RESEARCH ON INNOVATIVE MARKETING OF BALTIC AMBER JEWELLERY IN CHINA MARKET

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Abstract

Affected by the Novel Coronavirus epidemic, the challenge for SMEs in 2020 will change from "difficult mode" to "hell mode". In order to prevent cross-infection, offline retail, catering, tourism, supermarkets, vegetable markets and other traditional industries are almost closed. In other industries, most companies have delayed the resumption of work, but rent and wages are still paid. Under the huge cost pressure, many enterprises are facing a crisis. In Latvia, one of the three Baltic states, Baltic amber processing and retailing is an industry heavily dependent on tourism, and local amber souvenirs and jewellery have been severely affected by the outbreak. The transformation of marketing channels is therefore a priority for Baltic Amber jewellery sellers. In the traditional online marketing, Baltic amber jewellery is not easy to be recognised by the majority of Chinese consumers because of its own characteristics, so on the basis of a variety of online marketing, the marketing of Baltic amber still needs innovation to achieve the expected marketing goals. With fierce competition from rivals in online marketing in China, there will still be many difficulties, among which the biggest difficulty is that many sellers on Douvin platform are selling fake amber. And many Chinese consumers lack sufficient ability to purchase the authentic Baltic amber. Based on these problems, the author takes Georgs Romulis /Amber with Soul Baltic amber jewellery brand as the research subject and potential consumers of Baltic amber on the Douvin platform as the research object to carry out the new online marketing methods. The author takes the literature method, statistical analysis, and comparative analysis as the research methods. Through Douvin and WeChat platforms, the author create the Douvin-WeChat Network Marketing Model as the innovative way to enlarge Baltic amber marketing in China. Finally, the author finds that an innovative way of online marketing method for Baltic Amber is to find target customers through Douyin platform, communicate with potential customers and get their payment through WeChat platform.

Keywords: China, Latvia, Baltic amber, Douyin, Followers, Marketing online, Purchasing.

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Importance of Marketing Online

Online marketing methods are diverse, different products in different online platforms need different marketing methods. But the development of online marketing has gradually replaced the traditional marketing in many countries. In the China market, Taobao, Jingdong, Buy together, Kuaishou, Douvin and WeChat have all become online shopping platforms in the daily life of Chinese consumers. These online shopping platforms also greatly meet consumers' daily life needs and convenience. Chinese consumers' age, income, education and marital status, and their perceived usefulness are significant predictors of online shopping intention (Gong et al., 2013). Website quality has a direct and positive impact on customer satisfaction, and that customer satisfaction has a direct and positive impact on purchase intentions (Bai et al., 2008). Information quality, web site design, merchandise attributes, transaction capability, security/privacy, payment, delivery, and customer service – are strongly predictive of online shopping customer satisfaction, while the effect of response time is not significant (Zheng et al., 2012). At the present level of internet development in China, online consumers can be segmented on the basis of their self-rated internet skills and their perception of the challenges involved in online shopping (Wang, Zhang, 2020). Participants in the "retailer's country" experimental condition experienced higher telepresence and greater perceptions of product authenticity, and telepresence increased participants' trust in the retailer and perceived product authenticity, which led to positive behavioural intentions (Baek et al., 2019). Chinese consumers' attitudes and/ or purchase intentions were positively linked to their perceived incentives and negatively associated with their perceived complexity for online food shopping (Wang, Somogyi, 2018). Neither the measure of cognitive trust nor the measure of organisation trust is a good predictor of consumer behaviour (Poon, Albaum, 2019). The focus of e-commerce in China will be different than it is in Europe and America because of the difference in traditional business models, conventional consumer behaviours, and consumer expectations (Wong, et al., 2004). There is a threshold which determines which of the two strategies is optimal and the numerical analysis further verifies the research results, through comparison and analysis of the advance selling price, consumer utility and retailer's total profit of single advance selling strategy and advance selling with random rewards strategy. And the effect of the expected utility of random rewards on the advance selling price (Peng et al., 2020). The analysis suggests that seven constructs – price, convenience, product information, return policy, financial risk, product risk and delivery risk – are significant with customer satisfaction to re-purchase in e-stores (Khan et al., 2015). Internet marketing is conceptually different from other marketing channels and internet promotes a one to one communication between the seller and the end user with round the clock customer service (Shanthi, Desti, 2015).

