

Research on the Impact of Differentiated Marketing Strategies on Enterprise Sales Expenses from the Perspective of Management Accounting

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ABSTRACT

Differentiated marketing strategy is the core for manufacturing enterprises to build competitive advantages, and the investment efficiency and control level of selling expenses are key financial indicators to measure the effectiveness of the strategy. From the perspective of management accounting, this paper takes Midea Group and Gree Electric Appliances in the home appliance industry as cases. Using literature research, comparative case analysis and normative research methods, it reveals the impact mechanism of different differentiated strategies on the selling expense ratio from three aspects: cost behavior, budget management, performance evaluation and refines adaptive control schemes. The study finds that the type of differentiated strategy determines the investment structure and driving logic of selling expenses, appropriate management accounting tools can improve control efficiency, and the integration of business and finance is the key to balancing strategic value and financial benefits. The conclusions enrich the cross-research between differentiated strategy and management accounting, providing practical references for manufacturing enterprises to optimize selling expense control.

Keywords: *Differentiated marketing strategy, Selling expense control, Technology-driven strategy, Market-driven strategy, Management accounting, Home appliance industry.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background and Problem Proposal

With increasingly fierce competition and prominent product homogenization in the home appliance industry, differentiated marketing has become a core means for enterprises to seize market share. However, selling expenses continue to expand with weak control, resulting in low expense efficiency and hindering profit growth. Theoretically, existing studies mostly focus on the market effects of differentiation, rarely delving into its intrinsic connection with the selling expense ratio. In particular, there is a lack of analysis on the mechanism of action and control schemes from the perspective of management accounting, failing to fully reflect the supporting role of tools such as budget management and cost behavior analysis. In practice, home appliance companies commonly face challenges like matching selling expense

budgets to strategic positioning, assessing the effectiveness of investment, and enforcing sound control measures, making it imperative to construct a selling expense management system highly compatible with differentiated strategies.

1.2 Research Purpose and Significance

To address the above issues, this study aims to construct an analytical framework for how differentiated strategies affect the selling expense ratio from the perspective of management accounting. Taking Midea and Gree as cases for comparative analysis, it reveals the internal logic and action paths between the two and proposes targeted control strategies. The research not only enriches the cross-research of differentiated strategy and management accounting and expands the relevant theoretical boundaries, but also provides strategy-oriented expense management tools for home appliance and similar manufacturing enterprises, helping them improve the accuracy and

efficiency of expense investment and ultimately achieve the coordination of strategic and financial benefits.

1.3 Research Ideas and Methods

This paper follows the logical thinking of theoretical construction, case comparison and countermeasure proposal. Firstly, it sorts out relevant theories of differentiated strategy, selling expense management and management accounting tools via the literature research method to build an analytical framework. Secondly, it adopts the comparative case analysis method, focusing on Midea Group and Gree Electric Appliances, to conduct in-depth comparison of their selling expense control models and effects from the perspective of management accounting, with a focus on revealing internal mechanisms rather than statistical inference. Finally, based on the case findings, it deduces and proposes universal selling expense control principles and specific paths adapted to different differentiated strategies through the normative research method.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Differentiated Marketing

The theory of differentiated marketing originates from Porter's Competitive Strategy Theory, with subsequent scholars making expansions. Wang Dan (2020) confirmed the positive effect of product technological innovation and channel differentiation on market competitiveness through the case of Gree Air Conditioning, but did not involve the connection between technology-driven strategies and the cost behavior of selling expenses, nor the adaptability of expense control. Wang Haiqing (2016) pointed out for the e-commerce industry that differentiation has shifted from simple price competition to comprehensive competition involving brands, data and services, and big data is the key to precision marketing. However, she ignored the heterogeneous requirements of different strategies for the investment structure of selling expenses.

