



Analysis of Lululemon's Marketing Strategies Based on the 4P Theory

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Abstract. TBased on the background of rapid expansion and increasingly fierce competition in China's sports and leisure market, this study takes high-end sports brand Lululemon as study subject to analyze its marketing strategy and economic performance in the Chinese market in depth. The study adopts the case study method and is carried out under the analytical framework of 4P. Combined with economic concepts such as signaling theory, it systematically examines Lululemon's product strategy, pricing mechanism, distribution system and localized marketing activities. The results of the study show that Lululemon has achieved high growth rates by shaping vertical differentiation through technological innovation, using high-pricing strategies to signal quality and build community identity, and creating positive network externalities through KOL marketing and community operations. However, its market generalization strategy has also led to the risk of brand dilution and growth slowdown. The study concludes that Lululemon needs to establish a multi-level brand architecture, strengthen supply chain control and implement a gradient downward strategy in order to achieve sustainable growth while maintaining brand premium.

Keywords: Localized Marketing Activities, Distribution System, Pricing Mechanism.

1 Introduction

Over recent years, China's market for athleisure has been highlighted as a new hot spot, one that is full of vitality and development possibility, attributable to the proposal of "Healthy China" and the upgrading trend of consumers. Among different industry links, the market for athleisure has become the biggest competitive battleground for global brands fighting to obtain bigger share. In this context of high dynamism and competition, the emergence of lululemon as a Canadian premium brand for athleisure is to be paid close attention. The reason behind the successful growth of Lululemon in the North America market is its distinct marketing of community, high-quality products as well as specific brand concepts. lululemon has maintained a steady growth path in mainland China since it launched business there in 2016, relying on company-owned stores, e-commerce platform and local community event, and achieved the attraction of lifestyle group at the middle-income level. Researchers' work show that Lululemon's brand

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purpose of gender equality also made them a well-known brand with a great loyalty [1]. But deep integration with the local market also brings new challenge for these companies: one the one hand, the decline of sales growth behind the mask is the further shrinking of brand power of the company's development path of market diversification and customer mass; one the other hand, the fight between Chinese sports market is tough yet. In addition to the old international rivals, such as Nike and Adidas, which have solid barriers of brand loyalty and technological innovations, as well as the newcomer Alo, which also represents the high-quality life style of the middle class. It can provide a direct reference for brands to optimize their market strategies and enhance their competitive barriers, as well as a key reference for other international brands that intend to deeply cultivate the Chinese market. Based on this, this study identifies lululemon's marketing strategy in China as the core research theme, aiming to systematically analyze the strategic composition and implementation effect of its community-driven, high-end branding and digital adaptation. The research methodology adopts a case study strategy by systematically reviewing industry reports and literature to examine the macro-environment and competitive landscape, as well as utilizing the 4P analysis framework for comprehensive assessment. Ultimately, this study aims to achieve the following objectives: first, to accurately identify lululemon's competitive situation and core user profile in the current Chinese market; second, to objectively assess the strengths and limitations of its marketing mix strategy; and third, to propose an actionable localized marketing optimization plan to provide academic support and decision-making basis for the brand's sustainable growth.

2 Brand Introduction

2.1 Brand Development History

Lululemon, founded in 1998 in Vancouver, Canada, emerged during a period of rising global interest in yoga and wellness culture. Its founder, Chip Wilson, identified a gap in the market for women's yoga apparel through insights gained during yoga training. He gradually transformed a hybrid space combining a yoga studio and retail store into a globally renowned brand with a market value exceeding \$10 billion. Lululemon's brand philosophy, "Be a Sweatlife Ambassador," articulates its mission to balance modern wellness by advocating a lifestyle integrating exercise, healthy nutrition, mental wellbeing, and social connection. This ethos is embodied in its brand identity through symmetrical, streamlined design. The stylized letter "A" originates from the initial brand proposal "Athletically Hip," signaling the brand's commitment to a minimalist, healthy lifestyle. Lululemon's growth trajectory has been remarkable, achieving brand diversification and global market expansion within two decades. Historical records indicate the brand opened its first physical store in Vancouver in 2000. Through continuous expansion across North America and worldwide markets, it successfully went public in 2007. During the pandemic, its market value surged, surpassing Adidas to rank second globally, while many competitors faced stagnation or decline [2]. Through its deep brand positioning and continuous product innovation, Lululemon has

