

Branding Analysis of UNICEF -- How can UNICEF Enhance Its Public Reputation through Strategic Branding in China?

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Abstract: UNICEF is one of the world's leading NGOs that specially focus on relieving the challenges faced by Children. While it has been successfully operated for decades, it now has encountered multiple challenges such as low public trust and insufficient market exposure, which leads to decreased amount of donation received annually, especially in developing countries like China. Previous studies also found that NGOs also need to conduct marketing promotion and branding practices in order to attract donations worldwide so that they can achieve their organizational missions and objectives. Therefore, this study, concentrating on UNICEF, analyses its current situation, including competition and general environmental trends. An overall SWOT analysis for UNICEF has also been performed, followed by a reflection of challenges in the Chinese context. The results suggest that UNICEF should make more innovative collaborations with other third-party organizations to enhance its market power. This study would practically shed light on the branding and marketing of similar NGO and charity organizations.

1. Introduction

UNICEF is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to promoting children's rights. It is a United Nations agency that is in charge of providing humanitarian and developmental assistance to children all over the world. On December 11, 1946, UNICEF was formally established to aid children who had been injured during World War II [1]. UNICEF's efforts include delivering vaccines and disease prevention, treating HIV-positive children and mothers, increasing childhood and maternal nutrition, improving sanitation, supporting education, and giving disaster assistance [2].

Today, it has become one of the most recognizable and influential social welfare organizations in the world that addresses the needs of women and children in 192 countries and territories, among which many are still developing. UNICEF's mission is to "advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential," which they have devoted lots of efforts fulfilling – as can be seen through their accomplishment of reaching 307 million children under five years old with nutritious implements and food in 2019. UNICEF has 124 offices worldwide, promoting children's rights and supporting children around the world, including in China [3].

UNICEF has been involved in supporting the children in China since 1946 when the United Nations established UNICEF to help out children victimized by post-war Europe and China. Since then, UNICEF has been advocating for child-protection laws, training child protection professionals, strengthening China's education system to provide education for the excluded, vulnerable children - including those who have disabilities and those who are not treated equally due to gender norms [4].

UNICEF has long been the UN's most renowned and successful NGO. In the year 2018, UNICEF aided in the birth of 27 million newborns, gave pentavalent immunizations to an estimated 65.5 million children, educated 12 million children, treated four million children with severe acute

malnutrition, and reacted to 285 humanitarian situations in 90 countries [1]. The Nobel Peace Prize in 1965, the Indira Gandhi Prize in 1989, and the Princess of Asturias Award in 2006 have all been given to UNICEF for their efforts [5]. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF, in collaboration with the World Health Organization and other organizations, released guidelines on how to raise healthy children [1].

2. Problem statement

While UNICEF has been considered successful in the past decade, it is not without challenges. As an NGO that is funded entirely by contributions from private and public sectors and the commitment of volunteer workers, it heavily depends on countries' donations to function and continue their contribution to society. According to UNICEF's previous annual reports in 2018, 2019, and 2020, China's financial contributions to UNICEF have slightly increased over the years from \$16,603,308 to \$33,463,147 (UNICEF) though is still drastically fewer than the contributions from Canada and US. A possible reason that causes this difference between Chinese and Canada's contributions can potentially be about the countries' economic conditions [6].

In terms of per capita income, China's per capita income is \$17,200 while Canada's per capita income is \$47,500 in 2020 (Data Commons) - significantly higher than China's. Based on this comparison, it can be assumed that the population's income can be a factor that contributes to a country's financial ability to donate to non-profit organizations. However, comparing the charitable contributions made by China, Russia, and Hong Kong to UNICEF -- which are overall similar -- whose per capita income in 2020 is corresponding \$17,200, \$27,500, and \$62,520 (Data Commons), it can be examined that per capita income is not the determining factor that affects a country's contribution to UNICEF, since Hong Kong's per capita income is much higher than Canada's even when Canada's donation is much higher than Hong Kong's [7].

Furthermore, when comparing the national annual GDP of the countries, Canada's GDP of 1.643 trillion USD in 2020 is a lot lower than China's GDP of 14.72 trillion USD (Data Commons), while Canada's contribution to UNICEF is much greater than China's. Also, Russia's GDP lines more closely with Canada's even though their donations to UNICEF are dispersed. Therefore, as can be determined by the comparison above, a country's per capita income nor a country's economic conditions, which reflect the population's financial ability to donate, is not the most significant nor the only factor affecting their contributions to UNICEF.

Aside from economic reasonings, a country's contribution to UNICEF can also be determined by a country's social norms -- their willingness to donate to non-profit organizations -- the amount of support a country received from UNICEF, UNICEF's exposure in a country, UNICEF's competitors in a country, and many more.