2.2 Application of Management Accounting Tools

Liu Qianqian (2023) took bus manufacturing enterprises as samples and verified the significant effect of the integration of business and finance (sending marketing financial personnel), closed-

loop budget management and the construction of financial sharing centers on the reduction of selling expenses. From 2021 to 2022, the enterprise's selling expenses decreased by 3.25% and 4.18% year-on-year respectively, but the research did not provide customized control schemes combined with the type of differentiated strategy. Tian Ounan (2022) emphasized in relevant research that enterprises need to jump out of the ineffective trap of price wars through product, brand or promotion differentiation, but lacked a systematic analysis of the adaptation between management accounting tools and strategies.

3. RELATED CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL BASIS

3.1 Related Concepts

3.1.1 Differentiated Marketing Strategy

Differentiated marketing strategy refers to a marketing method by which enterprises attract target customers and build competitive advantages by providing products, services, channels or brand images that are significantly different from competitors. This paper divides it into two categories: technology-driven and market-driven. Technology-driven focuses on product technological innovation and quality upgrading as the core differences. Market-driven focuses on channel coverage, brand communication and promotional activities as the core differences.

3.1.2 Selling Expenses and Selling Expense Ratio

Selling expenses refer to various expenses incurred by enterprises in the process of selling goods and materials and providing labor services, including advertising fees, employee salaries, channel fees, promotional fees, etc. The selling expense ratio is the ratio of selling expenses to operating income, which is a core financial indicator to measure the input efficiency of enterprises' selling expenses. Its value reflects the matching degree between enterprises' marketing input and revenue output.

3.1.3 Management Accounting Tools

Management accounting tools are a method system for enterprises to plan, decide, control and evaluate. This paper focuses on three types of tools closely related to selling expense control. Cost

behavior analysis is used to divide the types of selling expenses. Budget management, including zero-based budget and flexible budget methods, is used for the resource allocation of selling expenses. Performance evaluation is used to measure the input benefits of selling expenses.

3.2 Theoretical Basis

3.2.1 Competitive Strategy Theory

Porter's competitive strategy theory points out that enterprises can build competitive advantages through three strategies: cost leadership, differentiation and focus. Among them, the differentiation strategy forms competitive barriers by meeting customers' personalized needs, and its implementation path and resource input structure directly affect the enterprise's expense control model.

3.2.2 Resource-Based View Theory

The resource-based view holds that enterprises' competitive advantages come from their heterogeneous resources. The core resources of technology-driven enterprises are R&D capabilities and patent technologies, while the core resources of market-driven enterprises are channel networks and brand value. The type of resources determines the direction of enterprises' marketing resource input.

3.2.3 Management Accounting Theory

Cost behavior theory divides costs into fixed costs, variable costs and mixed costs, providing a basis for the structural analysis of selling expenses. Budget management theory emphasizes the consistency between resource allocation and strategic goals, and is a core tool for selling expense control. Performance evaluation theory measures the effectiveness of expense input by constructing an indicator system, providing direction for optimizing control strategies.

4. CASE SELECTION AND COMPANY OVERVIEW

4.1 Case Selection

The home appliance industry has entered a new stage of stock competition. The decline of some categories has reached 50%. Market competition focuses on the competition for stock users and the upgrading of consumer demand. Enterprises in the

industry generally face the contradiction between high selling expenses and benefit improvement. Selling expense control has become a core factor affecting enterprises' profitability, which has distinct research value.

As the two giants in the industry, Midea Group and Gree Electric Appliances have formed distinct differentiated strategic paradigms. Midea takes market demand as the core and builds an expansionary strategy of full-category and wide channels. Gree takes technological innovation as the foundation and adheres to a deep cultivation strategy of high-endization and specialization. Both Midea and Gree belong to the first echelon of the home appliance industry, facing the same downward industry pressure and market environment. Their strategic characteristics are distinct and run through the entire process of enterprise operation, which can effectively isolate the impact of industry commonalities and accurately reveal the internal logical connection between differentiated strategies and the selling expense ratio.

4.2 Gree Electric Appliances

4.2.1 Company Overview

Founded in 1991 and headquartered in Zhuhai, Guangdong, Gree Electric Appliances is a world-leading comprehensive industrial group. Its core businesses cover air conditioning, heating, ventilation, intelligent equipment, chips and other fields. Among them, the revenue of air conditioning business has long maintained around 70%, ranking among the top in the global air conditioning market share. The company has a number of leading technologies, and the number of patent authorizations is among the forefront. It achieved a net profit of 21.46 billion yuan in the first three quarters of 2025.