distinguished itself in a fiercely competitive market, becoming the leading brand for middle-class women's healthy lifestyles.

2.2 Recent Developments

The reason for the success of Lululemon in a relatively short period in China is the focus of China local in China, like community yoga event and cooperation with domestic influencers. In combination with social context of staying at home during the pandemic, yoga and the idea of a healthy and high-quality lifestyle turned to be extremely popular overnight. In 2022, the market value of Lululemon reached \$37.4 billion, becoming the second largest sports brand in the world [2]. For Lululemon, this study examines its 2024 company annual report and notices that overseas sales increased, and annual net sales exceeded \$10 billion for the first time. The Chinese mainland's net sales increased 41% over last year, and the number of stores has increased from 151 by the end of the fiscal year 2024. On the other hand, Nike saw its revenue and profit sharply in the FY 2024's Q4, and its market segment Greater China saw the sharpest revenue drop with a 21% YOY decline—it had the weakest performance among all of these major sportswear brands. Obviously, different from its peers' poor performance, Lululemon has managed to grow its root in Greater China via a clear localized business model. Not only did it post a counter-cyclical growth while facing the pandemic, but it seems to retain a strong momentum even now.

Lululemon is perhaps the perfect example of a brand which has had success in terms of expansion of product offerings. This is evident from the extent to which it has branched out from a focused set of offerings from yoga into running, into training, into swimming, into golf, and more generally into all the ranges of apparel including topwears, bottomwears, innerwear, footwear and other accessories. Lululemon has also branched into lifestyle wear featuring more athleisure offerings, clothes with intent to be worn outside sports in a way that the line between casual clothes and workout clothes were blurred to better serve the changing clothing needs of consumers across scenarios. Under this initiative, it not only created an active life comprehensive ecosystem, but also achieved market penetration. For example, "Asian Fit" series, a 2025 women wear category's release – tailored into Asian body types and materials, such as UV protection – achieved a smashing hit at time of release in Chinese market.

2.3 Development Challenges

Lululemon has shown strong growth in the Chinese market in recent years, however, its growth rate has been declining quarter by quarter since 2024. More significantly, its sluggish growth in the Americas market has lasted for nearly two years, a phenomenon that reflects structural problems and economic logic, which is of great reference significance in predicting the future path of Lululemon in the Chinese market. Compared to the 82% growth rate in the Americas in the first quarter of fiscal year 2021, Lululemon's growth rate in 2022, 2023 and 2024 plummeted to 32%, 17% and 3.5% respectively, showing a clear decline in growth momentum [3]. This trend is highly consistent with previous warnings from brand founder Chip Wilson, who has successfully shaped

Lululemon's recognizable and loyal brand equity during his tenure by advocating a maverick communication strategy and focusing on the "superwoman" core positioning. Lululemon's highly recognizable and loyal brand equity. However, with the gradual withdrawal of Lululemon from the decision-making level of the company, Lululemon has started to implement the strategy of market generalization and customer base expansion, which has brought about a rapid increase in revenue and market capitalization in the short term, but has also led to the continuous dilution of brand power, which poses a potential threat to the long-term development [4]. As a key source of Lululemon's core competitiveness, brand power will have a direct impact on the pricing power and profit structure of the company. The brand not only gives high value-added to the product through identity symbol and emotional connection, but also makes consumers willing to pay a premium far beyond the functional value. If the brand image becomes blurred due to over-expansion or loses its uniqueness due to audience generalization, the perceived value of the brand will decline, which in turn will shake the pricing foundation of the high-end market. In addition, the loss of brand power will also affect the company's ability to resist risk in the face of competition. China's sports apparel market is in an environment of fierce competition and rapid iteration, foreign brands also as high-end sports apparel, 2025 is gradually deployed in the Chinese market, with the intention of seizing the high-end market. If Lululemon fails to continue to strengthen its brand differentiation and value proposition, it will easily fall into homogenized competition and eventually be forced to participate in price wars, leading to a decline in profitability.

