

UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN
FACULTY OF ACCOUNTANCY AND MANAGEMENT (FAM)
FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND FINANCE (FBF)

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2023/2024
OCT 2023 TRIMESTER

UKMM1011/UBMM1011 SUN ZI'S ART OF WAR AND BUSINESS STRATEGIES

GROUP ASSIGNMENT COVER SHEET

Course details

Faculty: Faculty of Information and Communications Technology (FICT)

Year and Trimester of study: 2023 / Oct 2023

Lecture Group : L2, 4-6 pm, Tuesday L2, 8 – 10 am, Thursday
(E.g.: L1, 8 – 10 am, Monday)

Lecturer's Name : Mr. Fong Chee Yang

Assignment Details

Company's Name: Alibaba Group Holdings Company

Due Date: Week 4 (22 November 2023, Wednesday) by 5 pm.

Important Note: Submission of assignment is the responsibility of the students

Student's Details

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Note: Arrange names according to alphabetical order and course

| Assessment | Overall marks (%) |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Group Assignment | |

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MARKING SCHEME FOR WRITTEN GROUP ASSIGNMENT

| No. | Assessment | Marks Allocation (%) | Marks Given (%) |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. | <u>Section A: Organization Background</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief introduction of the company (full company name, location, business, products, brands, competitors, performance, etc.) | 10 | |
| 2. | <u>Section B: Sun Zi's Art of War Theories:</u> Provide critical elaborations on the following theories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theory 1: In war, it is better to go shift victories rather than engage in prolonged military campaigns (Chapter 2). Theory 2: For the troops to plunder the resources of the enemy, they must be motivated by material rewards (Chapter 2). Theory 3: Who is able to unite himself with his officers and men as one mind, spirit and purpose will win (Chapter 3). Theory 4: Who knows the other side and knows himself will not be defeated in a hundred battles (Chapter 3). Theory 5: The enemy is greedy for small advantages, offer baits to lure him (Chapter 1). | 20 | |
| 3. | <u>Section C: Contents</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss your chosen company's practices for each of Sun Zi's theories provided. | 40 | |
| 4. | <u>Section D: Recommendations</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on your point of view, please recommend the practices which you discussed in Section C. | 15 | |
| 5. | <u>Section E: Conclusion</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize the report and explain what you have learned from this assignment. | 5 | |
| 6. | Quality of the written assignment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Format, layout, idea flow, languages, references, word count and structure. | 10 | |
| | Total Marks | 100 | |
| | (-) Minus (Non-compliance to structure/formats/instructions as stated in the Course Plan 2023 June) NOTE: A total of 30 marks can be deducted due to non-compliance. Marks should be deducted from the total marks of the assignment (if any). | | |
| | NET MARK AFTER DEDUCTION OF NON-COMPLIANCES | | |

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Section A: Organisation Background

The company to which we will apply Sun Tzu's Art of War will be Alibaba Group Holdings Company. Alibaba Group Holdings Company, also called generally as Alibaba by people, was founded on 4 April 1999 in Hangzhou, Zhejiang (Cuofano, 2022). The founder of the Alibaba Group Holdings Company is Jack Ma, who was an English language teacher in Hangzhou, Zhejiang over a decade ago. Alibaba Group Holdings Company was founded by 17 co-founders, who are his friends and students, and himself. (Alibaba Group, 2022) For the fun facts for this research of this company, the name of this company "Alibaba" comes from one of the characters from the Middle Eastern folk-tale collection "One Thousand and One Nights". (Cuofano, 2022)

Alibaba Group Holdings Company is one of the most successful companies that is focused on online retail stores and electronic commerce, which is called e-commerce in daily life. Also, Alibaba Group Holdings Company has focused on technology and the Internet sector with its successful applications such as Alibaba Cloud in the cloud computing field, which is called "Aliyun" in Mandarin. Alibaba is one of the world's largest retailers and e-commerce which provides consumer-to-consumer, business-to-consumer, and business-to-business sales services, which are also known as C2C, B2C, and B2B. The company was successful in breaking the record of the initial public offering known as an IPO in 2014 with a value-raising of USD25 billion and the company was given a market value of USD 231 billion at the same time. (Cuofano, 2022)

