

Research on marketing strategies in the pet food industry: a case study based on existing brands

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Abstract. The pet food market has grown significantly amidst the surging pet ownership, driven by diverse consumer demands and demographics. The significance of marketing in this industry lies in attracting new customers, fostering brand loyalty, and adapting to evolving market trends. To achieve this, marketers employ strategies like conducting thorough market research to understand consumer preferences and competitor landscapes. Targeting specific customer segments, such as pet owners and retailers, with tailored messages is crucial. Branding and promotion, involving memorable logos and creative campaigns across digital and traditional channels, help establish a strong brand identity. Diversifying product offerings with innovative formulations and flavors meets diverse pet nutritional needs. Integrating online and offline sales channels ensures widespread reach and convenient shopping experiences. Social media platforms facilitate engagement with customers, offering educational content and leveraging influencer partnerships. Cross-brand collaborations and limited-edition products add novelty and exclusivity. Finally, excellent customer service and post-purchase support foster long-term loyalty. Successful marketing in the pet food industry necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the market, innovative product development, multi-channel outreach, and a focus on customer satisfaction. As the industry continues to expand, staying agile and responsive to evolving consumer needs will be key to maintaining a competitive edge.

1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of rapid technological advancements, the new retail model has gradually emerged as a crucial direction for the transformation and upgrading of traditional retail. The pet food industry has witnessed rapid growth in recent years, with its market size continually expanding. However, it also confronts numerous challenges. Firstly, market competition has intensified, prompting major brands to seek differentiated competitive advantages. Secondly, consumer demands have diversified, with increasing expectations for product quality, safety, and personalized services. Additionally, supply chain management and logistics distribution efficiency are crucial factors constraining industry development.

Pet food brands can leverage social media platforms for brand building and consumer engagement. For instance, they can organize themed marketing campaigns that encourage

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consumers to share their pet-raising experiences and stories, thereby enhancing brand recognition. By collaborating with top athletes and fashion icons, they can also stimulate user-generated content and foster a robust brand community. Some pet food brands have even adopted 3D printing technology to offer personalized customization (in the context of pet food, this might refer to tailored food formulas). Consumers can submit their pets' data through mobile apps, and the brands then customize food according to their pets' nutritional needs, providing a unique shopping experience.

According to research "White Paper on China's Pet Consumption Trends 2021," the pet consumption market reached nearly RMB 300 billion in 2020, with a compound annual growth rate of 32.8% from 2015 to 2020. Pet food emerged as the core of pet consumption. In 2021, 94% of pet owners cited emotional attachment as their primary motivation for pet ownership, with pets ranking as friends, pets, children, family members, and roommates in the top five roles they play in people's lives. This indicates a shift in the role and status of pets in people's lives. There has been a notable change in people's pet consumption mindset, with an increasing number of pet owners willing to provide a higher quality of life for their pets. Consequently, related issues such as pet nutrition have garnered greater attention [1].

In recent years, China's pet ownership has continued to rise, and as the emotional bond with pets becomes more prominent, pet owners are more willing to spend on their "furry children." According to the Forward Industry Research Institute, in 2022, pet food, including staple food, snacks, and supplements, accounted for approximately 50.7% of the pet consumption market, with a market size of RMB 137.2 billion. It is projected that the domestic pet food market will grow to RMB 155.1 billion in 2023, marking a favorable development trend for the pet food industry [2].

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1) To analyze the current application status of digital marketing in new retail. By comprehensively reviewing the digital marketing practices in the current new retail industry, this study aims to understand its specific application forms in the pet food industry, such as social media marketing, big data analysis, personalized recommendations, etc.

2) To explore the impact of digital marketing on the new retail industry. This study will investigate how digital marketing changes the operational modes of the new retail industry, encompassing supply chain management, customer relationship management, marketing strategies, and more. Specifically, it will examine how digital marketing enhances operational efficiency and customer experience within the pet food industry.