3 Marketing Analysis

3.1 Product

High-quality Sports Brands. The brand's high-quality products are characterized by unique technical fabrics and functional details such as moisture-wicking Everlux™ and skin-hugging Nulu™, along with hidden pockets, reflective strips, and high-waisted cuts [2]. These designs not only embody the brand's relentless pursuit of practicality but also reflect its strategic intent to transform "athletic functionality" into "everyday wear capital." At the same time, the attributes of such products exemplify "vertical differentiation"—effectively establishing competitive barriers at the product level by offering technological elements that are difficult for competitors to replicate quickly. This underpins the brand's ability to command premium pricing and enhances consumers' willingness to pay. As demonstrated by founder Chip Wilson's initial vision for yoga apparel, Lululemon emerged from addressing the discomfort associated with traditional yoga clothing. He broke away from conventional cotton-polyester blends and developed a patented fabric specifically optimized for athletic movements. This founding principle continues to be upheld through Lululemon's problem-driven approach, which relies on customer feedback and iterative design in its product development process. For example, Lululemon now employs scientifically advanced zoned compression designs to provide targeted support for major muscle groups during exercise, while other areas feature more comfortable cuts [5]. This human-centered design philosophy

not only enhances product loyalty but fundamentally reshapes consumers' expectations for athletic wear functionality and aesthetic standards. Notably, Lululemon's innovation is not developed in isolation; It is deeply rooted in systematic market research and end-user insights. The Align™ yoga pants, developed through company research with professional yogis, utilize the skin-friendly Nulu™ fabric [5]. This material significantly minimizes friction and restriction between clothing and skin during movement, providing a second-skin sensation while facilitating seamless motion in athletic contexts. Lululemon's high-quality products are not merely isolated technological advancements; rather, they emerge from a systematic innovation framework that integrates user research, materials science, ergonomics, and brand strategy.

"Be Yourself" as a Social Outlet for Emotion. In the context of postmodern consumer society, emotional value has emerged as a fundamental component of brand premium. As a high-end yoga apparel brand, Lululemon's product design is closely aligned with its "Be Yourself" brand narrative. Firstly, in light of the pervasive societal anxiety and the increasing health consciousness observed in post-pandemic China, Lululemon's minimalist design and the inherent health benefits associated with yoga effectively address collective psychological needs. Since the pandemic, heightened global socioeconomic uncertainty has fueled collective anxiety, with the middle class increasingly craving stability and healthy lifestyles. Lululemon's minimalist aesthetic—defined by neutral tones, fluid lines, and stripped-down details—creates a "visual sense of order" that resonates with the middle class's pursuit of spiritual sanctuary and life control, it reduces decision fatigue and promotes feelings of calm. Simultaneously, the yoga apparel category signifies its role in helping consumers elevate health awareness and achieve wellness management [6]. This provision of emotional value fundamentally represents market adaptation based on scarce psychological resources, with its economic efficacy manifested in heightened brand loyalty and reduced price elasticity.