Alibaba Group Holding Company, as the name suggests, is a holdings company with the name "Alibaba" and Alibaba Group Holdings Company is a company that has grouped with 6 major business groups or companies. They are Taobao and Tmall Group, Alibaba International Digital Commerce Group, Cloud Intelligence Group, Local Services Group, Cainiao Smart Logistics Network Limited, and Digital Media and Entertainment Group, along with various other businesses. The brands that are introduced by the company can be separated into three major sectors, e-commerce brands with Taobao, Tmall, Alibaba.com, and 1688.com, technology and service brands with Ant Group, Alibaba cloud, and Cainiao Network, and digital media and entertainment brands with Youku Tudou and Alibaba Pictures. (Cuofano, 2022) The company hopes that all of the businesses can be done anywhere and this has become its mission so that the company can make it in reality. Also, this company aspires that it will be able to last for at least 102 years with good quality and the staff of the company hope that their customers can make it with the company. (Alibaba Group, 2022)

Some main competitors of Alibaba Group Holdings Company can let Alibaba face intense competition in its core businesses which include e-commerce, retail, technology, and the Internet. They are JD.com LLC, which is called "Jingdong" in Mandarin, and the main competitor in China's e-commerce market, Amazon, which is the company founded by Jeff Bezos in 1994 and it has the potential to compete

with its online retail stores, advanced technology platform and the similar business model, eBay Inc., which is having an advantage with its extensive global outreach and also the e-commerce platforms, and its online payment services, and Tencent Holdings Limited with its online social media network, online payment platforms, and the specialization in Artificial Intelligence (AI), cloud computing and big data services. (Hughes, 2021)

Section B: Sun Zi's Art of War Theories

Theory 1: In war, it is better to go shift victories rather than engage in prolonged military campaigns (Chapter 2)

Engaging in prolonged military campaigns often strains resources, both in terms of finances and manpower. Sun Tzu's approach prioritizes quick and decisive victories to conserve resources, reduce costs, and minimize the impact on the economy. By swiftly achieving objectives, the strain on resources is minimized, allowing for a more sustainable approach to warfare.

Prolonged conflicts tend to result in higher exhaustion among troops. Sun Tzu's philosophy of swift victories aims to reduce human costs by avoiding prolonged battles that could lead to increased casualties and the erosion of morale. Quick and decisive wins can help soldiers recover from their wounds and remain effective in subsequent battles.

By seeking rapid victories, a military force can maintain initiative and strategic flexibility. This strategy makes it possible to respond to shifting conditions more quickly, which keeps the opposition from strengthening its defenses or launching successful counteroffensives. Rapid victories disrupt the enemy's plans, keeping them off-balance and unable to recover easily.

In conclusion, Sun Tzu's principle of seeking swift victories in war emphasizes the advantages of efficiency, resource conservation, and the psychological impact of rapid successes.

Theory 2: For the troops to plunder the resources of the enemy, they must be motivated by material rewards (Chapter 2)

Sun Tzu recognized that material rewards such as wealth, spoils of war, and other tangible benefits serve as motivators for soldiers. The promise of gaining resources from the enemy can significantly enhance troops' willingness to engage in conflict, endure hardships, and perform effectively during battles. This concept acknowledges the human desire for personal gain and the role it plays in driving soldiers to excel on the battlefield.

The prospect of material gain can also play a role in psychological warfare. By highlighting the potential rewards awaiting victorious soldiers, commanders can boost morale and commitment among their troops. This approach can create a sense of purpose and determination among soldiers, making them more

willing to overcome challenges and pursue victory to secure those rewards. Sun Tzu's theory emphasizes the practical aspect of acquiring resources from the enemy, which can not only sustain one's forces but also weaken the adversary. A strategic advantage can be obtained by gaining the enemy of important resources while concurrently increasing its supplies.

In conclusion, Sun Tzu's theory emphasizes the practical significance of material rewards in motivating soldiers and leveraging enemy resources.