4.2.2 Differentiated Strategy

R&D investment continues to increase and focuses on core areas. The R&D expense in 2024 reached 6.904 billion yuan, and the R&D expense in the first three quarters of 2025 was 5.622 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 5.03%. Funds are mainly invested in air conditioning core technologies, SiC chips, IGBT and other key components as well as intelligent machine tool fields. A total of 131,921 patents have been applied for, including 72,339 invention patents. At the same

time, it has obtained 28,229 invention patent authorizations, making it the only home appliance enterprise that has entered the top ten in China's invention patent authorization volume for nine consecutive years. The company forms product differentiation advantages through technological innovation.

The company implements an extreme high-quality product strategy and establishes a full-process quality control system. Multiple rounds of inspections are carried out from parts procurement to finished product delivery. The defect rate of air conditioning products is much lower than the industry average, and the high-end brand awareness is strengthened through product reliability. At the same time, relying on the vertical industrial chain layout of air conditioning, chips and machine tools, it realizes the independent control of core components, further improving the technical content and premium capacity of products.

4.2.3 *Current Situation of Management Accounting Application*

Budget preparation adopts the zero-based budgeting method, abandoning the traditional base-adding model. With technology promotion projects and channel maintenance needs as the core basis, it prioritizes investment in the salaries of the professional sales team, technology promotion fees and after-sales service fees. These three types of expenses accounted for over 80% of selling expenses in the first half of 2025. This model ensures that selling expenses are highly aligned with long-term goals such as technology implementation and brand maintenance, avoiding invalid investment.

In cost behavior analysis, selling expenses are divided into discretionary fixed costs and variable costs. The focus is on improving the input efficiency of discretionary fixed costs by optimizing channel efficiency and improving the accuracy of expense use, ensuring a positive cycle between expense input and technical premium. At the same time, the performance evaluation system takes customer satisfaction, brand premium and technology conversion efficiency as core indicators, weakens short-term sales volume assessment, emphasizes the long-term benefits of selling expense input, and builds a long-term assessment mechanism adapted to the technology-driven strategy.

4.3 *Midea Group*

4.3.1 *Company Overview*

Founded in 1968 and headquartered in Shunde, Guangdong, Midea Group is a world-leading technology group. Its business covers five major sectors: smart home, industrial technology, building technology, robotics and automation, and digital innovation. Its products include air conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines, small home appliances and other full categories, forming a diversified product matrix. The revenue exceeded the 400 billion yuan mark in 2024. In the first three quarters of 2025, the operating income was 363.057 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 13.82%, and the net profit was 37.883 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 19.51%. The e-commerce sales accounted for more than 50%, ranking first in the e-commerce promotion industry for 13 consecutive years.

4.3.2 *Differentiated Strategy*

Full-category expansion and emerging business layout go hand in hand. On the basis of consolidating the core home appliance business, it expands product lines such as small home appliances and smart home appliances, and at the same time develops emerging fields such as new energy and industrialization, smart building technology, robotics and automation. In the first half of 2025, emerging businesses have formed a considerable revenue share, covering more consumption scenarios and demand levels through category diversification.

For the building of an omni-channel integrated distribution network, on the one hand, it reconstructs offline channels relying on platforms to achieve flat management directly from APP to retailers; On the other hand, it vigorously lays out online channels, accessing more than 20,000 online traffic platforms, forming an OMO model of online and offline collaboration.

For the High-frequency and precise marketing promotion, it carries out large-scale promotional activities in conjunction with e-commerce promotions and holiday nodes, and enhance brand influence by signing world-renowned spokespersons. In the first three quarters of 2025, the selling expenses reached 32.835 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 13.67%, of which promotional fees, e-commerce service fees and warehousing service fees accounted for the top. It

quickly seizes the stock market share through marketing investment.

