

Research on the Strategy for Breaking through the Circle of Beverage Products under Social Media Marketing

-- A Case Study of Sauce-Aroma Latte and Coconut Cloud Latte

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Abstract

With the continuous diversification of beverage products like milk tea and coffee alongside the rapid growth of social media, beverage innovation has gained significant momentum in the market, attracting increasing consumer attention. Xiaohongshu, a platform for content discovery and consumption scenarios, and Douyin, a major short-video dissemination platform, have become crucial platform for beverage brands to compete for publicity. Characterized by speed, resonant content, these dual platforms have emerged as vital arenas for beverage brands. This study examines the collaborative marketing campaigns of Luckin Coffee's "Sauce-Aroma Latte" and "Coconut Cloud Latte" with established Chinese brands. It systematically analyzes operational strategies on Xiaohongshu and Douyin through content analysis of posts/videos from official accounts, marketing channels, KOLs, and general users, along with metrics like likes and related comments. Findings reveal that Luckin achieved significant user engagement success through content matrix construction, diversified interactions, and differentiated product marketing. This provides practical insights for refined social media operations, supporting sustainable brand growth.

Keywords

Soy Sauce Latte; Coconut Cloud Latte; Cross-Circle Strategy; Social Media.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the beverage market has become fiercely competitive. "New" products like milk tea and coffee face severe homogenization issues, making "breaking out of the circle" a solution sought by all brands. Social media has emerged as a critical factor. This article focuses on Douyin and Xiaohongshu, two platforms with massive user bases. Aiming to broaden promotional reach, the dual-platform approach leverages their shared strengths and distinct characteristics, yielding synergistic results beyond single-platform campaigns. This analysis explores each platform's unique focus areas and how their combination achieves optimal outcomes.

Cross-industry marketing campaigns have emerged as a vital strategy for boosting brand awareness, buzz, and product sales. Representative examples include the Soy Sauce Latte (Luckin Coffee and Moutai, September 2023, with over 5.42 million cups sold on launch day) and the Coconut Cloud Latte (Luckin and Coconut Tree, 2022, achieving 660,000 cups sold on launch day) exemplify how social media amplification enables cross-circle or even "phenomenon-level" breakthroughs, delivering marketing impact far exceeding traditional models[1,2]. These collaborations captured widespread attention, driving exponential growth in sales and brand visibility. This study examines the reasons behind such breakthroughs under dual-platform promotion.

This research fills a gap by examining the "cross-industry beverage IP + beverage" composite marketing model within social media ecosystems. Existing theories predominantly focus on traditional communication or single-brand approaches. This study distills a comprehensive communication logic: "Topic Creation → Social Virality → User Co-creation."

Practical Significance: First, it provides strategic guidance for businesses: offering concrete directions for FMCG brands to develop social media marketing strategies, helping brands avoid marketing homogenization. Second, it aids traditional brands in youth-oriented transformation: providing pathways for established brands like Moutai and Yezhu to reach Gen Z, integrating cultural value with commercial value. Finally, it optimizes consumer experience: examining core user needs in social communication[3].

This paper will quantify its cross-circle achievements, dissect the communication entities across platforms-including Luckin Coffee's official account, KOLs, and individual users-along with trending content in comment sections. It will then analyze and refine marketing strategies by integrating relevant communication theories.

2. Core Theoretical Frameworks

2.1. Agenda-Setting Theory

Proposed by American communication scholars M.E. McCombs and D.L. Shaw in the 1972 *Journal of Public Opinion*, this theory builds upon Walter Lippmann's concept of media shaping the social environment in *Public Opinion*. It posits that communication media function as institutions engaged in "environmental reconstitution."

This theory reveals how mass media selectively report events to influence the public's perceived importance hierarchy. Media agendas show significant correlation with public agendas. Individuals with higher media exposure exhibit stronger alignment with media agendas, with communication effects primarily operating at the cognitive level.

2.2. Social Currency Theory

Social currency is a quantifiable concept in social media economics, referring to a virtual network equivalent that users acquire through sharing content enhancing their self-image to achieve word-of-mouth dissemination.

The theoretical foundation lies in users' tendency to disseminate information that reinforces their personal image. The "knowledge reserves" expended in this behavior constitute social currency. Brands establish deep connections with users by building sustainable social currency. Actions like reposting advertisements consume social currency, while sharing value-added content increases holdings.

2.3. Event Marketing

Event marketing is a strategy where businesses plan, organize, and leverage newsworthy, socially impactful, or celebrity-driven events or figures to capture media, social group, and consumer attention. This aims to elevate brand or product awareness and reputation, establish a positive brand image, and ultimately drive product or service sales.

