

Research on the Current Development Status and Marketing Strategies of Tianjin's Local Brand Haihe Milk Industry

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Abstract: Tianjin Haihe Milk, a 69-year-old Chinese time-honored brand, is a microcosm of the development of Tianjin's dairy industry and an important carrier of the city's memory. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the current development status of Haihe Milk, explore the opportunities and challenges it faces, and propose targeted marketing strategies. Based on brand marketing theory, this paper systematically examines the development status and transformation path of this local dairy brand through a combination of literature research and case analysis. The research shows that relying on the full industrial chain layout of Tianjin Food Group, Haihe Milk has established a complete industrial system covering breeding and research and development, pasture management, production and processing, and cold chain logistics. In 2023, its designed daily processing capacity reached 500 tons, and its products covered more than 20 provinces and cities across the country, maintaining a 35.4% market share in the local Tianjin market. However, under the backdrop of consumption upgrade and the digital wave, the brand is confronted with development bottlenecks such as a slow nationalization process, homogenization of product innovation, and lagging digital transformation. In response to these challenges, the study proposes a "three-dimensional drive" transformation and upgrading strategy. First, deepen the digital marketing system by building a consumer data platform to achieve precise marketing; second, strengthen the value of regional cultural IP, develop a "Tianjin flavor" product series matrix and cultural experience space; third, optimize the channel combination of "community + campus + e-commerce", and improve the construction of the cold chain logistics network in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. The implementation of these strategies will effectively enhance the brand's competitiveness, provide practical references for the high-quality development of regional dairy time-honored brands, and also inject industrial momentum into Tianjin's construction of an international consumption center city.

Keywords: Haihe Milk; Tianjin dairy industry; Time-honored brand; Digital transformation; Marketing strategy

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1. Introduction

Tianjin Haihe Milk, as a Chinese time-honored brand with a 69-year history, is not only a microcosm of

the development of Tianjin's dairy industry but also an important carrier of the city's collective memory. Since its establishment in 1957, Haihe Milk has witnessed the entire process of Tianjin's dairy industry transitioning from a planned economy to a market economy, and its development history reflects the changes in China's dairy industry ^[2]. Against the dual backdrop of consumption upgrading and digital transformation, regional dairy brands face unprecedented development opportunities as well as severe market challenges. Currently, China's dairy industry presents a clear competitive pattern of 'two leading and many strong.' According to data released by the China Dairy Industry Association in 2024, the two leading enterprises, Yili and Mengniu, have a combined market share of 48.6%, while the average market penetration rate of regional dairy companies is only 7.2%. At the same time, with the continued deepening of the consumption upgrading trend, the chilled milk market shows strong growth potential. This study aims to provide theoretical reference and practical pathways for the transformation and upgrading of time-honored dairy enterprises. The research is not only of significant academic value but also has positive practical significance for realizing the national strategy of 'dairy industry revitalization.' Against the backdrop of building Tianjin into an international consumption center city, the transformation and development of Haihe Milk will provide valuable reference for the development of urban characteristic industries.

2. Analysis of the current development status of Haihe Milk industry

2.1. Industrial foundation and scale

2.1.1. Full industry chain layout

Through years of development, Haihe Milk has established a complete full-industry chain system in the dairy sector. According to the 2023 annual report of Tianjin Food Group, its industrial chain layout includes: in the upstream breeding segment, there are 14 modern farms with a herd of 32,000 dairy cows, producing 150,000 tons of fresh milk annually ^[3]. Among them, the modern agricultural and animal husbandry demonstration park located in Leling, Shandong, invested 1.2 billion yuan, with a designed herd scale of 13,000 cows, and upon reaching full production, it can produce 220 tons of fresh milk per day. Moving to the midstream processing segment, the new factory in Beichen District has a total investment of 600 million yuan, introduces internationally advanced processing equipment, and has a daily fresh milk processing capacity of 500 tons, capable of producing more than 100 varieties across five major categories (Haihe Dairy official website, 2023). The production line is fully automated, with key processes achieving an automation rate of over 95%. Finally, in the downstream sales segment, a cold chain distribution network covering the entire Tianjin area has been established, with 50 dedicated refrigerated vehicles, all equipped with GPS tracking systems. In the Tianjin market, 3,500 terminal sales outlets have been established, including over 200 community specialty stores.