3) Theoretical significance: Enriching the theoretical framework of new retail by incorporating digital marketing into its system. This study delves into the mechanisms of digital marketing within the new retail industry, offering new perspectives and ideas for the development of related theories. Additionally, it expands the scope of marketing theory research by applying digital marketing theories to specific industries, such as the pet food industry, thereby enhancing the practicality and relevance of these theories.

4) Practical implications: Guiding corporate practices. The research findings will provide practical guidance for new retail enterprises, particularly those in the pet food industry, on how to better utilize digital marketing tools to enhance market competitiveness and operational efficiency. Furthermore, it will promote industry transformation and upgrading. Through the application of digital marketing, this study aims to drive the transformation and upgrading of the new retail industry, particularly the pet food industry, achieving goals such as online-offline integration, supply chain optimization, and improved customer experience, thereby fostering the healthy development of the entire industry. Lastly, it will contribute to consumer welfare. The application of digital marketing enables consumers to enjoy more convenient and personalized shopping experiences while also helping enterprises better meet consumer needs, thereby enhancing consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

2 Digital marketing and social media marketing in the pet food industry

2.1 The concept and application of digital marketing

Digital marketing is a way of marketing through digital technology and internet platforms, which uses search engine optimization, social media marketing, email marketing, content marketing, data analysis and other means to improve brand awareness, increase sales, increase customer loyalty, improve customer experience and other marketing objectives. The core of digital marketing is to use data-driven decision-making, through multi-channel integration and personalized services, to accurately push marketing information and services, and improve marketing effectiveness and competitiveness. Social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, etc. have become an important position for pet food companies to market. Companies attract the attention of target consumer groups by publishing product information, brand stories, user reviews, and other content on these platforms. At the same time, use the interactivity and communication of social media platforms to interact with consumers in real time, answer questions, collect feedback, and enhance the emotional connection between brands and consumers. Then there is the embodiment of content marketing, which is one of the important means of digital marketing for pet food companies. Businesses capture consumer interest and attention by creating high-quality content such as pet health knowledge, product tutorials, user stories, and more. Not only does this help boost your brand's image, but it also increases consumer intent and loyalty. It is necessary to pay more attention to the management of content that pushes information, improve the quality of content, and use high-quality content to retain followers; At the same time, it is also necessary to pay attention to the interaction with followers, and to have more exquisite control over the way, time and frequency of pushes [3]. Similarly, search engine optimization (SEO) is a technical means to improve a website's ranking in search engines. Pet food companies can improve the visibility of their website in search engines and attract more attention and clicks from potential customers by optimizing website content, keywords, links, etc. At the same time, through SEO, you can also improve the conversion rate of your website and convert potential customers into actual buyers. Experimental results show that these optimization strategies have significantly improved the ranking of websites in various search engines. As the ranking of websites in search engines increases, these search engines bring considerable traffic to websites and show an upward trend, further affecting the ranking of websites in websites such as Alexa, so that the ranking of websites has risen steadily, and their PR value has increased accordingly. All of these findings show that keyword optimization strategies can work well [4]. Finally, one-item-one-code marketing is a new trend in digital marketing in the pet food industry. Businesses provide a unique QR code or barcode for each product, and consumers can scan the code to obtain product details, anti-counterfeiting verification, purchase records, etc. This marketing method not only improves the transparency and credibility of the product, but also provides consumers with a convenient purchase and repurchase channel. At the same time, enterprises can also collect consumer purchase behavior and preference data through one item and one code, providing strong support for precision marketing.