3. Analysis of High-Traffic Content Across Dual Platforms

This study analyzes content published on Douyin and Xiaohongshu platforms for both Sauce-Aroma Latte and Coconut Cloud Latte, examining three levels: product design company Luckin Coffee, KOLs or marketing accounts, and individual users.

Data was initially filtered by likes. Publication dates primarily clustered within three months post-launch, covering the critical period from market debut to peak engagement.

3.1. Xiaohongshu

3.1.1. Luckin Coffee Official Account

Soy Sauce Latte

(1) Video Presentation of Ingredients and Production Process

The most-viewed content was "The Complete Production Process of Sauce-Aroma Latte Ingredients," emphasizing that "every cup contains Guizhou Moutai liquor." This content garnered 17,000 likes.

By showcasing production stages, this content highlights ingredient quality and manufacturing processes, addressing consumer curiosity about "whether it truly contains Moutai" builds customer trust[4].

(2) Youth-Oriented Narratives

Titled "What's It Like to Never Put Down Moutai at Such a Young Age?", this piece garnered 8,511 likes.

This content merges the traditional "business, middle-aged" consumption scenarios of Moutai with the coffee-drinking habits of younger demographics, This helps bridge the psychological gap between the product and its younger audience.

(3) Cross-Industry Expert Science Popularization

Luckin also collaborated with legal scholar Luo Xiang to launch the "Legal Education Classroom" series. For instance, "The Wind of Legal Education Blows to Luckin: Luo Xiang Answers User Queries" (5,826 likes) provided legal insights on topics like driving after consumption and underage drinking.

By introducing a KOL with significant public influence (Luo Xiang), Luckin leveraged his expertise to mitigate brand reputation risks while capitalizing on his personal IP popularity to drive secondary product exposure.

(4) Celebrity-Endorsed Variants

The content piece "Wine and Coffee: Today, 'President Li' Wang Yang Raises a Glass" (3,605 likes) Combining WangYang's business oriented arist image.

Cross-industry collaborations can leverage the "celebrity effect"—a phenomenon fueled by consumers' admiration, trust, and tendency to emulate celebrities' consumption habits.

Coconut Cloud Latte

(1) Classic KOL Promotion

Content: "Xu Dongdong Demonstrates Authentic Coconut Juice Drinking Method" (27k likes) Coconut Tree spokesperson Xu Dongdong promoted the Coconut Cloud Latte, adopting the iconic Coconut Tree pose in promotional photos—left hand reaching over her head to her right ear, both hands cradling a beverage.

This iconic pose represents Coconut Tree brand coconut juice, evoking nostalgic memories and shared experiences of growing up with the brand—a form of emotional marketing.

(2) Interactive Approach

Content: "Luckin vs. Coconut Tree Paper Bag Showdown" (11k likes). The campaign pits Luckin's iconic paper bag (all-white with a blue deer covering half the surface) against Coconut Tree's signature bag (black base with yellow trim, featuring the brand slogan across the entire surface), inviting users to vote.

This enhances user engagement awareness and participation, increasing both attention to the product itself and the quality of that attention, thereby boosting sales.

(4) Reasoning

Content: "Why No Straw for Coconut Cloud Latte?" (11k likes). Explains why the product doesn't include a straw: the layered design separates the coconut cloud (top) and latte (bottom).

Using a straw would result in drinking only the latte or only the coconut cloud, whereas lifting the lid allows enjoying both layers.

This deepens customer understanding of the product, clarifying the rationale behind every brand decision. It helps consumers grasp the intended drinking method, sparks curiosity, and encourages them to try the product.

In summary, Luckin Coffee's content strategy on Xiaohongshu addresses consumer curiosity by showcasing production processes and ingredients. Collaborations with KOLs like Luo Xiang and Xu Dongdong deliver dual benefits of expertise and emotional resonance. Additionally, supplementing beverage-related information boosts engagement and attention.

3.1.2. Individual User Content Analysis

Soy Sauce Latte

(1) Playful expressions of consumption behavior[5]

For example, "No Ice, No Coffee-Just Moutai" (7,555 likes) highlights users' fascination with "Moutai elements" through exaggerated customer notes, creating meme-like content.

(2) Humorous portrayal of family dynamics

Another high-liked post, "Give My Dad a Cup of Sauce-Scented Liquor and He'll Show It Off to the Whole World" (6,992 likes), playfully describes elders "showing off" on social platforms.

Linking the product to family scenarios aligns with Xiaohongshu's "lifestyle sharing" platform ethos while easily sparking users' associations and resonance with their own family contexts.

