

The collective forms the superstars

The casting show "Produce 101" put together a superstar girl group in China and triggered a media hype. Why does this show characterize the Chinese mentality? What can German entrepreneurs learn from this?

"Burn my Calories"! A song with this title has recently received the Chinese Music Award for the best music video; on YouTube it has millions of views. The song is sung by the "Rocket Girls", a girl group crafted by the casting show "Produce 101." For several months, the two-hour show was broadcast on the Chinese streaming portal Tencent Video, based on the Korean model.

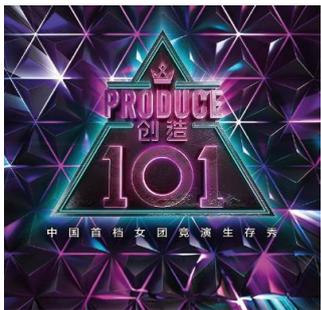
Learning effect for German companies

How can one explain the hype surrounding the casting show, where 101 young Chinese women were quartered in a skyscraper, and fought for weeks for inclusion in a girl group? The most important success factor was the active participation of the audience, which was consistently described as the "show's producer" and exerted far-reaching influence on the selection process. The people's collective shaped and created the superstars, and their commitment to their own favorites is huge – and expensive.



The enthusiasm is based on an almost limitless belief in optimization and development: with diligence, willpower and good training, everyone can achieve everything, according to the Chinese conviction. There is a deep longing to overcome social boundaries and ascend to higher social classes.

German casting shows are mostly about discovering potential, uncovering the individualistic genius – the judges hope to find a gold mine, a diamond in the rough. In contrast, China focuses on the "raw human material," which can be modified and improved upon in astonishing ways. The jade stone, which only becomes a true treasure when artfully carved, serves as a symbol for this in China.



"Produce 101" has now taken the belief in development to new heights by creating a new group according to the collective's own ideas. The hype surrounding the casting show can be explained by the fact that fans become creators and part of a media collective, and thus also part of the success.

The belief in development is not only a strong driver with regard to technical development, but also holds huge opportunities for brands – if they know how to use the underlying principle. While brands in Germany have to pay close attention to maintaining the core of their brand, in China the focus is on the dynamic development capability of the brand; German brands still have some catching up to do here.

The Germans are more focused on differentiation and individuality when it comes to brands, whereas the Chinese want to express that they are part of a large dynamic whole by displaying popular brands. Once brands are popular and successful in China, they can rely on extensive active support and identification from their fans.

(Co-)Development Potentials

This logic also reflects in "Produce 101". To make sure that their candidates stay in the game, viewers had to sacrifice their own time and money for their favorites.

Every day, the "producers" were allowed to cast eleven votes for their chosen candidate. In addition, they were also able to acquire 121 additional votes – for a fee. In online communities on Wechat and Weibo, money was collected with built-in mobile payment functions in order to keep the favorites in the competition with purchased votes.

The headline song of "Produce 101" sums up the relationship between the "producers" and the show participants, but also between customers and brands: "The more you like me, the more lovable I will be". Brands don't function in China as immovable identity creators. Rather, they are accessible companions.

"If the appearance of a brand in China remains unchanged, it will be perceived as lacking in inspiration and will lose its attractiveness." Stephan Urlings



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