2.2. Analysis of current production and business operations

From the perspective of production and business data, Haihe Dairy shows a stable development trend. In 2023, the company produced 158,000 tons of dairy products, an increase of 8.3% compared with the previous year; it achieved sales revenue of 1.87 billion yuan, a year-on-year growth of 12.5% ^[4]. In terms of product structure, low-temperature milk products accounted for 65%, significantly higher than the industry average, demonstrating the company's competitive advantage in high-end products such as pasteurized milk ^[5]. The market distribution shows a clear regional concentration, with sales in the local Tianjin market accounting

for as much as 85.3%, the surrounding Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei area accounting for 12.5%, and other regions only 2.2%. In terms of product innovation, the company has noticeably accelerated the pace of new product development in recent years, launching four locally characteristic innovative flavors of boiled milk: Rose Angelica Pomegranate, Polygonatum Black Goji Mulberry, Phyllanthus Lotus Leaf Poria, and Lily Loquat Snow Pear. These products have sparked widespread discussion and attention on social media.

2.3. Quality control and technological innovation

Haihe Dairy has established a strict quality control system and a technological innovation mechanism. The company has invested 45 million yuan in research and development, accounting for 2.4% of its revenue, with a focus on the development of functional dairy products, and has currently obtained five national invention patents. In terms of quality traceability, the company has established a full traceability system from farm to table, with 28 raw milk testing indicators, exceeding the 18 indicators required by national standards ^[6]. In the cold chain logistics process, the company strictly adheres to the “2-hour” delivery time limit, maintaining a low-temperature environment of 0–4°C throughout, and is equipped with electronic temperature monitoring devices to ensure product freshness. These technological innovations and quality control measures provide strong guarantees for the quality of the company’s products, maintaining a 100% qualification rate in national market supervision spot checks for five consecutive years.

2.4. Progress in digital transformation

In terms of digital transformation, Haihe Dairy has made significant progress. The smart farm construction project has started to yield results, with advanced equipment such as smart collars and automated milking robots deployed in the demonstration farms. The accuracy rate of estrus detection in dairy cows has reached 95%, and milk yield per cow has increased by 8%. The digital transformation of marketing has accelerated, with a membership management system established, accumulating 850,000 registered members; the proportion of online channel sales increased from 5% in 2018 to 18% in 2023, making e-commerce a new growth driver. The digital transformation of the supply chain continues to advance, applying blockchain technology to achieve full visibility throughout logistics, reducing order response time to 2 hours, and increasing inventory turnover by 25%, significantly enhancing operational efficiency ^[7].

2.5. Brand influence assessment

Haihe Milk has a significant brand advantage in the Tianjin market. The latest consumer survey shows that brand awareness reaches 92%, and the preference rate is 65%, both ranking first among local brands. According to evaluations by professional institutions, the brand value amounts to 2.53 billion yuan, ranking seventh among regional dairy brands nationwide. Notably, it has consistently ranked among the top three in the selection of ‘the most representative brands of Tianjin’ for five consecutive years, becoming an important part of Tianjin’s urban culture. This profound brand accumulation and cultural recognition provide the enterprise with a unique competitive advantage.

3. SWOT analysis

As a local dairy brand in Tianjin, Haihe Milk is facing a complex and ever-changing development situation in the current market environment.

3.1. Economic environment

At the economic environment level, the trend of consumption upgrading brings significant development opportunities for Haihe Milk. With the continuous rise in residents' income levels and the ongoing optimization of consumption structure, consumer demand for high-quality and differentiated dairy products is growing rapidly. This precisely aligns with the market positioning and development direction of Haihe Milk's pasteurized fresh milk product line. However, the cost pressures brought about by the continuous rise in feed prices cannot be ignored and need to be effectively addressed through large-scale farming and refined management^[8]. As a municipality, Tianjin's high urbanization rate and strong resident consumption capacity provide favorable conditions for Haihe Milk to deeply cultivate the regional market and build a high-end brand image. Enterprises can fully leverage Tianjin's per capita disposable income, which is higher than the national average, and focus on developing high-quality dairy products that meet the demands of consumption upgrading, thereby increasing product added value and market competitiveness. At the same time, the continuous improvement of cold chain logistics infrastructure also creates favorable conditions for the market expansion of chilled dairy products.