For the aforementioned reasons, explaining why different countries would have different amounts of donations, as can be seen from Figure 1, China is still much behind the other countries. Also, the total donation of money, even from Canada, has been decreasing in the past three years. In this case, two major challenges can be concluded for UNICEF: 1) the insufficiency of donations from developing economies like China; 2) the decline of donations from existing major donors from developed countries. To understand the above challenges, the following sections present a general SWOT analysis, together with an empirical survey in China to understand the state-of-the-art faced by UNICEF.

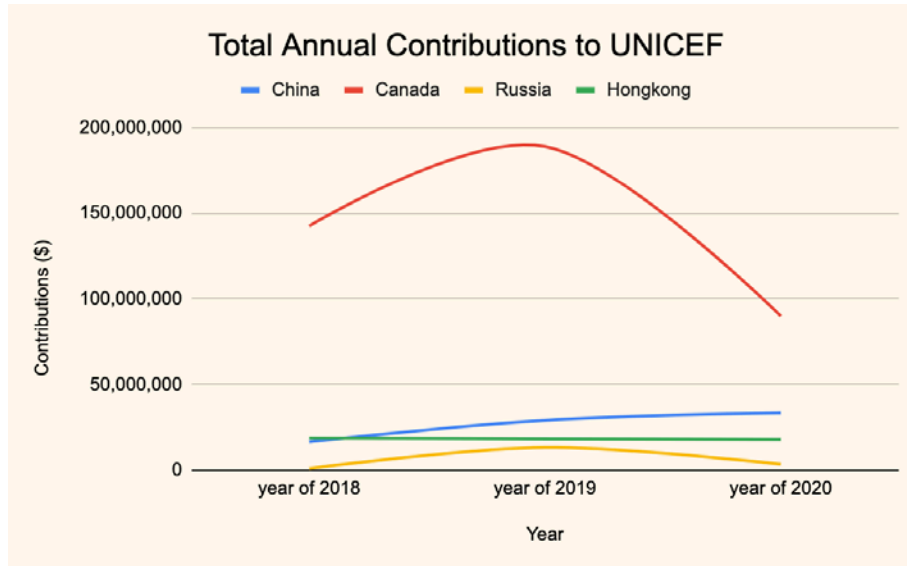


Figure 1. Total annual contributions to UNICEF by country

3. A SWOT SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF UNICEF

To generally appraise the situation faced by UNICEF, a SWOT analysis is performed in this section (Figure 2). Specifically, in terms of the strengths of UNICEF, it is definitely one of the world's largest NGO that has been endorsed by the United Nations. The number of its office is around 124 which are located all over the world. Moreover, it has a very good reputation and mature system that would help more than 3 million children's lives annually. Regarding its financial sources, it receives grants from rich and famous worldwide charity organizations. It also has a strong human resources team that can conduct pertinent activities professionally, together with transparent reports released annually. All of these are its internal advantages that provide the basis for its operation in the past few decades.

As for its weakness, it has quite a stubborn organizational system and highly bureaucrat structure. For example, in the time of COVID-19, merely online payment could be accepted as the donation channel. Also, it does not have a very high innovative capacity, manifested by its failure in launching it is UNICEF APP called Kids Power. As for its marketing campaign, it does not have a very proactive manner. In fact, its promotional campaigns are mostly limited to its own social media website without any collaboration with other external third parties or any other commercial organizations [8]. Last but not least, its internal transparency has also been doubted by third-party donors and the general public before. All of these are considered internal weaknesses that need to be tackled in the future [9].

Then, moving on to its external opportunities, it is believed that the emerging technologies would contribute to its future expansion. For instance, the increasingly advanced social media adoptions, blockchain technologies, and a variety of information-communication technologies would all potentially lead to a better and more sufficient donation process. Meanwhile, the macro-environment is becoming more inclined to be charitable as the world's economy is getting better and better, making more people have the donation capacities and providing a massive basis for donation [10]. Finally, the world leader-USA-has rejoined the UN and world system; therefore, the general political and social system has become more stable to provide a context to develop philanthropic business [11].

Nevertheless, an array of threats can also be detected through our analysis. As can be seen from the world trend, UNICEF has encountered increasing competitors nowadays, including but not limited to other charity organizations internationally and locally [12]. Also, the pandemic and the supply crisis have made the operational costs become higher for the UNICEF, resulting from the increased shipping and transportation costs and so forth [13]. Finally, nowadays, ubiquitous social

media presence led to increasing critiques from the public of UNICEF, magnifying the negative comments online [14]. All these potential external threats would also be imperative to ensure the long-term sustainable development of UNICEF [15].