Second, Lululemon empowers women's bodily autonomy through functional design, exemplified by ergonomic tailoring that enhances mobility. This approach resonates with the trend of increasing economic status and social voice among women. The products incorporate high-stretch fabrics and sculptural cuts to accentuate women's figures while enhancing their functional capabilities, effectively addressing both the rational consumption patterns and emotional needs associated with women's economic empowerment. The brand's Define collection promotes body confidence among wearers through tummy-control features and figure-flattering designs. Lululemon adeptly transforms women's body anxieties into consumer-driven needs, embedding these solutions within a narrative of "self-acceptance" to foster a greater willingness to pay. This positions Lululemon as a prime beneficiary of the 'she-economy,' referring to the rising economic power and influence of female consumers, where its emotional value proposition represents a market segmentation innovation leveraging gender-based dividends.

3.2 Price

As a leading brand in the sportswear industry, Lululemon has always been in the top tier of the industry with product price is far above general sportswear brands. And according to the price of Lululemon store for women's yoga leggings in 2025, the selling price of it is 750RMB to 980RMB, as to women's travel coat, the sale price is 980RMB to 2580RMB. Meanwhile, the price of Lululemon is only between 206 and 1299 RMB while the Adidas' range of women pants varies from 226 RMB to 1499 RMB, which implies the brand premium pricing and narrow market in comparison with Adidas and Adidas' limited band price category. This is their deliberate strategy and targeting their consumption behavior psychology and the middle-class women in terms of purchasing ability.

The high price in addition to directly signifies its premium brand positioning is also the key driver in capturing and sustaining brand equity. First, Lululemon high-price strategy can be utilized to send credible signals. "Signaling theory" in information economics states that price itself could be a valuable signal of brand quality and brand image [7]. A high price means better material and construction, better functionality and better design. This association helps shoppers to make inferences in information asymmetrical markets and strengthens their trust for their purchase behavior. In terms of social identity and group membership, Lululemon's hi-marking price strategy has successfully created extremely attractive brand community. The intended audience – a middleclass female population – doesn't only want to be wearing the goods produced but also become part of the lifestyle or social status associated with the brand. In wearing the goods, Lululemon can be considered as "social currency": One is implicitly able to show off health consciousness, beauty values and economic achievements (the ability to afford high quality goods) to others when wearing its products. By doing so, their self-perception gains in stature and social recognition and admiration can be received from their social environment.

3.3 Place

Lululemon's distribution strategy in Chinese market is a perfect case to reveal the combination of its exclusive brand philosophy with the globalisation of supply chain management strategy. It can be analysed in this three aspects: sales location, sales strategy, sales channel. Firstly, in terms of store site selection, Lululemon follows a scale up strategy, using a slope model of first-tier city, second-tier city and third-tier city—aligns with its premium market segment. In China, Lululemon starts its entry with booth sales and launches Beijing and Shanghai as its pilot cities in 2013. As the first batch of physical outlets was launched in 2016, it still focused on the above two major economic centers, in order to establish the brand image under the background of the high-end consumption power and international atmosphere of the first-line cities, and at the same time, it conforms to the theoretical model of "core-edge" diffusion. Based on this, a model of brands usually choose the core city with strong radiative effect and obvious demonstrative effect first and then expand it to the periphery and sub-city later. So far, Lululemon has opened its business in 49 first- and second-class cities in China, totaling

195 (by September 2025) stores (of which there are 27 stores in Shanghai and 25 in Beijing), which to the greatest extent reflects its orderly consideration for urban class and consumption capacity in its local setup.

Secondly, in terms of retail strategy, Lululemon insists on adopting a vertical retail model in China, which in contrast to convention distribution through third-party retailers. This model effectively integrates the marketing interests of different links by controlling the sales and brand experience within the same organizational system, forming a synergistic effect. As a matter of fact, vertical retailing can reduce intermediate links, lower transaction costs, and enhance the brand's direct control over the consumer experience [8]. Lululemon's stores usually set up product display and experience areas, and consumers can immediately enter the retail area to make purchases after completing the on-site experience, which greatly shortens the consumption path from awareness to decision-making. This strategy not only improves conversion efficiency, but also strengthens the emotional connection between the brand and the community, which is in line with its high-value business model of "experience-driven sales".