3.2. Social environment

The generational turnover of consumer groups has posed new development requirements for Haihe Milk. As Generation Z gradually becomes the main force of consumption, their consumption habits—emphasizing personalization, social attributes, and experiential engagement—differ significantly from those of traditional consumers. Haihe Milk has already catered to the preferences of young consumers by launching innovative products with regional characteristics, such as milk flavored like Jianbing Guozi, and it will need to continue monitoring changes in consumer trends to maintain product innovation vitality in the future^[9]. In the post-pandemic era, the general rise in consumers' health awareness has made functional products, such as those high in calcium, low in fat, and rich in probiotics, more popular, which provides a clear direction for corporate product development. Meanwhile, the strong emotional recognition of local brands among Tianjin consumers represents a unique competitive advantage for Haihe Milk. 'Haihe,' as a symbol of Tianjin's mother river, carries profound cultural significance and emotional value, which can further strengthen this regional emotional connection and translate the brand's cultural value into market competitiveness. The increasing consumer demand for product transparency and traceability information also compels enterprises to improve their quality traceability systems continuously.

3.3. Technological environment

The rapid development of the technological environment brings both challenges and significant opportunities. Digital transformation is profoundly changing the production and marketing models of the dairy industry, and the widespread application of new-generation information technologies such as 5G, the Internet of Things, and big data creates conditions for Haihe Milk to improve operational efficiency. The construction of smart farms and the introduction of intelligent manufacturing systems can significantly enhance production efficiency and product quality stability. The continuous advancement of cold chain technology allows low-temperature dairy products to overcome geographical constraints and expand into broader markets. In particular, against the backdrop of continuously improving cold chain infrastructure in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, it provides reliable support for product distribution. The innovative development of marketing technologies requires companies to actively adapt to new marketing methods such as live-stream

e-commerce and social marketing, establishing deeper connections with young consumers through more vivid and interactive formats. These technological changes demand that Haihe Milk increase investment in innovation, seize development opportunities, and transform technological innovation into the company's core competitiveness. At the same time, the enhancement of R&D capabilities will help the company develop more innovative products that align with consumer trends and meet the diversified needs of the market.

3.4. Political environment

From the perspective of the political environment, the continuous introduction of policies by the state to support the development of the dairy industry has created favorable conditions for enterprises. In recent years, policy documents such as the "14th Five-Year Plan for Enhancing Competitiveness in the Dairy Industry" have guided the development of the dairy sector. In particular, support policies for time-honored brands have offered policy guarantees for regional brands like Haihe Milk. The revitalization implementation plan for time-honored brands issued by Tianjin provides substantial support in terms of financial subsidies and tax incentives. These policy benefits play a significant role in promoting enterprise development. At the same time, the increasingly stringent food safety regulatory environment has actually established competitive barriers for Haihe Milk, which possesses advantages across the entire industry chain, and its comprehensive traceability system has become an important competitive edge. The deepening advancement of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei coordinated development strategy presents a historic opportunity for enterprises to break regional limitations. The accelerated market integration among the three regions helps Haihe Milk expand its market from Tianjin to the entire Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei area, achieving a broader market layout ^[10].

4. Strategic development countermeasures for Haihe Milk

4.1. Deepening the Construction of the Digital Marketing System

In the era of the digital economy, Haihe Milk needs to build a more comprehensive digital marketing system. First, it should establish a unified consumer data platform, integrating consumption data from both online and offline touchpoints to form a complete user profile. This platform should not only collect basic purchase data but also focus on consumer behavior patterns and preference changes, using data analysis to uncover potential demands. Reference can be made to the digitalization practices of leading companies such as Mengniu, constructing a user profile system with multi-dimensional labels to lay the foundation for precision marketing. The construction of an intelligent recommendation system is a key part of digital marketing. Based on user profiles and historical behavior data, the system can recommend the most suitable product combinations for different consumers. Such personalized recommendations can not only enhance user experience but also significantly increase conversion rates. At the same time, attention should be paid to social media operations, developing interactive social viral tools that encourage voluntary sharing by users through mechanisms such as reward points for sharing and group buying. Successful experiences in social marketing by Bright Dairy can be used as a reference to build an active online user community.