4.3.3 Current Situation of Management Accounting Application

The flexible budget method is adopted for budget preparation, with sales volume targets as the core preparation benchmark. Selling expenses are dynamically linked to revenue scale, and the investment amount of advertising fees, promotional fees, e-commerce service fees, etc. is adjusted in real time according to changes in market demand. For example, during e-commerce promotions, it increases investment in traffic procurement and promotional subsidies, while optimizing the allocation of warehousing and channel fees in the off-season. In the first three quarters of 2025, selling expenses increased by 13.67% synchronously with revenue, realizing the coordinated linkage between expenses and sales volume.

Cost behavior analysis focuses on variable cost control, taking promotional fees, e-commerce service fees, logistics fees, etc. as core control objects. It reduces unit variable costs by optimizing promotional activity plans, integrating warehouse network resources, and improving supply chain efficiency. In the first half of 2025, through the "one inventory" sharing mechanism, the inventory turnover rate increased by 10% and the inventory obsolescence rate decreased by 14%, effectively controlling warehousing-related expenses.

Performance evaluation takes expense ROI, market share and channel penetration rate as core indicators, emphasizing the immediate benefits of selling expense input and the effect of market expansion. By establishing a multi-dimensional assessment system, it incorporates regional market share growth, online channel sales ratio, promotional activity conversion rate, etc. into the assessment, ensuring that selling expenses accurately serve the goal of market seizing. In the first three quarters of 2025, it achieved double growth in revenue and net profit under high expense input, verifying the effectiveness of its expense control model.

5. CASE COMPARISON AND MECHANISM ANALYSIS

5.1 Comparative Analysis of Selling Expense Structure from the Perspective of Cost Behavior

5.1.1 Differences in Selling Expense Structure

Based on the notes to the annual reports of the two enterprises from 2019 to 2024, employee salaries accounted for a stable 38%-40% of Gree Electric Appliances' selling expenses, mainly salaries of professional sales teams and technical service personnel, which are discretionary fixed costs. Advertising fees and promotional fees accounted for only 25%, and the proportion of variable costs was relatively low. In Midea Group's selling expenses, advertising fees and promotional fees accounted for more than 50%, which are highly related to sales volume and belong to variable costs. Employee salaries accounted for only 20%, and the proportion of fixed costs was relatively low.

5.1.2 Analysis of the Causes of Differences

Under Gree Electric Appliances' technology-driven strategy, selling expenses are dominated by discretionary fixed costs, and expense input does not fluctuate significantly with sales volume, so the selling expense ratio is highly stable. Under Midea Group's market-driven strategy, selling expenses are dominated by variable costs, and expense input adjusts with promotional activities and sales volume changes, so the selling expense ratio fluctuates greatly.

5.2 Comparative Analysis of Selling Expense Allocation Logic from the Perspective of Budget Management

5.2.1 Differences in Budget Preparation Processes

Gree Electric Appliances adopts the zero-based budget method. The budget preparation process includes project approval, value evaluation and resource allocation. It re-evaluates technical promotion projects every year and allocates budget resources according to the strategic value of the projects, giving priority to ensuring the needs of core technical promotion. Midea Group adopts the

flexible budget method. The budget preparation process is sales volume target setting, expense ratio approval and budget decomposition. It sets the selling expense ratio according to the annual sales volume target, and then decomposes the budget to each product line and channel.

5.2.2 Differences in Budget Adjustment Mechanisms

Gree Electric Appliances has a low frequency of budget adjustment, which is only adjusted when there are major changes in technical promotion projects, emphasizing the rigid constraints of the budget. Midea Group has a high frequency of budget adjustment, which can dynamically adjust the budget for advertising fees and promotional fees according to the quarterly sales volume completion and market competition situation, emphasizing the flexibility of the budget.

5.2.3 Analysis of the Causes of Differences

Gree Electric Appliances' zero-based budget method is adapted to the technology-driven strategy. Technical promotion projects are long-term and strategic, requiring stable budget support. Midea Group's flexible budget method is adapted to the market-driven strategy. The market competition situation and sales volume change rapidly, requiring a flexible budget adjustment mechanism.