Overall, the aim of UNICEF is to promote children's rights in the whole world, especially in some developing countries. In China, a few people who were donating to UNICEF had two assumptions. The first one was that most Chinese people did not believe UNICEF since the past year had a fake non-profit charitable organization. The second one is that the visibility of UNICEF was low. Fewer people knew what UNICEF did and how they could help. Since UNICEF did not do so many commercials, which led only a few people to donate or purchase products. To confirm these assumptions, in the next section, a case study based on a survey in China has been demonstrated to investigate what problems are faced by UNICEF so as to put forward suggestions for its ensuing development.

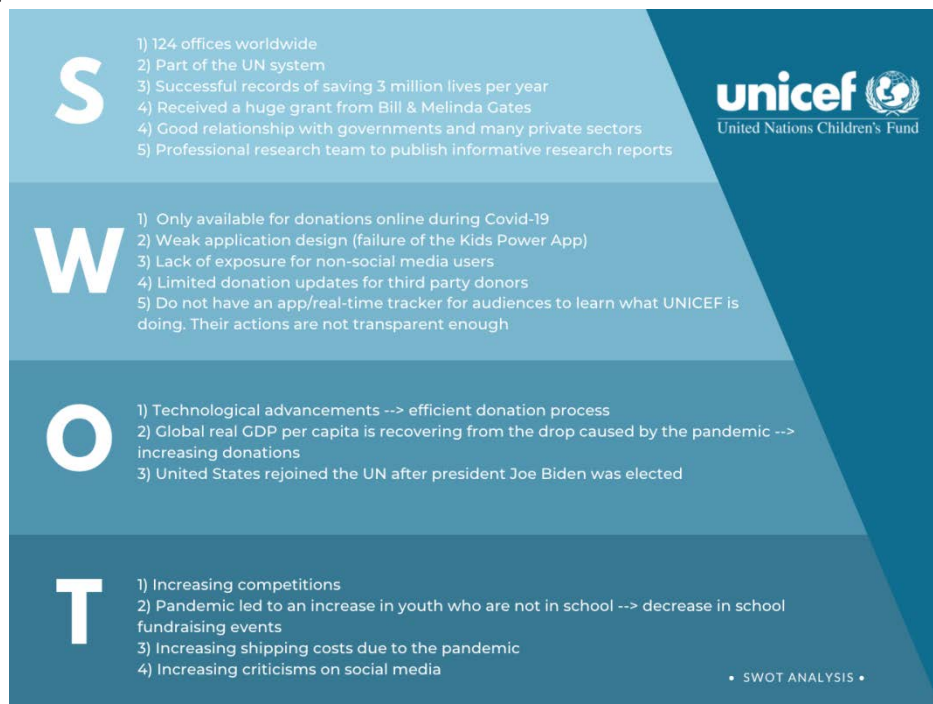


Figure 2. SWOT analysis of UNICEF

4. UNICEF EXPOSURE IN CHINA: a case study

We have conducted a qualitative survey that involves seven questions about Chinese teenagers' impressions and exposure to UNICEF and UNICEF's contributions to the world and China. This survey was mainly structured with multiple choices and open-ended questions and was sent to teenagers aged 16-17 years old in a high school in 2021. Questions in the survey have been listed in Table 1. All the data analyses are anonymously performed by the authors.

The objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of UNICEF among young Chinese students who will potentially become future donors for UNICEF. Their opinions are deemed as important to understand the status quo of UNICEF. The results of the study can also be used to compare existing findings.

Table.1. Survey Questions

No. of Question	Content of questions
Q1	Have you heard about UNICEF? (Available choices: Very familiar, have heard about, not familiar)
Q2	Have you ever made any contributions to UNICEF? For example, donations, volunteers, etc. (Available choices: Yes, no)
Q3	What is your impression of UNICEF? (Responders can choose between the scale of 1-5)
Q4	Through which social media would you like to learn more about UNICEF? (Available choices, public account, Weibo, QQ, Wechat, others)
Q5	Do you think UNICEF has enough exposure in China? (Available choices: Enough exposure, decent exposure, not enough exposure)
Q6	Based on your impressions and understandings of UNICEF, what do you think UNICEF does? (Open-ended question)
Q7	What are some products or methods that would incentivize you to donate? (Open-ended question)

5. Results and discussion of the case study

This section is used to present the results we derived from the above survey to delineate the current situation faced by UNICEF. For Q1, according to our survey, only 27.3 percent of respondents have heard about UNICEF. Twenty-seven percent of people have no idea what UNICEF is or what it can do. Based on this result, it can be argued that UNICEF has a comparatively low reputation among Chinese students. This number also shows the lack of advertising made by UNICEF in China. For those who have heard the name of UNICEF, 54.5 percent of people believe UNICEF is a wonderful organization for children. This number also manifests that UNICEF fails to establish a positive image among Chinese donors. As for the promotional material given by UNICEF, it is found that the quality of those souvenir products could be improved. The results show that 56 percent of respondents did not like those products, for example, old fashion cups, bags, and so on.