Live-stream e-commerce has already become an important channel for dairy product sales. Haihe Milk needs to cultivate a professional live-streaming team and create differentiated live content. Unlike simple product displays, themed live broadcasts such as "Ranch Exploration" and "Production Process Revelation" can enhance brand transparency. It is also necessary to emphasize real-time interaction with consumers, answering product questions and collecting feedback and suggestions. Live streaming can not only promote

sales but also serve as a crucial way for the brand to establish emotional connections with consumers. At the same time, the application of VR/AR technology will bring new possibilities for brand experiences. Through virtual reality technology, consumers can visit the Haihe ranch remotely and understand the entire milk production process. This immersive experience can effectively increase brand trust, especially suitable for conveying brand value to young consumers. AR-based interactive games can also be developed, allowing consumers to deepen their brand awareness through engaging experiences.

4.2. Strengthening the development of regional cultural IP value

As a local Tianjin brand, Haihe Milk should fully explore the value of regional culture and create a unique cultural IP. In terms of product development, a three-tier system can be established: the basic tier retains existing classic products, the upgraded tier incorporates more cultural elements, and the premium tier can collaborate with art institutions to launch limited-edition products. Special attention should be given to developing product series with distinctive Tianjin characteristics, such as innovative products integrating elements of comic dialogue (crosstalk) and traditional snack flavors, thereby forming differentiated competitive advantages.

The creation of cultural experience spaces is an important medium for connecting the brand with consumers. Brand experience stores can be established in key commercial areas of Tianjin, which not only sell products but also serve as windows to showcase Tianjin's food culture. Experience stores can include freshly prepared beverage areas, cultural exhibition areas, and interactive experience zones, allowing consumers to experience the brand's charm fully. Regularly organizing themed events and workshops can attract consumers of different age groups and enhance brand loyalty.

Cultural marketing activities should be developed as an annual IP. For example, a series of events like the "Haihe Tianjin Flavor Cultural Festival" can be planned and co-hosted with local cultural institutions. Event content may include traditional snack innovation competitions, city memory photo exhibitions, and more, which both demonstrate the brand's cultural heritage and promote deeper interaction with consumers. At the same time, social media dissemination must be emphasized by launching topic-driven online activities and inviting local celebrities to participate, thereby expanding brand influence.

Deep exploration of cultural content is equally important. Cooperation with universities and research institutions can be pursued to compile brand history books and trace the development of Tianjin's dairy industry. This content not only serves as brand endorsement but also enhances consumer emotional identification through narrative communication. Additionally, it is essential to integrate cultural elements into product packaging design, making each product a carrier for promoting Tianjin culture.

4.3. Optimizing the omnichannel network layout

Community channels have traditionally been Haibo Milk's stronghold and need further deep cultivation. Implement the "Thousand Stores Plan" to build brand experience stores in key communities, using a "front store, back warehouse" model to ensure product freshness while improving service response speed. Special attention should be paid to training community leaders, developing a group of loyal "mom leaders," and building a stable community sales network through social group operations. Experience from leading community retail companies can be referenced to optimize last-mile delivery services.

Campus channels hold significant strategic importance. Actively promote the "Nutrition Partner" project and cooperate with education departments to place smart milk vending machines in more schools.

Develop exclusive nutritional products for students and conduct educational activities on milk consumption to cultivate brand loyalty among young consumers. Establish a campus promotion system, recruit student ambassadors, and communicate brand value in ways young people enjoy. Campus channels are not just sales territories but also important platforms for nurturing future consumers.

E-commerce channels need differentiated strategies. Develop exclusive products and marketing plans according to the characteristics of different e-commerce platforms. Highlight brand strength and product quality on comprehensive platforms like Tmall and JD.com, while focusing on scenario-based marketing and word-of-mouth on content platforms like Douyin and Xiaohongshu. Pay special attention to regional e-commerce growth, establishing efficient warehousing and delivery networks in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei area to ensure product freshness and delivery speed. E-commerce operations should focus on content innovation, vividly showcasing product features through short videos and live streams.

