


Chapter 2

Harnessing the Power of Social Media Marketing to Transform the Food Industry in China

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the evolution of social media's role within the Chinese food industry, emphasizing its profound impact on marketing strategies. The progression of the Internet from Web 1.0's static content to Web 4.0's immersive experiences has significantly influenced prominent local platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin and Xiaohongshu, which now play a crucial role in China's digital ecosystem. These platforms offer rich, interactive content and leverage big data for precise marketing, thereby enhancing brand engagement and consumer interaction. The chapter examines how social media marketing has transformed the food industry, providing an in-depth analysis of successful case studies. It also identifies key performance indicators and future trends. By delving into these elements, the chapter aims to offer actionable insights for food industry, enabling them to effectively utilize social media for branding and market expansion.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has evolved from the Web 1.0 static web (Lewis et al., 2024) to the Web 2.0 interactive and user-generated content (UGC), the Web 3.0 semantic and intelligent web, and the current Web 4.0 intelligent, integrated, and immersive experiences (Santos, 2022). Similarly, in China, local social media sites like WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu hold significant influence (Liu, 2021). These

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platforms facilitate immediate information interchange, offer broad social networking capabilities, and give different tools for creating and sharing content. It establishes new channels of contact between organizations and consumers (Arora et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). According to Santos (2022), Web 2.0 introduced user-generated content and interactivity, leading to the emergence of blogs, social networks, video sharing platforms, and many more. This provided the basis for the rise of social media marketing. It was also at this time that social media platforms such as Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005) and Twitter (2006) emerged, allowing companies to interact directly with consumers for marketing activities such as branding, user engagement, and community building (Kaur et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2022; Wongsansukcharoen, 2022).

China's food industry is an important part of the national economy, covering a wide range of fields from agricultural production, food processing to food service (Hu et al., 2020). . According to the China Industrial Statistical Yearbook, the market size of China's food industry has exceeded RMB 11 trillion in 2023 (China Industrial Statistical Yearbook, 2023) (please refer to Figure 1). The market structure of China's food industry shows a diversified trend, including multiple market segments such as traditional food, leisure food, health food and high-end food (Franzolini, 2020; Huang and Fleiss, 2023). The market size of China's food industry is thought to be growing due to the country's rapid economic growth and the rising income levels of its population (Kroeber, 2020; Lei et al.,2021; Zhang et al.,2020; Zhong et al., 2022). The acceleration of urbanization, the improvement of residents' living standards, and the enhancement of consumers' health awareness have driven continuous innovation and change in the food industry. Some scholar pointed out that consumers' increasing demand for food safety, quality and branding has brought new opportunities and challenges to food companies (Katsikouli et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2022).

Figure 1. China Food and Beverage Industry Market Size from 2016 to 2023



Source: China Industrial Statistical Yearbook (2023)

The growing influence of social media has made it an important tool for marketing and branding for Chinese companies (Chen and Qasim, 2021; Cheung et al., 2021). According to Huang (2024), the number of monthly active users of WeChat has exceeded 1 billion, and the number of users of Weibo and Jitterbug have both exceeded 500 million. Social media platforms offer rich forms of content presentation, such as short videos, live broadcasts, graphics and interactive games, which greatly enrich the user experience (Lu and Nam, 2021; Song et al., 2021; Zheng, 2023). Through big data analysis and precise

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