Moving on to the open-ended questions, in the research, there were no people who thought UNICEF's exposure was enough in China. Generally, UNICEF's advertisements are not often seen in the social medias — such as Weibo, Douban, Wechat, Zhihu, and TikTok — commonly used by Chinese people. The Chinese government has restricted the Internet so their citizens cannot access some overseas applications, for example, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Although UNICEF has 1.2 million followers on Weibo, the amount of interaction on the account is too small. Unless some popular Chinese celebrities endorse it, there will attract a relatively small amount of attention.

According to the result of Q4, about 90.9 percent of survey participants want to access news about UNICEF from the WeChat public account since it is the most popular channel in which Chinese people chat with friends and get notified of current events. The second platform is Weibo, which has 81.8 percent of people wanting to get more information about UNICEF there. Even though UNICEF had an official Weibo account, the interaction they have with their followers was not sufficient - normally, only 30 people comment on UNICEF's Weibo posts. In order to create more market exposure in China, UNICEF can propose advertisements on WeChat's new video-channel

function, where brands can run commercials. Advertisements propagated through this function experience frequent exposures, thus making them popular brands in China.

Furthermore, based on our research, another weakness that might explain China's low contribution to this NGO is the low quality of its attached souvenirs. Attracting younger donors through popular products is a functioning way to develop their brand loyalty. However, most respondents think the products that UNICEF sells do not attract them or are unpractical. Most of the products do not follow the ongoing trends and the perception of a “nicely designed” toy or bag. They are mostly available in white and blue that, for high school students, can be even less attractive.

As can be found in this research, another potential reason is specifically targeted toward China: the status-quo of philanthropy in China. Chinese philanthropic mindsets were not as well constructed as people in US or Canada. Despite having a huge wealth accumulation, China has only contributed 0.1 percent of its GDP in 2014 towards charities compared to the US who contributed 2 percent to charitable organizations. This may be the result of the practice engrained to society during the first quarter-century of the People's Republic, where wealth was nationalized, and the need for a private charitable organization was perceived as a governmental failure thus was greatly discouraged (China Research Center). Even though this cannot determine China's current or future philanthropy -- since the economic growth and diversification can affect Chinese's charitable spirits in the future -- the behaviours engrained by China's long history of minimum charitable actions might affect the portion of the population who have experienced that history. Therefore, if UNICEF were to receive more attention and donations from China, it would be recommended that they shift their target audience to the younger population who are less likely to be affected by China's historical norms and more aware of the world's conditions with the help from advancing communication technologies – for example, the water shortage in Africa, young war victims in Afghanistan, and even the children under poverty in rural China.

Connecting this analysis with UNICEF's lack of exposure in China, this paper focuses on UNICEF's exposure to Chinese youth and recommends some strategies for UNICEF to create a stronger brand loyalty among these Chinese youth, who are going to be the future donors and leaders of China.

6. Recommendations and conclusion

In conclusion, based on the SWOT analysis we did for UNICEF, we have noticed two major causes explaining why UNICEF has lacked market power in China: one is the insufficiency of the market campaign, and the other is the perception of philanthropy. As a result of these findings, our major suggestions for UNICEF is to enhance its product design and shift their target audiences to the younger Chinese population.



Figure 3. Samples of promotional products

On the survey, respondents mentioned that they would like to get fashionable products, for instance, blind box toys - toys that provoke a sense of mystery, as consumers are not exposed to the style of the product until they open the box consisting it. UNICEF can cooperate with Popmart, a successful design company that produces blind-box toys, to produce a series of these products.

In addition, UNICEF should do more marketing in China. Some influencers can inspire and promote UNICEF's work to people who are attentive of them. About a year ago, there were a lot of posts about UNICEF's donation rings on Little Red Book — a Social Networking and E-commerce application in China — causing a wave of trends on TikTok. All these proactive market campaigns are expected to increase the number of people who may want to participate in the charity programs made by UNICEF.

Lastly, we recommend UNICEF to reconsider their target audience in China, as the philanthropic norms engrained in China's older citizens difficult to alter yet the younger population are more influenced by the globalization of western norms and cultures, which consists the practice of donation and volunteering. They might be more willing to contribute their wealth to promote equal education opportunities and human rights than their parents and ancestors.

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