

Research on the Optimization of Shanghai Disneyland's Marketing Strategy: A 4P Theory

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Abstract. In recent years, Shanghai Disneyland has consistently attracted a large number of domestic and international tourists. This widespread popularity is closely linked to its marketing strategies. This study selects Shanghai Disneyland as a case study and, based on the 4P framework of marketing (product, price, place, promotion), employs a combination of literature review and case analysis to investigate the current implementation status and existing challenges of its marketing strategies. The findings reveal several issues: at the product level, there is a prolonged interval between facility updates and insufficient coverage of diverse customer segments; at the place level, an excessive number of ticketing platforms, inconsistent discount policies, and inadequate service attitudes among staff are observed; regarding promotion, although marketing campaigns have successfully boosted popularity, there remains room for improvement in terms of creativity and the integration of local and Disney elements; at the price level, the significant price disparity between peak and off-peak seasons has led to consumer perceptions of high costs relative to the experience. To resolve these challenges, recommendations include enhancing park management and regularly updating facilities to improve the product strategy; standardizing discount policies and expanding market outreach to optimize the place strategy; reducing reliance on scarcity marketing, deepening the integration of local culture with Disney elements, and improving service attitudes and after-sales efficiency for the promotion strategy; and establishing a more balanced pricing mechanism to enhance consumer satisfaction and reduce disputes for the price strategy.

Keywords: 4P Theory, Shanghai Disneyland, Marketing Strategy

1. Introduction

With the recent advance of China in various aspects, along with the improvement of public transportation facilities such as high-speed rail, people's travel has become more convenient, which has significantly promoted the development of China's tourism industry. The theme park market is also highly competitive. As of October 2024, there are a total of 385 theme parks across the country, among which 87 are large and super-large theme parks [1]. Under this environment, both world-renowned theme park brands and emerging local theme park brands have flooded into the Chinese theme park market. As one of the representatives, The Walt Disney Company, Shanghai Disneyland's visitor flow and considerable revenue have provided strong impetus for its

development. After opening in 2016, Shanghai Disneyland has developed rapidly, and in 2023, it ranked 5th in the global theme park rankings, with the number of visitors increasing year by year [2]. The park provides multilingual services and a variety of payment methods to facilitate visitors from both China and abroad. With its strong IP influence, it not only attracts Chinese tourists but also interests overseas tourists. Shanghai Disneyland has rapidly occupied a core position in the Chinese theme park market, and among the theme parks mentioned first when referring to China, Disneyland ranks at the top. However, in recent years, the competition in the theme park industry has been intense, and the increase in visitor demand has led to issues such as improper management and operation within the parks. Shanghai Disneyland is facing challenges such as a decrease in visitor flow and negative public opinion attacks. Its marketing strategies and the optimization of internal management arrangements will be of great concern and will be an important factor in determining whether it can maintain its core position in the Chinese theme park market.

This research has certain significance both in theory and practice. Theoretically, the 4P theory, as the cornerstone of marketing in various industries, is often used for the analysis of marketing strategies in different fields. Taking Shanghai Disneyland as an example, analyzing it based on the 4P framework can improve the theoretical research on theme park marketing strategies and provide new perspectives or viewpoints for similar studies. Practically, Shanghai Disneyland, as a typical theme park case in China, the improvement and refinement of its marketing strategies can provide references and suggestions for other theme parks, which can rapidly enhance the marketing level of the entire theme park sector.

The research topic is the optimization of marketing strategies for Shanghai Disneyland based on the 4P theory. With the 4P theory (price, product, channel, promotion) as the theoretical framework, combined with the current marketing strategies of Shanghai Disneyland, this study analyzes the current progress in pricing strategies, park facilities, visitor experience, channel promotion, and promotional activities, identifies the shortcomings and areas for improvement, and provides optimization suggestions based on visitor needs and market gaps.