As more consumers become sophisticated (being able to infer the product quality based on the influencer's endorsement), Livestream Selling always hurts the product quality and the firm's profit, and may even lower consumer surplus, leading to a "lose-lose" outcome (Hou et al., 2021). Individualism is the only culture dimension to have a significant effect on purchase intention, and product type and individualism by price interaction also have a significant effect, whereas price does not (Moon et al., 2008). Consumers generally benefit from the manufacturer's optimal online distribution strategy because of low prices and high quantities (Pu et al., 2020). Organisations should enhance shopping platform quality in order to keep customers engaged, embed more online personal selling functions to facilitate e-loyalty (Zuo, Khan, 2021). Incentives for retailers carrying differentiated goods to make information environments maximally transparent, but to avoid price competition by carrying more unique merchandise (Lynch Ir, Ariely, 2000). Destination Marketing Organisations should promote the niche images, as well as the commonly held images in their online marketing effort (Pan, Li, 2011). It is proposed that the Chinese government pay attention to the mentality of its citizens when establishing an food traceability system and take measures to lift consumers' willingness to pay for certified traceable food (Xu, Wu, 2010). Internet users' concerns toward online shopping were assessed by considering financial issues, product quality issues, refund issues, product delivery issues, security issues and privacy issues (Huseynov, Yıldırım, 2016). Website design, security, information quality, payment method, e-service quality, product quality, product variety and delivery service are positively related to consumer satisfaction towards online shopping in China (Guo, et al., 2012). However, the online shopping platforms and sales models of various countries have many common characteristics, but also different differences.

Essence of Douyin-WeChat Network Marketing Model

The supply of Baltic amber is less than the demand due to the limitation of its origin. Since the original production area of Baltic amber is only in the Baltic coast, and many Baltic countries restrict the original export, it is difficult for many amber sellers in China to buy affordable amber stone in China market. This has led many manufacturers to make fake Baltic amber stones, mostly plastic or cast plexiglass. At present, lots of amber stone is synthesized with chemical reagents (such as Marisan, one of the fake amber materials, is a toxic organic matter and very harmful to the skin and body). Due to the serious imbalance between market demand and supply,

on the basis of preventing Chinese consumers from buying fake Baltic amber, the author also puts forward a set of effective methods for Baltic amber jewellery online marketing.

Development of WeChat and Douyin Platforms in China

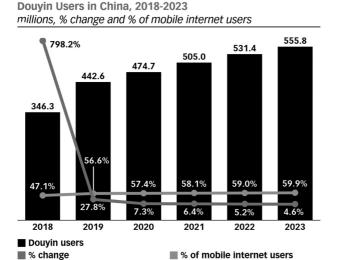
As is well known WeChat is one of the main ways people communicate in China. When doing business or consuming in daily life, people prefer WeChat to pay. From major supermarkets to the smallest of street shops, people can pay for things with WeChat almost anywhere in China. As long as a person have a Chinese bank account, this person can link that to a WeChat account. There are three ways to pay for something or transferring money via the app. Firstly, the store can scan the user's unique WeChat QR code. Secondly, the user could scan the QR code of the shop in which they are buying items or services. Third, WeChat friends can transfer money to each other or send lucky money package to each other. The number of monthly active WeChat accounts reached 1.151 billion by the third quarter of 2019. increased 6 percent from the same period in 2018. More and more netizens tend to use multiple WeChat signals to socialize with different groups. 97.5 % of the surveyed netizens said they had WeChat accounts, of which 48.6 % had a single WeChat account and 48.9 % had two or more WeChat accounts.² People of different ages pay different attention to the contents of Wechat official accounts. For example, most young people like to watch cartoons, more middle-aged people pay attention to the content of pregnancy, childbirth and parenting, and college students pay attention to academic research. As a head social platform, Wechat is no longer a simple social tool after years of development. It has penetrated into every aspect of people's lives. At present, Wechat's social relationship chain is large and stable, and users have developed a certain degree of dependence on it.

WeChat now has a serious challenger whose meteoric rise has taken China by storm (and WeChat's owner Tencent by surprise). That is Douyin, one of the most popular short video apps in China, as well as worldwide. It is owned by ByteDance (a.k.a Toutiao), an Al-driven media company in China and one of the world's most valuable start-ups, most recently valued at \$30 billion. ByteDance is a GGV portfolio company. Douyin is one of the few apps that has enjoyed wild popularity both inside and outside of China. In the first quarter of 2018, Douyin's international version of Tik Tok, was the most downloaded iPhone app worldwide, totalling 45.8 million and surpassing Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, according to the American research company Sensor Tower. Douyin has grown into one of the most

² www.chvxx.com

popular social platforms in China and its popularity translates into opportunities for many people. For the platform, it means more advertising revenue; for different brands – more advertising opportunities. And for the users with millions of followers, it's a chance to make some money.