2.2 Application in the pet food industry

With the improvement of people's living standards, pets have gradually become an important member of the family, and the pet food market has ushered in rapid growth. With the improvement of China's economic level, the increase of work pressure, the increase of "empty

nest elderly", and the rise of "empty nest youth", the number and scale of pet raising people continue to expand, coupled with the improvement of pet lovers' awareness of pet raising, the status of pets in the family and the treatment they receive are also constantly improving, showing a trend of continuous advancement to the high consumption level. The pet industry continues to upgrade, giving birth to the continuous improvement of the pet industry chain, pet food, as the upstream industry of the pet industry chain, has become one of the fast-growing industries, and has become a blue ocean market for pet companies to chase. [5]

3 Research methods

In the digital age, corporate marketing faces a multifaceted dilemma, including privacy and data security issues, information overload issues, uncertainty about technological changes, increased market competition, and social media risks. These dilemmas have brought new challenges and dilemmas to the marketing of enterprises, and enterprises need to innovate and change to cope with these problems. Innovative approaches such as strengthening data protection, implementing personalized recommendations, responding flexibly to technological changes, building multi-channel marketing strategies, and social media risk management can help companies get out of the woods and improve their market competitiveness and innovation [6].

3.1 Case study method

Conduct in-depth analysis of specific, typical cases to reveal general patterns and trends. In this study, we will select several pet food companies with outstanding performance in digital marketing, and analyze their marketing strategies, technology applications, market response and effectiveness in detail. First of all, according to the market position, the degree of marketing innovation and other factors, select representative enterprises. Case data is then collected through corporate annual reports, public information, industry reports, social media, and other channels. Finally, the specific strategies, technology applications, and market feedback of each enterprise in digital marketing are analyzed, and then the commonalities and differences in the cases are summarized, and the experience and lessons that can be used for reference are extracted.

3.2 Review research methods

The review research method is to comprehensively analyze and summarize the research status, achievements, problems and development trends in a certain field by reviewing a large number of relevant literatures. We will comprehensively sort out the theoretical framework, research results and practical cases in the field of new retail and digital marketing and provide theoretical support and background analysis for digital marketing in the pet food industry. First of all, academic databases, industry reports, professional journals and other channels are used to collect relevant literature extensively. According to the purpose and needs of the research, the literature related to digital marketing in the pet food industry was screened. Finally, the selected literature was summarized, sorted out and comprehensively analyzed to form a systematic research review.

3.3 Textual analytics

Textual analysis is to go from the surface of the text to the deeper layers of the text in order to discover the deeper meanings that cannot be grasped by ordinary reading. In this study,

we will use text analysis to conduct an in-depth analysis of pet food companies' marketing copy, social media content, user reviews, etc., to reveal the underlying logic and consumer psychology behind their marketing strategies. First, collect text materials such as marketing copy, social media content, and user reviews from the target company. Then, the methods of "New Criticism", semiotic analysis, and narratology are used to analyze the text in depth. Finally, the analysis results are presented in the form of charts, abstracts, etc., which are easy to understand and apply.

3.4 Comparative analysis

The method of comparative analysis is to reveal the internal laws and differences by comparing the similarities and differences between different objects or cases. We compare the strategies, effectiveness and market response of different pet food companies in digital marketing to discover their strengths, weaknesses and lessons for reference. First, according to the purpose and needs of the research, the objects and dimensions of comparison are determined. Collect data on digital marketing for each of your competitors. Statistical methods, chart display, etc. are used to compare and analyze the data. Based on the results of comparative analysis, valuable conclusions and suggestions are extracted.

4 The application of digital marketing in the food industry

First of all, we should improve operational efficiency, food enterprises through digital means to integrate internal resources, to achieve business process automation and intelligence, so as to effectively reduce labor costs and improve production efficiency. For example, establish an intelligent inventory management system to achieve real-time inventory monitoring and forecasting, and reduce inventory backlog and waste. Second, to enhance the consumer experience, digital marketing enables companies to more accurately grasp consumer needs and provide customized products and services. Interact with consumers in real time through digital channels, respond to consumer feedback in a timely manner, and continuously optimize the product and service experience. For example, we use big data to analyze consumer buying habits and push personalized recommendations and offers. Third, to expand market share, digital marketing can help enterprises expand new market space. Sell your products around the world through cross-border e-commerce platforms or use emerging channels such as social media to promote your brand and products to attract more potential consumers. For example, Chinese pet food companies can enter the international market through platforms such as Amazon and Tmall Global. Finally, to promote innovation and development, digital marketing provides enterprises with rich data resources and advanced analysis tools, which can help enterprises gain insight into market trends and explore new business models and product innovation opportunities. For example, based on consumer feedback and data analysis, develop new pet freeze-dried food products that meet market demand.