(3) DIY "Recipe Replication"

One user shared "Organizing the Recipe: Make Sauce-Flavored Latte at Home" (4,866 likes), breaking down the formula and sharing preparation steps to transform the brand product into a replicable "DIY project" for home use.

This not only satisfies users' curiosity about ingredients and processes but also boosts engagement with brand-related topics.

(4) Emotional Work Scenarios

Content titled "Meltdown Moment: After Making Ten Soy Sauce Latte, Customer Asks to Switch Them All to Hot" (2,451 likes) presents the helplessness of unexpected workplace situations from a service industry worker's perspective.

This content vents frustrations through lighthearted self-deprecation, easily resonating with service industry workers and broader office populations, extending the sauce-aroma latte from a "beverage topic" to a "workplace emotional topic."

(5) Hyperbolic descriptions of taste experiences

For example, one user humorously described the taste of soy sauce-flavored latte: "The top note is like a drunkard kissing you right after vomiting, while the base note is like taking a sip of latte before you had a chance to brush your teeth" (4,281 likes).

This exaggerated, dramatic expression concretizes abstract taste sensations, creating a powerful memory point and viral potential. It also reflects the complex feelings some users have about the product's flavor.

• Coconut Cloud Latte

(1) DIY paper bag, hand-drawn

Content involves cutting out words from the paper bag to create a collage, garnering 26,000 likes. The bag features extensive promotional text printed across its surface, a signature trait of the Coconut Tree brand.

Cutting out the text for crafting adds playful appeal, drawing platform users to marvel and even participate.

(2) DIY beverage

A beverage blogger demonstrated how to make a coconut cloud latte that tastes and looks identical to the Ruicheng brand version. Likes: 3,825

2023 marked a year of economic recovery from the pandemic with limited growth. Thus, compared to purchasing products externally, people preferred inexpensive, simple methods to craft a trendy Coconut Cloud Latte.

In summary, individual user content primarily features everyday life settings, presenting consumption experiences and emotional moments related to the Soy Sauce Latte through humor, exaggeration, and self-deprecating humor, while incorporating DIY activities. This not only boosted topic engagement but also enriched the product's cultural significance through personalized storytelling.

3.2. Douyin

3.2.1. Luckin Official Account

Soy Sauce Latte

Its high-engagement content primarily revolves around product presentation, production processes, collaborative merchandise, and topic extensions:

Product and Merchandise

The video "Red Cup Lamp Made with New Cups" garnered approximately 15,000 likes, showcasing the repurposing of the sauce-scented latte's red cup into a "red cup lamp,"

This content enhances the peripheral value and collectible appeal of the Soy Sauce Latte, encouraging users to engage in secondary creation and reuse. By tapping into the dual trends of "environmentalism" and "fashion," it extends the product's lifecycle.

(2) Full Production Process

The "Full Production Process" video garnered 517,000 likes, systematically showcasing the complete journey of the Sauce-Aroma Latte from raw materials to finished product.

This content addressing user concerns about "whether Maotai is genuinely added" and "hygiene and safety" by showcasing standardized production steps. It serves as a trust endorsement and authoritative presentation, demonstrating that content delivering what people genuinely seek is king.

(3) Storefront Scenes and Queueing Phenomena

The video "Long Store Queues" garnered 5,008 likes by capturing footage of lengthy lines at physical stores, visually demonstrating the product's immense popularity.

Such "queue videos" are a common trend-driven narrative tactic on Douyin. Their visual impact amplifies the "everyone is drinking it" atmosphere, further stimulating potential consumers' herd mentality and desire to try the product.

(4) Cross-Industry Collaboration and Public Education

"Luo Xiang Q&A" videos garnered 30,000 likes, extending legal education collaborations from Xiaohongshu to explain issues like drunk driving and underage drinking.

This content extends the product discussion beyond "taste appeal" to dimensions like "legal risks" and "naming significance," deepening the topic's complexity and broadening its scope for discussion[6].

• Coconut Cloud Latte

(1) Drinking Method Tutorial

The content "Top layer of coconut milk, no straws or stirring" garnered 9,766 likes. It addressed the brand's rationale for discouraging straw use and the proper, legal way to enjoy the drink, encouraging customers to savor it by opening the lid and drinking directly.

This approach builds rapport with customers in a playful manner while distinguishing the product from competitors through its unique straw-free consumption method, leaving a lasting impression and sparking engagement interest.

(2) Connecting to Users' Personal Backgrounds

Content: "Hometown Specialties" (2,424 likes). Recounting memories of Hainan's local specialty-Coconut Tree brand coconut juice-to introduce the Coconut Cloud Latte. Mentioning hometowns resonates deeply with viewers, fostering connection. This prompts reflection: Did your hometown also have a brand like Luckin producing distinctive beverages?