Sellers can also sell products directly through the window of Douyin. However, there are many cheating phenomena in sales of Douyin. For example, the products displayed by Douyin live broadcast are often different from the products received by consumers. But Douyin is an open platform, and as long as the product quality is good, more potential customers will pay attention on it. Douyin will overtake Taobao to become the largest shopping platform in China in the next few years. Therefore, by combining Douyin with Wechat marketing, customers will have a better understanding of the store's products and get more scientific purchasing information from the shop. The Douyin users amount statistic is shown in Figure 1 below.



Note: internet users who access their Douyin account via any device at least once per month; excludes Hong Kong

Figure 1. The Information of Douyin User in China from 2018 to 2023 Source: eMarketer. November 2019

It's even more prevalent because services like Facebook are blocked in China. There is also a social feature called "Moments." Users can upload a number of images or videos and their friends can comment or like the post. One will need to put in a passcode or use a biometric authentication tool to authorise the transaction. Instant money transfers to one's WeChat contacts

can also be made via the messaging function, which makes it easy to split bills or just move money around China. It is possible to be nearly cashless in China and actually go out for the day without a wallet.

Due to the particularity of the jewellery industry, Douyin video has many drawbacks when presenting products to customers. So WeChat is a very good complementary tool to make up for Douvin's lack of direct presentation to clients. There are three reasons for this: First, WeChat can better show customers detailed pictures of each jewellery. In particular, WeChat photo albums are the best way to display jewellery. Totally nine pictures can be uploaded in a WeChat album, which can convey details of amber jewellery taken from different directions to customers. And pictures are static, so it can fully display the colour, light transmittance, size and other information of the amber jewellery. Second, due to incomplete information in the Amber market in China, most consumers will get lost and choose the wrong seller. Therefore, it is necessary to popularise the identification method of Baltic amber to customers. WeChat is superior to Douyin in terms of processing text and sending documents, so the customer service staff can convey the scientific knowledge of purchasing amber to each customer through WeChat chat. Third, WeChat is the most convenient way to do the payment. At present, Chinese people seldom use cash for transactions, which are basically replaced by WeChat Pay and Alipay in real life. So letting potential customers see amber jewelleries in a photo album in WeChat platform is an important step of final transaction payment.

Frame of the Douyin-WeChat Network Marketing Model

Figure 2 below shows how potential customers are found from Douyin platform to WeChat platform and eventually become customers of our store.



Figure 2. Douyin-WeChat Network Marketing Model

Source: Composed by the author

Douyin also has platform rules. When looking for potential customers, for example, one cannot follow more than 152 accounts per day by one Douyin account, and can follow 38 accounts in each time. There are also differences in the way and efficiency of getting attentions from potential customers. There are basically three channels to reach potential customers: people who are preparing to buy Amber Jewellery from other sellers in the live stream, people who wrote comments on works of peer Douyin accounts, and people in the follower lists of other sellers' accounts (only when there are no restrictions on the follower list). The results of these three ways to find potential customers are the same. In the end, if the potential customer pays attention to one's own account in turn, then this person becomes a Douyin follower. It means this Douyin user is already paying attention to the work published in one's account every day and can see the products. Through a large number of work experiments, the author found that out in 152 target potential customers who are followed each day, 30 to 40 of them become Douyin account followers on the shop Douyin account. Of those 35 to 40 Douvin followers, 10 to 15 will become WeChat friends, and of those 10 to 15 WeChat friends, 3 to 5 will become the final customers.³ The statistic is shown in Figure 3 below.

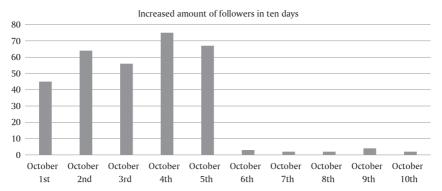


Figure 3. Comparison of Douyin followers' variation under different operations Source: creator.douvin.com

From October 1 to October 10, 2021, the author created an experiment. During the five days from 1st to 5th, the author actively followed 152 potential target customers on Douyin platform every day, and 307 people became his Douyin followers in these five days. However, from October 6th to October

³ The statistical data are based on the author's work records from January to September 2021.