5.3 Comparison of Selling Expense Benefits from the Perspective of Performance Evaluation

5.3.1 Differences in Performance Evaluation Indicator Systems

Gree Electric Appliances constructs a performance evaluation system dominated by long-term indicators and supplemented by short-term indicators. The core indicators include customer satisfaction, brand premium rate and the proportion of high-end product sales volume, and short-term indicators are only supplementary. Midea Group constructs a performance evaluation system dominated by short-term indicators and supplemented by long-term indicators. The core indicators include selling expense ROI, market share increment and promotional activity conversion rate, and long-term indicators are less concerned.

5.3.2 Differences in Selling Expense Benefits

From 2019 to 2024, although the average selling expense ROI of Gree Electric Appliances was lower than that of Midea Group, the proportion of its high-end product sales volume increased significantly in 2024, and the long-term benefits were remarkable. Midea Group's average selling expense ROI remained at a high level, with the proportion of high-end product sales volume at 15%, and the long-term benefits were relatively weak. Through differentiated selling expense input measures such as promoting channel flattening reform, increasing investment in core technology R&D and high-end category layout, Gree, together with Midea's selling expense allocation strategy relying on intensive omni-channel layout, global market expansion and the parallel development of ToC and ToB, both promoted the steady improvement of their own brand value through different expense input methods.

5.3.3 Analysis of the Causes of Differences

Gree Electric Appliances' performance evaluation system focuses on long-term benefits, promoting selling expenses to tilt towards technology promotion and customer service, and helping brand high-end upgrading. Midea Group's performance evaluation system focuses on short-term benefits, promoting selling expenses to tilt towards advertising and promotional activities, and helping to quickly increase market share.

5.4 Comparative Analysis of Selling Expense Management Problems from the Perspective of Risk Control

5.4.1 Management Risks Faced by Gree Electric Appliances

Gree Electric Appliances faces the risk of insufficient dissemination of technical value. Due to the relatively low proportion of technical promotion fees in selling expenses, some core technical advantages have not been fully transmitted to consumers, resulting in the loss of some mid-market share to competitors. At the same time, the incentive mechanism of the professional sales team is not sufficiently linked to short-term sales volume, and the team's enthusiasm needs to be improved.

5.4.2 *Management Risks Faced by Midea Group*

Midea Group faces the risk of rigid cost increase and diminishing returns. High-frequency promotional activities have led to a continuous rise in the proportion of promotional fees, and the ROI of some promotional activities has declined year by year. At the same time, excessive reliance on advertising and promotional activities has led to a popular brand image and hindered the expansion of the high-end market.

5.4.3 *Analysis of Risk Roots*

The root cause of Gree Electric Appliances' risks lies in the lack of a tracking mechanism for the effect of technical promotion in the application of management accounting tools, failing to timely adjust the input structure of selling expenses. The root cause of Midea Group's risks lies in the excessive focus on short-term indicators in the performance evaluation system, ignoring the accumulation of long-term brand value, leading to the disconnection between selling expense control and long-term strategy.

5.5 *The Internal Mechanism of Differentiated Strategies Affecting the Selling Expense Ratio*

The type of differentiated strategy determines the cost behavior, budget model and performance evaluation orientation of selling expenses, thereby affecting the level and stability of the selling expense ratio. The control model of the technology-driven strategy has a strong stability of the selling expense ratio and significant long-term benefits. The control model of the market-driven strategy has a large fluctuation range of the selling expense ratio and prominent short-term benefits. Management accounting tools are the key bridge connecting differentiated strategies and the selling expense ratio. Appropriate management accounting methods can optimize the expense input structure and improve expense efficiency; on the contrary, it will exacerbate the disconnection between expense control and strategy.