Theory 3: Who is able to unite himself with his officers and men as one mind, spirit and purpose will win (Chapter 3)

Sun Tzu's idea of unity between a leader and his officers and men emphasizes the importance of unity in purpose, common goals, and a synchronized mindset within an organization. He emphasizes that a leader must align his vision, goal, and mindset with his team. This unity ensures a cohesive approach to achieving common goals. It is not just about giving orders, but about creating a shared sense of purpose and direction. This requires empathy, effective communication, and an understanding of the team's strengths and weaknesses. (Sherman Morris, 2023)

This theory highlights how important it is for everyone in the team to share the same values, principles, and criteria. When everyone is on the same page, it's easier to coordinate actions towards the big goals. This can significantly influence decision-making and the problem-solving process. While being unified is crucial, Sun Tzu doesn't support being too inflexible. A good leader should encourage their team to be adaptable and flexible. Things change, and being able to adjust while staying focused on the main goal can make a big difference in achieving success. (Sherman Morris, 2023)

While Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" focused primarily on military strategy, the principles of unity apply broadly in various fields. They are relevant in business, politics, sports, and all other areas where teamwork and leadership are required. (Jennifer Herrity, 2023) Unity is not just about winning battles, but also about maintaining success. A leader who consistently promotes unity in their team can make a lasting impact and build a culture that endures beyond individual contributions.

Theory 4: Who knows the other side and knows himself will not be defeated in a hundred battles (Chapter 3)

Sun Tzu said Know the enemy and know yourself in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. Only by thoroughly understanding the situation between ourselves and the enemy can we win every battle in the war. The implication is that no matter what you do, you must understand and master the actual situation of the matter (yourself and the other party) to analyze and formulate feasible implementation plans. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant

both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril. This deceptively simple instruction, properly applied, is at the essence both of making a sound decision to go to war and of strategic and tactical planning once that decision has been made (DeSutter, 1994).

Theory 5: The enemy is greedy for small advantages, offer baits to lure him (Chapter 1).

Learning “Sun Tzu’s Art of War” is not just for the use of the military, those who learn "Sun Tzu's Art of War" will have learned the true skills. The best understanding of "Sun Tzu's Art of War" is to learn and apply. Applying it to all aspects of your life, work, etc. is a worthwhile study. From Chapter 1, obtained the theory “The enemy is greedy for small advantages, offer baits to lure him”. The theory means that use small profits to lure opponents. People seek advantages and avoid disadvantages, and so do organizations. If it is willing to listen to your changes, it must have seen benefits. In war, there is the so-called ambush warfare, which is to use a small number of troops to disguise the main force, attract the opponent's troops to the opposite position, and then launch an attack to eliminate the opponent.

(Liu, 2023) , Offering a small benefit can lull the enemy into a false sense of security. They may lower their guard, believing that they have gained an advantage. This element of surprise can be a powerful tool when launching a counterattack. In some cases, offering a small benefit may not only lure an enemy into a vulnerable position but could also serve as a basis for negotiation. It may create opportunities for peaceful resolutions or concessions that are more favorable to your interests. Luring an enemy into a specific location or position through the promise of a small benefit can set the stage for a more favorable battlefield for your forces. This allows you to control the circumstances of the conflict more effectively.

It's important to note that the success of such a strategy depends on various factors, including the specifics of the situation, the capabilities of the parties involved, and the overall context. Additionally, the ethical considerations of using deception and manipulation in conflicts should be carefully weighed, as they can have long-term consequences for relationships and trust.

Section C: Contents

Theory 1: In war, it is better to go shift victories rather than engage in prolonged military campaigns (Chapter 2)

Theory 1 reflects the principles of seeking swift victories rather than engaging in prolonged campaigns, the practices done by Alibaba Group Holding Limited are agility in market penetration, singles’ day sales events, and strategic partnerships and alliances.

Agility in Market Penetration:

Alibaba has shown agility in entering and dominating different sectors swiftly. Rather than engaging in prolonged battles for market share, Alibaba strategically identifies opportunities and captures them rapidly. For instance, its quick rise to dominance in the Chinese e-commerce market and subsequent expansions into various sectors, including cloud computing and financial services.

Singles' Day Sales Event:

Alibaba's annual Singles' Day shopping event highlights its capability to secure swift victories in sales within a short timeframe. The company focuses on intense marketing, pre-event preparation, and innovative sales strategies to achieve record-breaking sales numbers in a single day. An example of an event is 11.11 which was started by Taobao an online shopping application under the Alibaba group that give huge discount only on that specific day for user to shop (Goh, 2023).