10th, the author stopped looking for potential target customers. During these five days, the company account only gained 13 followers. During these ten days, the company's Douyin account has not made any changes (no new videos, no new photos, no new product description). Therefore, it can be proved that the company's Douyin account actively pays attention to potential customers to attract their attention is a necessary way to expand the number of potential customers.

Innovative marketing of Georgs Romulis / Amber with Soul Baltic amber jewellery based on the Douyin-WeChat Network Marketing Model

Because amber began forming about 45 million years ago, the original geological conditions for the formation of ambers no longer exists, which is why all natural amber and its elements are such a rarity, and fine ambers even more scarce. Furthermore, ambers are considered non-regenerative resources, with each spent piece, it is one piece less in the world. The prices of amber rise annually, not only making them a precious stone with prolonged collection value, but one of long-time monetary value as well. Its rising value has made it a forty plus million years old treasure and deemed as the northern gold and sun, a historical gem. So Baltic amber jewelleries could be sold in different ways.

Transmit the Baltic amber primitive culture as a marketing tool

Amber mainly consists of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen, with a trace of sulphur. It is fossilized tree resin (not sap), which has been appreciated for its colour and natural beauty since Neolithic times, commonly known as resin or carbon fossils. Baltic amber is, as the name suggests, a type of amber. Contrary to popular belief, amber is not a rock or gemstone. Amber is actually fossilized tree resin and can be found in many regions throughout the world. Baltic amber is specifically amber from the area near the Baltic Sea, including areas in Poland, Lithuania, Germany, and Latvia, just to name a few.

It has travelled the world for three thousand years, as even the Ancient Greeks had a name for it – the "substance of the sun". People have always loved it – no one cared that it is not a gem. The Romans were an example, regarding amber as valuable as gold. The historic Amber trade route connected the Baltics to Rome. Latvians put it in their brooches, beads, textiles and song lyrics. They do occasionally call the Baltic Sea the Amber Sea. And they do not hesitate to name their brands or even children after it, either. Dzintars or Dzintra (meaning amber) are among the few given names

of Latvian origin. Amber is a pine tree resin fossilized through the ages. Vast pine forests have closed in on the half a thousand kilometres long Latvian sandy seaside. Amber fragments are still washed up along the Baltic Sea coast. The shiny specimens we see today have been around for 40 million years. Some amber contains plant and insect inclusions, such as ferns, frogs or dragonflies stuck in the pine resin back then. The organic material comes in a variety of shades which characterize Latvia. Some amber is as yellow as a field of grain, a bouquet of flowers or a spread of butter. Another is the caramel colour of bees and honey. At last, there is amber the red of seaside sunset or the rustic brown of homebrew beer. One may see amber artefacts at the Latvian Nature Museum, the Latvian History Museum and the Latvian Institute of History (in Rīga), and the Liepāja Museum of Art and History. One may buy a wide variety of amber souvenirs, most notably in the Old Town of Rīga.

Communicate the medicinal benefits of Baltic amber to Chinese consumers

Since ancient times, amber pendants, buttons and beads have been made, as well as more complex items. Amber has been widely used to make religious artefacts. Latvian scientists and entrepreneurs have thought of innovative application elsewhere. As an organic material, it absorbs the body heat and is easy to work with. Equally ancient is the use of amber for medicinal purposes. The Baltic amber's unique healing properties may be connected with its content of succinic acid, which is an excellent bio stimulant. Medicinal amber filaments and fashion items such as shawls made of amber textiles are just a few of the unique new applications for the "substance of the sun". Besides, amber is applied as a strategic material on nuclear submarines and in the engines of spacecraft. By-products include amber oil and amber varnish. These are used to make high quality paints and varnishes. Amber varnish is essential for restoring the gilded roofs of architectural monuments. The optical properties of amber have been utilised ever since the Middle Ages, Spectacles were made from amber, and at the present day, several manufacturers of optical equipment use amber to improve the quality of lenses. Amber, particularly pressed amber or amberoid, is used as an insulator in electrical equipment. Such amber cores were also used in the equipment that measured radiation levels after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. These facts just add up to the importance Latvians have always attributed to amber.4