This research mainly adopts the literature research method. In the study, first, through searching academic literature platforms such as China National Knowledge Infrastructure and Google Scholar, relevant academic journals and papers on marketing strategies, visitor experience, and pricing mechanisms of Shanghai Disneyland were collected. The 4P theory framework was combined with the marketing strategies of Shanghai Disneyland to analyze the current situation. Secondly, the study will review the information on the official website and ticketing platforms of Shanghai Disneyland to fully understand its marketing strategies, operational management status, and recent deployment directions. Additionally, the study will pay attention to media interviews and consumer experience evaluations on social platforms to provide factual basis for analysis and form effective information to propose optimization suggestions.

The research objectives include three aspects. The first is to understand the current operation status and effectiveness of Shanghai Disneyland in the four dimensions of price, product, channel, and promotion. The second is to identify the challenges and problems that Shanghai Disneyland is facing in these four dimensions. The third is to provide optimization suggestions for Shanghai Disneyland in these four aspects, offer improvement plans and new marketing strategy ideas.

2. Marketing strategy analysis

2.1. Product strategy

The product strategy of Shanghai Disneyland is generally satisfactory to tourists at present, mainly focusing on internal transportation, environmental hygiene, and service levels [3]. Shanghai Disneyland mainly adopts experience marketing, attracting tourists' attention with its captivating stories, highly realistic architecture and characters. Tourists can experience various projects in different houses during the day and interact with NPCs dressed as Disney characters. At night, they can enjoy the breathtaking fireworks show in the park [4]. Thus, the immersive park environment and enthusiastic staff have made Shanghai Disneyland a great product. However, this does not mean its strategy is perfect. Research on its problems suggests there are two issues.

First, the quality of products around Shanghai Disneyland is not good. In May 2020, Shanghai Disneyland launched its new product "Lingna Beier", but within less than a month, consumers reported to the Pudong New Area Market Supervision Bureau that the long-sleeved T-shirts it sold were of substandard quality, which could cause skin allergies in severe cases. As a result, it was fined over 280,000 yuan. In 2018, the small toys under Shanghai Disneyland were recalled due to the high risk of small parts falling off and being swallowed by young children [5]. Shanghai Disneyland's failure to meet product quality standards has led to a significant loss of customers. Second, the innovation of products within Shanghai Disneyland is insufficient. In recent years, various theme parks have emerged in China, such as the Shanghai Legoland Resort that just opened this year, and the Harry Potter and Peppa Pig theme parks expected to open in Shanghai in 2027 [6]. The overall play content of these theme parks is similar, including thrilling rides like roller coasters and 5D cinemas. It can be seen from this that theme parks have fallen into a fixed mindset when designing facilities within the park, without seriously understanding the needs and preferences of consumers to develop corresponding facilities. As a result, when tourists come to visit again, they will find it boring [7].

2.2. Pricing strategy

Shanghai Disneyland's current price strategy targets two parts. After research on the official website and ticket purchase app, it was found that the price was divided according to time. Tickets were divided into four types: regular day, special regular day, peak day and special peak day. The second is to be formulated based on the age of consumers. Tickets are divided into standard tickets, children's tickets, elderly tickets, and disability tickets (see Table 1 for specific values).

During peak hours such as holidays and weekends, Shanghai Disneyland has successfully diverted tourists through different price strategies. Due to the high prices during peak periods, some tourists may choose to enter the park during off-peak periods, thereby reducing the pressure of excessive traffic in the park and avoiding overcrowding. Visitors can also experience more projects and receive more comprehensive and thoughtful staff services due to the reduction of queue time, and the satisfaction of tourists will increase. Children and elderly people are the same as those with disabilities for different age groups. It reflects Shanghai Disneyland's care for this kind of socially disadvantaged groups, allowing tourists of different ages and situations to enjoy the fun of the park, which can improve tourists' satisfaction and loyalty and the social image of the brand. In addition, the park has also launched family packages and preferential policies for college students. The former can reduce the overall cost of travel for children and the elderly, thereby attracting more family tourists; the latter is a young group of college students and will post their experiences and

experiences and even ticket purchase discounts on social media, which can also attract more tourists. However, this price strategy is price discrimination and will cause social controversy. Some people might consider this as age discrimination. They believe that it is unreasonable for adults to have to pay a high price. Especially, the price difference between regular days and peak days for standard tickets is quite significant [8]. Although Disneyland is set up to divert visitors, those who only come to play on holidays have to pay a high price. This is obviously something they cannot bear. At the same time, although the park sets low prices for children and the elderly out of consideration, children might feel that they are not as privileged as adults because they know they are getting discounted tickets, and the elderly might feel discriminated against.