Cold chain logistics networks are the cornerstone of supporting an omnichannel strategy. Continue to optimize the cold chain layout in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei area, build regional distribution centers, and improve logistics efficiency. Introduce intelligent management systems for precise warehouse and delivery management. Consider forming cold chain alliances with industry peers to share logistics resources and reduce operating costs. Also, emphasize the development of green logistics by using new energy delivery vehicles, which aligns with environmental requirements and enhances brand image.

4.4. Strengthening product innovation and brand management

Product innovation is the core driving force for the sustainable development of a brand. Haihe Milk needs to establish a systematic innovation mechanism and regularly introduce new products that meet market demands. Innovation directions can include: the development of functional products catering to the health needs of different groups; flavor innovation, integrating local characteristics and popular trends; and packaging innovation to enhance convenience and visual appeal. It is essential to establish a rapid market feedback mechanism to adjust product strategies promptly.

The quality control system needs continuous improvement. Full industry chain quality control, from farm to table, is Haihe Milk's core advantage and should be further strengthened. This includes establishing stricter raw milk acceptance standards, improving key control points in the production process, and upgrading testing equipment and methods. At the same time, supply chain management should be reinforced, implementing stringent access and evaluation criteria for raw material and auxiliary suppliers. Quality control should not only meet national standards but also benchmark against internationally advanced levels.

Consumer communication is an important component of quality building. Methods such as transparent factories and live broadcasts of the production process allow consumers to witness product quality firsthand. A comprehensive customer service system should be established to respond promptly to consumer concerns. Regular consumer satisfaction surveys should be conducted to collect suggestions for improvement. Building a reputation for quality requires long-term accumulation and continuous efforts to earn consumer trust.

4.5. Improving talent development and organizational construction

Talent is the key support for implementing development strategies. Haihe Milk needs to strengthen the introduction and cultivation of professionals in areas such as digitalization and new retail. A systematic talent training system should be established to enhance the professional capabilities of the existing team. Particular attention should be paid to the cultivation of versatile talents; those who understand the business and master

new technologies will become the core assets of the company. Collaboration between schools and enterprises can be carried out to train professionals in a targeted manner.

The organizational structure needs to be adjusted to align with the development strategy. A more flattened and agile organizational structure should be established to improve decision-making and execution efficiency. New organizational units such as dedicated digital marketing departments and innovation research centers can be set up to focus on building key capabilities. At the same time, cross-departmental collaboration should be strengthened, breaking traditional functional barriers to form a team culture of coordinated operations.

The incentive mechanism needs continuous innovation. In addition to traditional salary incentives, diversified incentive methods such as equity incentives and project co-investment can be attempted. Especially for innovative projects and strategic businesses, differentiated assessment mechanisms should be established. Effective incentives can stimulate team vitality and creativity, promoting the achievement of strategic goals.

Corporate culture is an important force for uniting the team. Haihe Milk's historical heritage should be inherited while injecting new elements of innovation and openness. Through cultural construction, values can be unified, and employees' sense of belonging and mission can be enhanced. An excellent corporate culture can not only retain talent but also attract outstanding talents to join.

5. Conclusion

As a local dairy brand in Tianjin, Haihe Milk has broad prospects for future development. Under the national policy supporting the revitalization of time-honored brands, the company can fully leverage its profound historical accumulation and cultural heritage, extending its brand influence from Tianjin to the national market. With the continued deepening of consumption upgrading trends, Haihe Milk can rely on its innovative capabilities to continuously expand in areas such as functional dairy products and cultural creative dairy products, meeting the growing and diversified demands of consumers.

Digital transformation will become an important driving force for the company's development. Through the construction of smart ranches and the upgrading of intelligent manufacturing systems, Haihe Milk is expected to achieve intelligent transformation across the entire industry chain, improving product quality and production efficiency. At the same time, the company can utilize emerging channels such as new retail and social e-commerce to establish closer connections with young consumers. With the in-depth advancement of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei coordinated development strategy, Haihe Milk can also fully leverage its geographical advantages to expand into surrounding markets and build a more influential regional brand. In the future, Haihe Milk is expected to enhance its commercial value while continuously inheriting Tianjin culture.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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