This emotional linkage between hometowns and Luckin evokes nostalgia, reducing resistance to the brand and boosting purchase intent.

(3) Anime Character Fan Art

Content: The iconic image of Coconut Tree coconut juice and the personified concept of Luckin Coffee coexist on the same plane. Luckin Coffee's official account @Coconut Tree Group Content Tree: "See how this CP just happened?"

This fan-made collaboration incorporates iconic imagery and gestures from both brands, while the copy uses familiar internet slang. Its strong online vibe bridges the gap with netizens and engages customers interested in anime and similar hobbies.

Overall, Luckin's Douyin content strategy: Visually demonstrates "buzz" and "legitimacy" through production processes, queue scenes, and sales data. Infuses brand with cultural relevance via creative merchandise and cross-industry collaborations. On the other hand, it develops brand animations tied to hometown connections, emphasizes diverse consumption methods to broaden customer bases, and incorporates emotional content to engage audiences seeking deeper understanding.

3.2.2. KOL and News Account Content Analysis

• Soy Sauce Latte

(1) KOL Reviews and "Hit or Miss" Narratives

Most KOL content centers on "reviews," focusing on the following dimensions:

Taste Experience: Subjective evaluations of the sauce-aroma latte's flavor profile and aromatic complexity;

Alcohol Content: Addressing user concerns like "Can I drive after drinking?" through actual measurements or official data references;

Cups and Packaging: Visual evaluation and aesthetic interpretation of the red cup design and collaboration elements;

DIY Tutorials: Some KOLs attempt to recreate the sauce-aroma latte at home, providing simplified recipes and step-by-step instructions.

In summary, by addressing viewers' "curious yet hesitant" mindset, the "tasting it for you" approach reduces user decision-making costs [7]. Simultaneously, creating controversy between "recommending" and "discouraging" purchase drives higher video engagement and virality.

(2) News Accounts: Facts and Risks

China National Radio Network published content with 75,000 likes, stating "no Maotai liquor was directly added to the coffee" and questioning potential "false advertising" suspicions.

These news accounts functioned more as "public oversight and science education platforms," objectively contributing to the topic's spread.

• Coconut Cloud Latte

(1) Product Introduction

Content: "What's it like when Luckin Coffee meets Coconut Tree brand coconut juice?" (4,801 likes) Explains that what Luckin refers to as "foam" is actually a layer of soft, fluffy milk cap.

Given the release timing, the blogger promptly reviewed the product on launch day—a swift response. The first-person perspective broadens awareness of the product launch among the target audience.

(2) Related Blogger Profile

Content: "Coconut Cloud Latte: When Coconut Tree Meets Luckin—I Choose the Coconut Juice Method" (106,000 likes). The post playfully explains the collaboration between Luckin and Coconut Tree, featuring Xu Dongdong demonstrating and tasting the drink.

In the comments section, Luckin's official account advised: "When drinking Coconut Cloud Latte, please avoid using straws and drink directly." This sparked audience discussions.

These news outlets elevated the Soy Sauce Latte from a mere marketing stunt into a public discourse involving advertising compliance, consumer rights, and road safety. On one hand, they verified critical details like "authentic Maotai content" and "alcohol levels," pressuring the brand. On the other, they educated the public through accessible content, amplifying societal attention.

Meanwhile, the Coconut Cloud Latte focused on product introduction, highlighting differentiation through its signature Xu Dongdong-style pose, unique taste, and drinking method. This emphasized the product's distinctiveness, ultimately aiming to increase societal attention.

3.2.3. Individual User Content Analysis

• Soy Sauce Latte

(1) "Real Moutai + Sauce-Aroma Latte" Pranks

A video titled "Authentic 53% ABV Sauce-Aroma Latte" garnered 113,000 likes. It shows a user mixing genuine Maotai liquor into a Sauce-Aroma Latte to "prank a friend."

This content amplifies the symbolic significance of "sauce-aroma" and "Moutai" through extreme "enhanced" actions, creating strong dramatic effect while boosting the video's entertainment value and virality.

(2) Emotional Resonance in Everyday Scenarios

For instance, sharing the "first sip of soy sauce latte" with friends or colleagues; capturing elders' reactions to trying something new at family gatherings.

These content pieces often take the form of short skits, vlogs, or spoken commentary, emphasizing personal experiences and emotional expression rather than product information itself.

• Coconut Cloud Latte

(1) Questions about similar flavors and products

Content: "After drinking the Coconut Cloud Latte, it feels like..." (9,331 likes). First, it points out that lattes aren't meant to be sipped through a straw, then expresses that the product tastes very mild and is quite similar in texture to the Deep Coconut Latte.