In terms of supply channels, Lululemon is typically characterized by outsourced production on a large scale and reliance on key raw materials. The company transfers low value-added production to developing countries, while focusing on high value-added R&D, design and marketing activities locally. While optimizing the cost structure, this global supply chain layout also brings about a stronger reliance on upstream raw materials. For example, Lululemon mainly purchases fabrics from about 65 suppliers, with the patented material Luon, known for its elasticity and durability, accounting for about 30% of the total fabric usage [9]. The highly centralized sourcing strategy and the dependence on a few key materials increase the bargaining power of suppliers, while the bargaining power of consumers is relatively limited.

3.4 Promotion

Advertisement. Lululemon's advertising and marketing strategy in China not only continues its core tradition of global brand communication, but also actively implements localization improvements, reflecting the dual logic of cross-cultural market adaptation and brand value transmission. In order to increase brand awareness and enhance consumer trust, Lululemon has long adopted a radial communication model centered on key opinion leaders (KOLs). The strategy stems from its well-established "brand ambassador" system, in which Lululemon selects around 20 of the most influential local yoga or fitness instructors when it enters a new city, invites them to become brand ambassadors, and displays posters of them wearing the brand's gear in its offline stores [10]. This approach not only uses KOL's professional image to endorse the product, but also realizes the secondary diffusion of the brand's value through its social network, effectively lowering the target group's information acquisition cost and trust threshold. With the evolution of China's digital media environment, Lululemon has further extended this strategy to online platforms, systematically expanding the scope of cooperation and communication effectiveness of opinion leaders. The company mainly targets highly compatible audiences such as overseas students, middle-class women in first- and second-tier cities, and sports enthusiasts. It chooses to cooperate with people with

more than 50,000 followers on mainstream social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin. By launching challenges such as #WearLululemonToday, the brand not only enhances the sense of community participation and identity, but also successfully realizes the precise reach and consumption guidance to potential customers. In addition, in the face of China's large and clearly stratified consumer market, Lululemon has also made strategic localization adjustments in its choice of celebrity spokespersons. Early spokespersons such as Lu Jingshan and Wang Zixuan had images closer to internationalization and high-end aesthetics, which helped consolidate the market in first-tier cities. In recent years, the choice of Jialing as the spokesperson shows the brand's clear orientation to break through the original customer boundaries and develop the second and third tier markets. Jialing's popularity, affinity and comedic image, although to a certain extent conflicting with the brand's traditional "high-end and exquisite" positioning, has greatly enhanced the brand's visibility and acceptance in the lower-tier market.

Offline Community Building. In addition to social media promotion, Lululemon has also been effective in building offline communities. Through systematic community activities, the brand has not only strengthened its brand concept of "hot sweaty life", but also built up a highly viscous user network in the real economy, thus realizing the transformation from product functionality promotion to lifestyle value delivery. This strategy significantly enhances brand identity, promotes spontaneous dissemination by users, and effectively supports its high-end pricing and market expansion, with significant economic efficiency and strategic value. For example, in May 2023, Lululemon celebrated its 10th anniversary in mainland China by launching a campaign called "The Story of Us," in which the company invited 10 brand ambassadors, employees, and community members to share their experiences of growing up with the product [5]. This kind of authentic narrative not only strengthens the emotional connection between the brand and the users, but also transforms the users from "consumers" to "characters in the brand's story", which increases their self-brand identity and willingness for word-of-mouth communication. More importantly, community-driven promotion has significant positive externalities, such as peer influence, and network effects. Event participants often come from the brand's target groups, including sports enthusiasts, middle- and high-income groups, and lifestyle-conscious consumers, who form a brand-centered social circle through offline interactions. Such circles not only increase user conversion costs by binding social relationships with the brand, but also influence potential consumers through group behavior, bringing low-cost or even zero-cost new customer reach. Compared with expensive online advertising or celebrity endorsement, community activities achieve high user loyalty and community diffusion effects with relatively low investment, reflecting a good input-output ratio.