⁴ https://www.latvia.eu/priroda/amber

Proposal of Scientific Purchasing of Natural Baltic Amber to Chinese Consumers

Georgs Romulis /Amber with Soul is an European Baltic amber brand in the world that can be achieved with three guarantees to sell their Baltic amber jewelleries. Each piece of amber jewellery strictly follows the concept of scientific truth to ensure that each circulation process of amber purchasing is highly transparent, so that consumers will not doubt about product quality and authenticity. And each Baltic amber fans can enjoy the pleasure of purchasing Baltic amber at home by the mobile phone. In the three guarantees, the author believe Chinese consumers will have a clear mind to get the concept of scientific purchasing of natural Baltic amber.

(1) Quality guarantee

Authoritative scientific inspection certificate can prove each of the products is genuine natural Baltic amber. VSIA Latvian Proof Bureau offers certification of amber and its products. The Bureau uses state-of-the-art testing methods for certification using FTIR spectrometry.⁵ The scientific test report also can be scanned and sent to any foreign affairs departments in capital cities of China, as well as Latvian embassy in China to get the legalisation issued by the notarised central government certification. And each amber jewellery bought from the shop to any country and region of the world the legal jewellery inspection institutions can also give the inspected result to prove if it is real natural Baltic amber. If consumers find that any of the products or certificates is fake, one will receive a full refund.

(2) Brand guarantee

Each piece of amber jewellery from the brand shop is full of purchasing pictures, which fully proves that each amber jewellery is bought from top brand shop in Baltic country. The material of each hand made amber jewellery is made from the raw Baltic amber stone in the Baltic Sea, and the professional jewellery designer is Latvian famous Baltic amber master Georgs Romulis. The company even asks the designer to hold the amber items to take a photo to show the customer who bought this item. Based on these photos, customers can see the amber jewellery designer at the very beginning, which can increase the added value of each amber jewellery attached by this European brand.

(3) Channels guarantee

The purchasing process is transparent in the whole process. Each amber jewellery is purchased in Latvia, a Baltic country, and directly posted to

⁵ www.prove.lv

China. The shop assistant also takes photos of each amber jewellery in the shop, packs in nice boxes and posts to each customer in China. There are complete pictures of shop purchasing and post shipping, as well as videos. After the product is posted, the tracking number is existing, so the customers can check the original posting place and path of the package at any time and date. In addition, after the purchase of each amber jewellery, the most famous buildings in the old town of Riga, Latvia (all the unique buildings in the world) will be used as the background for photos and videos too. Each unique and famous building in Riga as background in the photos can strictly prove each Baltic amber jewellery is bought in Latvia.

Therefore, as the marketing manager of Georgs Romulis /Amber with Soul Baltic amber shop, he hopes that each consumer who is interested in Baltic amber can be more vigilant, and everyone should be responsible for the authenticity of their personal jewellery. Thus, the scientific method to distinguish the authenticity of Baltic amber is the first step of choosing an ideal Baltic amber jewellery. Figure 4 below is a logical process for Baltic amber jewellery purchasing. This process represents each step that consumers need to go through from understanding Baltic amber to the final purchase. Is a scientific and perfect purchase process.

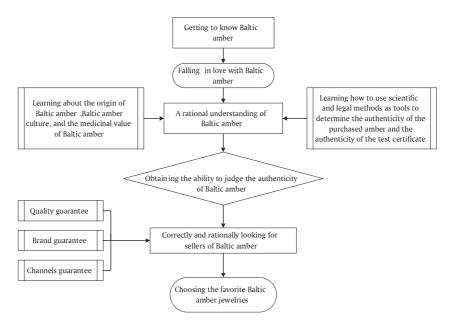


Figure 4. The procedures of scientific purchase of Baltic Amber

Source: Created by the author

In the marketing innovation design, customers who bought the amber jewelleries are asked to be more personalised by saying the customer's name and wishing the customer good luck from the shop assistant in the video. The personalised wish also can be made according to customers' own requirements. By these short videos customers can make sure that each Baltic amber jewellery from the brand is 100 % from the original place of Baltic culture. They also can feel Baltic amber will spread positive energy to themselves through this purchasing. Some customers buy the products as birthday gifts. The shop assistants also wish happy birthday to them in Chinese in the short video. So this video will spread a good wish to the customer from Latvia.