(2) WeChat Moments Photo Post

Content: "Posting Coconut Cloud Latte on Moments? Do It Like This" (15k likes). The post challenges the typical way of sharing a photo holding a latte, prompting viewers to wonder why that pose is discouraged.

As a daily sharing platform, WeChat Moments encourages relatable participation through humorous poses—especially appealing to college students and office workers.

Overall, individual content on Douyin continues Xiaohongshu's trend of "humorous anecdotes and everyday life," but Douyin's strong entertainment focus pushes toward more dramatic

expressions-like pranks or extreme recipes-to boost completion rates and shares. For Coconut Cloud Latte, the approach leans more toward everyday life scenarios.

4. User Needs and Breakthrough Logic from a Theoretical Perspective

4.1. Select Core Themes to Target Precise Audiences

Leveraging platform data to identify young demand for "cross-industry innovations + affordable Moutai," we established two core themes-"Coffee-Liqueur Crossover Innovation" and "Barbain Moutai"-aligning with their dual desires for novel experiences and budget-conscious spending. This created a connection point between the product and its audience.

4.2. Tiered Topic Diffusion to Expand Reach

Strategically deploy a communication matrix based on platform traffic logic. On Douyin, emphasize "influencer reviews + narrative storytelling," flavor evaluations, and Q&A sessions. Leverage algorithmic recommendations to engage interested audiences, address their queries. Xiaohongshu prioritized "influencer deep dives + use check-ins" to emphasize "aesthetic cup design + taste experience" details and artisanal craftsmanship. Hashtags like #SoySauceLatte and #MoutaiLuckinCollab boosted cross-platform topic engagement,

4.3. Crafting High-Value Social Currency Content

Tailor viral content to platform user preferences. Douyin KOLs focused on "taste exploration" and Xiaohongshu KOLs emphasized "emotional resonance", satisfying needs like trying novel experiences.

4.4. Amplify Value Through Interactive Virality

Design mechanics to drive dissemination. Douyin KOLs prompt users to comment on "post-drink experiences," boosting video comments. Xiaohongshu KOLs launch "show-and-share" campaigns, encouraging organic UGC creation for secondary dissemination.

4.5. Collaborative Efforts Across Stages Drive Successful Market Expansion

Brands first clarify core messages; KOLs and marketing accounts amplify these messages through reviews or comparisons to sustain topic momentum; finally, ordinary users share authentic experiences for secondary dissemination. This forms a complete communication chain: "official announcement → intermediary amplification → user co-creation."

4.6. Cross-industry Collaborations Benefit Both Parties

Luckin Coffee and Moutai or Coconut Tree have expanded each other's audience and influence. boosting sales and visibility while spreading their brand culture.

5. Discussion

(1) Xiaohongshu and Douyin work in tight coordination, Xiaohongshu's content emphasizes refinement depth, details, credible endorsements, and collaborative creation. Douyin leans toward entertainment with powerful algorithmic recommendations, Through topic synergy and complementary content, they transition from "precise product discovery" to "viral dissemination" across the web,

(2) Young consumers crave novel experiences, prioritizing value and emotional resonance. This reveals that beverage brands must shift from "promoting products" to "fulfilling user needs" in social media marketing.

(3) The success collaborations hinged on complementary brand styles and overlapping user bases. Companies must anticipate risks and prepare for public opinion management when executing cross-industry collaborations.

(4) UGC Requires Guidance: Authentic user experiences, anecdotes, DIY tutorials for breaking into new markets. Brands must encourage positive contributions. Simultaneously, they must promptly address negative feedback, transforming user creativity into a driving force for brand communication.

6. Conclusion

This study examines how beverage brands transcend niche market constraints through social media marketing, using Luckin's Soy Sauce Latte and Coconut Cloud Latte as case studies. Findings reveal that differentiated strategies across Xiaohongshu and Douyin are pivotal: Xiaohongshu supports in-depth product cultivation, while Douyin drives entertainment-focused viral diffusion. The collaboration between brands, KOLs and users forms a self-contained communication loop underpinned by established marketing theories. Cross-industry partnerships further satisfy consumer needs, enhance brand value complementarity, and enable traditional brands to connect with younger consumers.

Practically, this research offers actionable guidance for beverage marketing and youth-oriented transformation for traditional enterprises. Theoretically, it identifies a communication mechanism: Topic Creation → Social Virality → User Co-creation, enriches cross-industry IP marketing models, and confirms the validity of classic marketing theories in new media environments, providing a solid framework for future studies.

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