Based on the framework of the 4P theory (i.e., Product, Price, Promotion, and Place), food companies should focus on improving the core competitiveness of products in their operations, especially strengthening emotional marketing. For example, by adding intimate and elegant emotional elements and lifestyle stories to product descriptions, the emotional connection with consumers is strengthened. At the same time, it flexibly adopts diversified marketing methods such as holiday specials, theme interactions, online promotion and tasting experience to convey the sincerity and benefits of the enterprise. The success of shopping festivals such as 618 and Double 11 is an empirical proof of the effectiveness of this program [7].

5 The application of social media marketing in the pet food industry

In the application of the pet food industry, accurate traffic and brand awareness, such as social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, etc., have a huge user base and accurate traffic push capabilities. Pet food companies can use these platforms to publish product information, marketing campaigns, and brand stories to attract the attention of target consumer groups and increase brand awareness. Second, content marketing cooperates with influencers to use social media for content marketing and enhances consumers' awareness and emotional connection to the brand by publishing high-quality graphics, videos, and other content. At the same time, cooperate with pet experts and Internet celebrities to share their experience to enhance consumer trust and enhance brand reputation. Third, community marketing and interaction, establish a brand community, and conduct in-depth interaction with consumers through social platforms such as WeChat groups and QQ groups, answer questions, and collect feedback. Social marketing not only helps to increase consumer loyalty, but also attracts more potential consumers through word-of-mouth.

The promotion of digital marketing on freeze-dried pet food, first of all, can enhance the brand image and awareness, digital marketing through multi-channel, multi-form publicity, help to enhance the brand image and consumer awareness of freeze-dried pet food. Showcase product features and benefits through social media platforms to enhance consumers' trust and favorability of the brand. Second, in a certain aspect, sales channels and market share can be expanded, using e-commerce platforms and cross-border e-commerce platforms, freeze-dried pet food companies can break through geographical restrictions and sell products to all over the world. At the same time, through digital means to optimize supply chain management, reduce logistics costs, and enhance market competitiveness. Finally, digital marketing can promote product innovation and market adaptation, and digital marketing provides enterprises with rich market data and consumer feedback, which helps enterprises gain insight into market trends and changes in consumer demand. Based on these data, companies can adjust their product strategies and innovation directions in a timely manner and develop new freeze-dried pet food products that are more in line with market demand.

6 The current marketing structure of the pet food industry

First of all, in terms of market size and growth, the pet food market continues to grow globally, especially in emerging markets such as China, with the increase in the number of pets and the upgrading of pet owners' consumption concepts, the market size continues to expand. The growth of the market size is mainly driven by pet owners' higher requirements for pet food ingredients, nutritional value and safety, as well as the preference for high-quality, natural and organic pet food. In terms of consumption structure, when pet owners buy goods, the money, time, energy, and physical strength consumed are all factors that constitute the total cost of customers. The total value of the consumer after consumption minus the total cost of the customer forms the transfer value of the customer. The higher the transfer value, the more it can win the trust and praise of customers, and the value for money enables consumers to achieve satisfaction beyond expectations, so that the goods form a good reputation. Pet food consumption is mainly divided into two categories: pet staple food (dry food, wet food) and pet snacks, of which pet staple food dominates [8]. The snack market is concentrated in the field of high-end products, such as pet jerky, nutritious blocks, fresh food, etc., to meet the pursuit of pet owners for pet health and quality of life.