Table 1. Shanghai Disneyland ticket prices table

| | Standard ticket | Children's ticket | Aged person ticket | Disabled person ticket |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Regular daily ticket | 475 yuan | 356 yuan | 356 yuan | 356 yuan |
| Special regular day ticket | 599 yuan | 449 yuan | 449 yuan | 449 yuan |
| Peak day ticket | 719 yuan | 539 yuan | 539 yuan | 539 yuan |
| Special peak day ticket | 799 yuan | 599 yuan | 599 yuan | 599 yuan |

2.3. Channel strategy

The study found that the ticketing channels of Shanghai Disneyland are mainly divided into indirect channels and direct channels. There are two types of direct channels. The first is to buy tickets on site, where tourists can go to the ticketing point at the entrance of Shanghai Disneyland to buy tickets in person. This type of ticket sales method can avoid tourists who do not know how to buy tickets online, such as the elderly. The second type is an application to purchase tickets on the official website of Shanghai Disney or under it. This method is easier to purchase tickets, and visitors can also check the day's event schedule, hotel reservation and other services when purchasing tickets. Scan the QR code when entering the park faster, reducing the queue time; the indirect channel for ticket sales in Shanghai Disneyland is that tourists can cooperate with travel agencies or travel platforms such as Ctrip, and platforms such as Meituan in various aspects of life. This method can not only promote cooperation between multiple companies, share their respective customer groups well, expand market coverage, and increase sales. The flaws are also obvious. For ticket purchases now, people may need to queue up, and the queue time will be increased when checking tickets. A certain number of staff are required on site, and the operating costs will increase. When purchasing tickets online, because their IP is popular all year round, especially during the holidays, if a large number of people purchase tickets online, the official website or program will be stuck, or even the card is cancelled, which will affect the tourists' ticket purchase experience. If Shanghai Disneyland cooperates with other travel agencies and platforms, different ticket purchase offers will cause dissatisfaction to tourists who do not know the discount, and the brand image will also be diluted due to too many channels for cooperation.

2.4. Promotion strategy

The promotional activities of Shanghai Disneyland have significant shortcomings. A few years ago, a series of products featuring Lina Belle for Christmas were launched. Journalists found that a large number of these products were being sold at prices far higher than their original prices on the second-hand market, and the transaction volume was very high [9]. Shanghai Disneyland's strategy

of limiting sales to create a sense of scarcity and earn huge profits has given ticket scalpers an opportunity. The limited sales prevented all the consumers who wanted to buy from getting the products, while scalpers bought a lot of them, causing strong dissatisfaction among consumers and a poor experience, which dampened their enthusiasm. Secondly, in order to compete in the market, some of Disney's products incorporate Chinese elements to attract customers. However, the design and marketing of these products do not have a deep understanding of Chinese culture, and even some cultural misunderstandings have occurred, such as the incident where "Lina Belle was accused of wearing a left-opening garment of mourning during the Mid-Autumn Festival", which caused a huge stir online [10]. In addition, the promotional efforts on online platforms like Douyin are insufficient. Although videos are continuously updated, their quality is mediocre and there is nothing particularly attractive, resulting in very few likes and views, and failing to effectively drive traffic to increase sales and exposure.

3. Conclusion

Under the analysis of the 4P theoretical framework, Shanghai Disneyland has encountered problems to varying degrees in the implementation of marketing strategies. Only by solving and breaking through such problems can Shanghai Disneyland and other theme parks be able to detach from the entire market and continue to develop. The study will provide final summary and optimization suggestions from 4P of Shanghai Disneyland.