4 Suggestion

First of all, for Lululemon's brand dilution due to the broadening of customer base, it is recommended to realize the balance of market coverage and value maintenance by

establishing a multi-level brand architecture, including flagship, sub-brands, and entry-level product lines. The brand should strictly distinguish between the main product line and extended product line, the main series continue to adhere to high-end pricing and professional attributes, focusing on the core city and professional sports communities, in order to maintain the brand image and premium ability; at the same time, researchers can explore the introduction of emerging markets or young consumer groups of the sub-brand or a specific product series, through the differentiation of the naming, design and channel strategy, to avoid excessive dilution of the value of the main brand while expanding the market share. In this process, special attention should be paid to the depth of core community operation, such as through membership grading and differentiation of activity rights and interests, to strengthen the sense of belonging of high-value users, so as to realize the joint growth of brand equity and scale income at the economic level.

Secondly, regarding the proliferation of piracy caused by the outsourcing production model, brands should build a dual protection system, combining technological empowerment such as advanced anti-counterfeiting designs, and institutional synergy like stricter e-commerce monitoring. It is recommended to increase R&D investment in core product line production processes, and conduct in-depth R&D on garment fit, durability, and specialized sports functions, so as to increase the difficulty and cost of counterfeiting. At the same time, brands should strengthen data cooperation with China's major e-commerce platforms, establish a real-time monitoring and quick take-down mechanism for infringing goods, and actively carry out legal actions against the chain of manufacturing and selling imitations to increase the cost of violations. In the long run, moderately tightening the outsourcing control of core fabrics and processes, and establishing closer partnerships or even equity investments with key suppliers will also reduce the risk of technology leakage at the source.

Finally, in order to realize the consolidation of China's high-end market and the continuous development of new market vitality, Lululemon should adopt the comprehensive marketing strategy of high-end leadership, cultural integration and tiered market penetration, which contrasting with Adidas' broader mass-market approach in China. In the high-end market, Lululemon should deepen its cooperation with authorities in the professional field, focusing on the brand's implantation sponsorship in important events, highlighting the brand's professionalism and aesthetic value, and reinforcing its recognition in the elite circle; at the same time, it should actively expand its corporate-level cooperation, embedding itself in the work and life scenarios of the high-net-worth group. For new markets, it is necessary to focus on localized translation of marketing content, combining the brand's concept with China's local sports culture and urban lifestyle to achieve emotional resonance. In geographical expansion, the company should follow the strict gradient path of "core cities - regional centers - potential cities", relying on stores as brand experience centers, and steadily promoting market penetration, so as to avoid weakening the effectiveness of localized campaigns due to over-expansion and the overall image of the brand as a result of over-expansion.

5 Conclusion

Taking Lululemon, an international high-end sports brand, as the research object, this study systematically reviews and analyzes its marketing strategies, growth drivers, challenges and the economic logic behind them in the Chinese market. Based on the 4P analysis framework and combining theoretical tools such as signaling theory and brand economics, the study found that Lululemon had successfully built up its brand premium capability and achieved rapid growth in China by virtue of its product strategy of vertical differentiation and unique value delivery, the signaling mechanism of high-end pricing, and localized community marketing. However, its market generalization strategy has also led to the structural risks of brand power dilution and growth slowdown. Based on this, this paper suggests balancing expansion and value maintenance by establishing a multi-level brand architecture, protecting intellectual property rights by building an anti-counterfeiting system that synergizes technology and system, and adopting a comprehensive strategy of "high-end leadership, cultural integration, and gradient sinking" to achieve sustainable development. This study not only provides a case study of an emerging market for the theory of brand economics, but also provides an important reference for the strategy formulation of international brands in the Chinese market, showing that maintaining brand equity is the core issue for realizing long-term economic value creation.

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