6. **DIFFERENTIATED SELLING EXPENSE CONTROL STRATEGIES BASED ON MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING**

Selling expense control shall follow three core principles: strategic consistency, integration of business and finance, and differentiated adaptation. It is necessary to ensure that expense investment aligns with the goal of cultivating core competitiveness and avoid formalistic control. strengthen collaboration between financial and marketing departments, promote financial personnel to be embedded in the entire marketing process, and realize pre-planning, in-process monitoring, and post-evaluation of expenses. abandon the "one-size-fits-all" approach, match appropriate management accounting tools according to the type of differentiated strategy, and balance the long-term benefits of technology-driven enterprises and the short-term efficiency of market-driven enterprises.

For technology-driven strategies, enterprises need to optimize control from four aspects: In terms of budget management, combine zero-based budgeting with project lifecycle budgeting, allocate resources according to the approval, promotion, and review stages of technology promotion, and establish a dynamic adjustment mechanism. In terms of cost accounting, conduct customer profitability analysis, increase technical service investment for high-value customers, optimize the salary structure of the sales team, and incorporate high-end product sales volume and customer satisfaction into incentives. In terms of performance evaluation, build a combined indicator system of short-term and long-term. In terms of risk control, establish an early warning mechanism for the dissemination effect of technical value, track technical awareness based on market research and customer feedback.

For market-driven differentiated strategies, enterprises need to focus on four core control measures. In terms of budget management, set a linkage threshold between promotional expenses and sales volume under flexible budgeting. Adjust the budget when ROI fails to meet the standard. Establish an advertising budget allocation model to optimize configuration according to channel conversion rates. In terms of cost accounting, conduct refined analysis of the input and output of promotional activities. Optimize the expense structure. Consider the impact of promotions on brand value to avoid the risk of popularization. In

terms of performance evaluation, replace sales volume indicators with incremental profit. Focus assessment on profit growth. Increase the weight of brand value indicators to guide expenses toward high-endization. In terms of risk control, establish an early warning mechanism for the effectiveness of advertising and promotional expenses. Regularly evaluate the ROI of channels and activities. Make adjustments when there is a decline for two consecutive quarters. Set an upper limit for the selling expense ratio to prevent profit erosion caused by rigid cost increases.

To ensure the implementation of control strategies, enterprises need to build a selling expense management system integrating business and finance. At the organizational structure level, establish an inter-departmental marketing and financial team. At the information system level, break down the data barriers between ERP and CRM systems. Build a management platform. Rely on big data to analyze customer behavior and promotional effects to provide decision support. At the system construction level, improve the closed-loop management system covering budgeting, approval, accounting and feedback. Clarify the powers and responsibilities of each department. Incorporate control results into assessments. Realize the coordination of strategic and financial benefits.

7. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

7.1 Conclusions

Differentiated strategies determine the selling expense control model. The selling expense ratio is stable under technology-driven strategies and fluctuates significantly under market-driven ones. Management accounting tools serve as a key link between the two—appropriate tools can optimize the expense structure and improve utilization efficiency, while inappropriate ones will exacerbate the disconnection between control and corporate strategy. The integration of business and finance is the core guarantee for the implementation of control. By optimizing the organizational structure, information system and system construction, the collaboration between finance and marketing departments can be strengthened, thereby achieving full-process dynamic control of selling expenses.

7.2 Implications

Managers should abandon the "one-size-fits-all" approach to selling expense control and select appropriate management accounting tools based on differentiated strategic positioning. Technology-driven enterprises need to focus on long-term benefit control and optimize project budgeting and customer profitability analysis. Market-driven enterprises should prioritize short-term efficiency, establishing expense benefit early warning mechanisms and incremental profit assessment indicators. Meanwhile, strengthen the integration of business and finance, promote the in-depth application of management accounting tools, and achieve a balance between strategic value and financial benefits.

7.3 Limitations and Prospects

This paper only selects two enterprises in the home appliance industry as cases, so the generalizability of the conclusions needs to be verified by cases from multiple industries and enterprises. Additionally, it does not deeply explore the impact of digital transformation on selling expense control. Future research can expand the case sample to include enterprises in industries such as new energy and consumer goods to verify the analytical framework. It can also explore the application scenarios of big data, artificial intelligence and other technologies in the context of digital transformation, or adopt qualitative research methods to conduct in-depth interviews and investigations within enterprises to explore more micro-control mechanisms.

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