In terms of the competitive landscape, several major brands have been formed in the market, and these brands dominate in their respective market segments. Emerging brands through continuous innovation and marketing strategies, gradually enter the market and seek

a place, intensified the market competition in the pet shares said that at present, the domestic pet food track has more and more signs of involution, the competition is very fierce, there are problems such as product homogenization. Industry enterprises should change their way of thinking and transform from traditional enterprises to brand enterprises. To this end, Zhongpet has been increasing brand investment, including the launch of brand marketing activities that are more in line with the interests of young consumer groups, as well as increasing the content marketing of emerging channels [9]. Due to the low entry threshold of the pet industry and the huge number of enterprises in the industry, from the perspective of the market share of various companies in China's pet food industry, Mars and Nestle have always occupied the top two, but the market share has declined, Mars's market share has decreased from 15.9% in 2020 to 7.9% in 2021, and Nestle has decreased from 7.9% in 2020 to 2.8% in 2021. Correspondingly, the market share of domestic pet food brands has gradually increased, and companies such as Huaxing, Zhongpet, Birigi, Yiyun, Rongxi, Newick, and Ganbao Pet are favored by domestic consumers. According to the data of the China Pet Industry Association, there are currently about 20,000 pet enterprises in China, of which small and medium-sized enterprises are the mainstay. There are similarities in the business strategies and products of these enterprises, which leads to the serious phenomenon of product homogenization [10].

7 Comparison of established and emerging companies

Royal is a long-established pet food manufacturer, the brand was founded in 1968 by France veterinarian Jean Cathary, headquartered in Emmag, France, focusing on the research and development, production and sales of pet food for dogs and cats. Its product line covers multiple categories such as pet snacks, canned pet food, pet staple food, etc., with a complete brand matrix and stable product quality. Relying on the whole industrial chain, the company's business is mainly export-oriented, and in recent years, it has also focused on the expansion of the domestic market and registered a number of independent brands.

Royal has a high market share in the pet food industry, especially in the traditional pet food market. Its business is all over the country and abroad, and its revenue mainly comes from overseas markets, but in recent years, the proportion of revenue in the domestic market has been on the rise. The company's operating income and profitability are relatively stable, but it faces challenges such as fierce market competition and aging brands.

As a first-class pet food brand, Royal has a number of well-known brands and has a high reputation and reputation in the market. The company has a large-scale production chain, from raw material procurement to production, processing, sales and other links, Royal has a complete industrial chain, which is conducive to controlling costs and product quality. More experienced in the field of international market, long-term experience in export OEM has enabled Royal to accumulate rich experience and resources in the international market.

But at the same time, there are also many shortcomings, such as brand aging, and traditional brands may face the problem of declining recognition by young consumers. At the same time, with the rapid development of the pet market, more and more companies are entering the field, and the market competition is becoming increasingly fierce. Finally, the lack of innovation, compared with emerging enterprises, Royal may be slightly deficient in product development and innovation, which is a challenge for Royal in marketing.

After introducing the old pet food giant Royal, I would like to introduce Open Farm, an emerging brand from Canada that focuses on food transparency and sustainability to produce high-quality freeze-dried pet food. Founded in 2014 in Toronto, Canada, it focuses on providing quality food for pets and pet owners. Through its unique brand concept and transparent supply chain management, Open Farm has won the favor of a large number of pet owners who are concerned about health and environmental protection. Its products are