Innovative Marketing Volume Change of Georgs Romulis /Amber with Soul after Applying the Douyin-WeChat Network Marketing Model

As the marketing manager of Georgs Romulis /Amber with Soul Baltic amber jewellery brand, the author calculated the amount of sold amber jewellery items as shown in the Figure 5 below.



Figure 5. The marketing changes after the application of Douyin-WeChat Network Marketing Model

Source: Created by the author

By the data, it is obvious to see that after the application of this model, the sales volume of the store (only the transaction volume of customers obtained through the model) increases in each month, from 3 items in October 2020 to 65 items in August 2021. The proportion of sales through model application in total sales is also increasing, from 23 % in October 2020 to 65 % in August 2021. It can be seen that the original amounts of previous customers are not enough to support the rapid growth of

the store achievement, and this model can bring rapid growth of marketing achievement. Because of the epidemic, there are almost no tourists in Latvia at present, plus the local people basically do not buy amber. Therefore, this sales model has become the main way of sales in the store.

Conclusions

This article only takes Georgs Romulis /Amber with Soul Baltic amber jewellery brand as the research subject and observe the change of marketing performance after using Douyin-WeChat Network Marketing Model. In fact, this method is also suitable for other Baltic amber brand online sales. The innovative marketing research based on this model developed by WeChat and Douyin will certainly bring increased marketing achievements to the Baltic Amber industry under the epidemic time. Since this innovative marketing method has produced a certain effect, the author believes that cross-border Baltic amber jewellery marketing applied by this way will be an effective method to be adopted.

- (1) The essence of this article is the proposal of Douyin-WeChat Network Marketing Model. This model is based on the characteristics of the Amber jewellery market in China. Therefore, it has the basis of practical operation. To sum up, it is to find potential target customers through Douyin platform, make potential customers become Douyin account followers, and turn followers who are interested in the products of the store into WeChat friends. Finally, some WeChat friends will become customers. The Baltic amber market is so chaotic that fake products can easily confuse consumers. Therefore, the model proposed by the author combines the advantages of Douyin and WeChat platforms, which can not only efficiently find target customers, but also effectively communicate scientific purchasing concepts to customers.
- (2) This model has a strong innovation in the marketing of Baltic amber jewellery. Many sellers on Douyin platform sell Baltic amber directly through livestreaming and direct selling. But most of these sellers of amber or jewellery exaggerate too much about their products quality and price, so consumers are not able to ask for the proofs of product information given by the sellers. Therefore, their marketing method will largely mislead potential consumers. However, WeChat is used in this model to send scientific buying suggestions to customers, so customers can quickly have a perceptual and rational understanding of Baltic Amber through reading these scientific buying suggestions before buying. After the potential customers from WeChat friends have a rational understanding, the final turnover rate can highly be improved.

- (3) This article is based on a large number of online marketing scientific literature, which can be applied into practical methodology. It is easy to be used in the process of looking for potential customers. There are a lot of commercial promotion activities on Douvin, but these promotion activities are not free and some even cost a big amount of money. Some can help the account get more followers, some can help the work of each video get more likes, and some can help the account get more views. But these commercial promotions are only auxiliary, which only can achieve a certain advertising effect. By these paid commercial promotion activities probably the shop Douyin account will gain lots of followers in a short time, but it doesn't mean the marketing efficiency will be high enough. Since the marketing managers will never know which followers will eventually become customers, they still have to spend the same amount of time communicating and spreading the idea of scientific buying to each potential customer. Therefore, the model proposed by the author can effectively obtain the final customers with a high probability through the Douvin and WeChat platforms.
- (4) This model also has many limitations. For example, Douvin must be downloaded by the Chinese version, and only the Chinese version of Douyin (Not Tiktok) can openly reach the potential target customers of Baltic Amber in the Chinese market. Also the WeChat payment function needs to be bound to Chinese bank accounts, and the payment can only be done in Chinese RMB. In addition, when looking for potential target customers, the account user should prefer look for target consumers from the public list of other Baltic amber sellers. If there will be no public list of target potential customers, then the Douyin account user can look for potential customers in the comments from other amber sellers. However, due to the huge potential of the Chinese market and the increasing number of Douyin users year by year, many people who do not like Baltic Amber can also become potential customers. Therefore, using this model into the marketing work only takes a few minutes per day for Douvin account users to get the basis of customers. So in the marketing of amber jewellery in the store, the method provided by this model is innovative, practical and efficient.

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