Regarding product strategy, the core issues focus on the lack of management in the park and the insufficient strength of product innovation. Since the opening of the park, the overall amusement facilities in the park have not been updated on a large scale. After more theme parks enter the market, facing fierce competition from competitors and pressure on product innovation, many customers will go to other theme parks to consume because they want to have more freshness, and consumers' willingness to pay will decrease. The theme atmosphere of Shanghai Disneyland is too focused on young people and people with families, and there are no amusement facilities or experience projects for the elderly or agents to give special groups, which will lead to the total market sales of Shanghai Disneyland that cannot exceed and reach a larger scale. Moreover, the new amusement projects that the park has innovated are not innovative enough, and their linkage with their themes is low, and consumers' willingness to play continues to decline. This study's opinion on it is to speed up the update speed of amusement facilities in the park, create a new and sustainable IP to keep fresh and continue to attract customers. Secondly, Shanghai Disneyland needs to create more comprehensive experienceable projects to cater to a wider range of people, such as developing leisure experience projects suitable for elderly tourists and creating barrier-free facilities that meet special needs groups, so that such people can also have a good experience in the park, so that tourists' willingness to replenish things can increase, and the original market size can also be broken through more tourists. Finally, Shanghai Disney needs to improve the quality of its peripheral products and no longer have negative news about unqualified quality, otherwise it will lose a lot of customer loyalty.

For price strategies, the problem is reflected in the mismatch between the price and its value. During peak season, the ticket price of Shanghai Disneyland is about twice the price of regular tickets, but the activities experienced in the park are the same, which leads to a gap in the experience of tourists and has caused quite a lot of negative public opinion. In addition, since food is prohibited in the park, tourists can only buy food in the park. Visitors doubt whether Shanghai Disneyland is monopolizing the pricing, and its people-friendly image has been damaged. In this regard, this study's opinion on it is to customize floating prices based on the quality of real-time passenger flow

and service. The price should not be higher than the off-duty period at peak times, because there are many people at peak times, so tourists cannot pay a price that is far lower than the product experience during normal periods while experiencing longer queues and worse experiences. The food prices in the park should also be kept equal to the outside world as much as possible and relax the control over food restrictions.

For channel strategy, the problem is reflected in the lack of a fixed platform to provide the same preferential policies and excessive hunger marketing when purchasing tickets. Because Shanghai Disneyland cooperates with multiple travel agencies and travel platforms, consumers can buy tickets on any of the platforms, but because these platforms compete with each other, they will propose different preferential policies, which leads to the price of tickets for Shanghai Disneyland for the same group at the same period. Many tourists find this problem very dissatisfied with this problem after purchasing tickets, which will generate many negative comments about Shanghai Disneyland online, causing damage to its image. In this regard, this study's opinion on it is to cooperate with one or a few tourism platforms and plan fixed preferential policies in advance to avoid a decrease in consumer surplus. In addition, research mainly uses live e-commerce, short video platforms and offline advertising to expand the market, sell derivative products to tap market potential, and attract more customers.

The promotion strategy is reflected in the excessive hunger marketing and local creative integration defects of Shanghai Disneyland. Hunger marketing at Shanghai Disneyland makes tourists who like Disney unable to buy the products they want, and there is a shortage of supply. The original intention is to make more profits, but consumers will be disappointed if they fail to purchase continuously, and their loyalty to Shanghai Disney will decline. Moreover those who resell Shanghai Disney products rely on limited quantities to make profits, forcing many consumers to spend higher than the original price to pay, harming the interests of consumers. The integration of Chinese traditional culture by the promotional activities has not been achieved because the emotional resonance between Chinese cultural elements and Disney IP cannot be deeply integrated. In this regard, this study's opinions on it are to relax restrictions on the quantity of products and strengthen control over those who resell, so that they cannot monopolize the products and sell them at high prices. At the same time, Shanghai Disneyland needs to interact more with consumers, designers need to have a deeper understanding of Chinese culture, deeply combine traditional Chinese festival cultural elements with Disney IP, create a more resonant theme for promotion, and improve the efficiency of responding to negative public opinion, and timely repair the brand image.

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