performing well in the market and showing strong growth potential. Different from other pet food brands, in terms of marketing direction, Open Farm has a unique product, freeze-dried pet food has significant advantages such as high protein, low fat, easy digestion and absorption, etc., which meets the high-quality needs of pet owners for pet health and the recognition of the brand. At the same time, in terms of technological innovation, Open Farm has a core advantage in vacuum freeze drying technology, which is able to produce high-quality products and reduce production costs. In terms of marketing level, Open Farm focuses on the expansion of online sales channels and brand building and enhances brand awareness and reputation through creative marketing and social media promotion. As an emerging brand, Open Farm has relatively low visibility, and although it has a high degree of recognition in the freeze-dried pet food market, its brand awareness still needs to be improved compared with some traditional established enterprises. Correspondingly, Open Farm is also facing the risk and pressure of the market, with the continuous expansion of the market, more and more companies have begun to enter the freeze-dried pet food market, and the market competition risk faced by Open Farm is also increasing.

To sum up, as a traditional veteran enterprise, Royal has a wide range of product lines, covering multiple categories such as pet snacks, canned food, and staple food, while Open Farm focuses on the freeze-dried pet food market, and its products have significant health and nutritional advantages. Both have their own characteristics in terms of market positioning and product differentiation. The advantage of Royal lies in brand awareness and the ability to control the whole industry chain; The advantage of Open Farm lies in product innovation and technology leadership. However, Royal also faces the problem of brand aging and lack of innovation; Open Farm needed to further enhance its brand awareness and respond to market competition risks.

Finally, with the continuous development of the pet market and the continuous change of consumer demand, the pet food industry will show a trend of diversification and personalization. Both Royal and Open Farm need to constantly adapt to market changes, strengthen product development and innovation, and enhance brand competitiveness and market share. At the same time, with the rise of online sales channels and the change of consumer shopping habits, both companies also need to strengthen their online marketing and channel expansion efforts. In conclusion, Royal and Open Farm each have advantages and disadvantages in the pet food industry. In the future, both will need to continuously improve and innovate to cope with the changes and challenges of the market while maintaining their own advantages.

8 Conclusion

This paper comprehensively discusses the current situation, application and impact of digital marketing in the pet food industry in the context of new retail. Firstly, this paper analyzes the importance of the new retail model to the transformation and upgrading of traditional retail and points out the challenges faced by the pet food industry while expanding the market scale, such as fierce market competition, diversification of consumer demand and supply chain management. Then, the paper elaborates on the application of digital marketing in new retail, including social media marketing, big data analysis, personalized recommendation and other strategies, and conducts an in-depth analysis of digital marketing in the pet food industry through various research methods such as case analysis and review research method. The study aims to provide practical guidance for enterprises to promote the transformation and upgrading of the industry and improve the well-being of consumers.

First of all, data acquisition and timeliness may be limited in data acquisition, and some second-hand data may have a lag and cannot fully reflect the latest developments in the current market. In addition, due to the confidentiality of some internal data, the case studies

in this article may not be able to obtain the most comprehensive data support. Secondly, the breadth and depth of industry coverage, although this article focuses on digital marketing in the pet food industry, it may not cover the specific situation of all companies in the industry due to space and research resources. At the same time, there may also be a lack of in-depth analysis of the application depth and effect of some emerging digital marketing methods.

Finally, we also have a good outlook for the future, from the perspective of technology integration, with the continuous progress of technology, the future of digital marketing in the pet food industry will be more dependent on technological innovation and integration. For example, cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things will play a more important role in new retail, providing enterprises with more accurate and efficient marketing solutions. Secondly, omni-channel marketing will become an important trend in the pet food industry in the future. Enterprises will integrate online and offline resources to achieve seamless connection of all channels and provide consumers with a more convenient and personalized shopping experience. At the same time, personalized service will also become a key point of enterprise competition, through the in-depth understanding of consumer needs, provide customized products and services, enhance consumer loyalty and brand identity. Finally, in the future, data will become an important basis for business decision-making. The pet food industry will pay more attention to the collection, analysis and application of data, and achieve more accurate market positioning, product development and marketing strategy formulation through data-driven decision-making. At the same time, companies will also strengthen data security and privacy protection to ensure the security and legitimacy of consumer data.

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