Strategic Partnerships and Alliances:

Alibaba forms partnerships strategically to achieve rapid victories in various markets. Collaborations with global brands, alliances with local businesses, and investments in startups help Alibaba swiftly expand its influence and reach without engaging in prolonged struggles for market penetration. To take over the market of online shopping in Southeast Asia, Alibaba Group owned the Lazada app in 2016 holding an 83% stake in Lazada (Leaver, 2022). So, they do not need to fight for the Southeast Asia market with Taobao instead own an existing one.

In summary, Alibaba Group's business practices align with Sun Tzu's concept of seeking swift victories in warfare by emphasizing agility, strategic alliances, and efficient resource utilization. The company's ability to swiftly penetrate markets and adapt to changes showcases a business approach that values quick, decisive actions over prolonged struggles for dominance.

Theory 2: For the troops to plunder the resources of the enemy, they must be motivated by material rewards (Chapter 2)

Theory 2 states that troops must be motivated by material rewards to plunder the resources of the enemy, the practices done by Alibaba Group Holding Limited are employees' incentives and rewards, affiliate and seller incentive programs, and customer loyalty programs.

Employee Incentives and Rewards:

Alibaba places a significant emphasis on motivating its employees through material rewards. According to retailasia website (2022), the company offers competitive salaries, bonuses, stock options, and

performance-based incentives. These material rewards serve as motivators for employees, encouraging them to contribute effectively to the company's success.

Affiliate and Seller Incentive Programs:

Within its ecosystem, Alibaba implements various incentive programs for affiliates and sellers. Through commission structures, bonuses, and promotional rewards, Alibaba motivates its sellers and partners to enhance their performance, drive sales, and contribute positively to the company's growth. According to Ackroyd and Utley (2023), 1 million brands and merchants had invested in 11.11 promotions on Alibaba's China marketplaces in 2023. By providing these material incentives, Alibaba encourages individuals and businesses to actively participate in the platform's success.

Customer Loyalty Programs:

Alibaba strategically employs material rewards in the form of discounts, coupons, and loyalty points to incentivize customer engagement and repeat purchases. These incentives motivate customers to continue using Alibaba's platforms for their shopping needs, fostering loyalty and increasing the chances of repeated transactions. Alibaba's business-to-consumer marketplace Tmall is offering a 17% discount of RMB50 (\$6.84) off every RMB300 purchased during the sale (Ackroyd and Utley, 2023). Taobao, on the other hand, is offering a 15% discount of RMB30 off purchases made on its platform (Ackroyd and Utley, 2023).

In summary, Alibaba Group implements various strategies and practices that align with Sun Tzu's theory of motivating troops with material rewards to seize the resources of the enemy by incentivizing its employees, partners, sellers, and customers with material benefits.

Theory 3: Who is able to unite himself with his officers and men as one mind, spirit and purpose will win (Chapter 3)

Jack Ma, Alibaba's founder, emphasized the importance of a shared vision. Similar to Sun Tzu's idea, Jack Ma aimed to unify the entire organization behind a single goal: building an inclusive, international marketplace. (A.G., 2023) This unified focus inspired employees to work together towards the same goal. Alibaba promotes a culture where leaders not only guide but also empower their teams. This echoes Sun Tzu's emphasis on unity through understanding and aligning with the team.

Alibaba values teamwork and collaboration much like Sun Tzu's theory, the company encourages collective efforts, fostering an environment where employees work as a cohesive unit. The company promotes trust and cohesion among its employees, encouraging them to cooperate towards shared goals. (Anshul Saboo, 2023) Alibaba creates an atmosphere where everyone shares the same beliefs and rules, which influences how they make decisions and what they do. This is a lot like what Sun Tzu said about how having a united culture helps make sure everyone's actions match up with the big goals. Similar to Sun Tzu's

notion of flexibility within unity, Alibaba is known for its adaptability and innovation. They can change plans and adapt to new situations while still focusing on their main goals, allowing them to succeed in dynamic markets. (A.G., 2023)

Theory 4: Who knows the other side and knows himself will not be defeated in a hundred battles (Chapter 3)

To compete with various competitors, Alibaba has done thorough research on the market and its competitors. Furthermore, it also has a full understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. With this information, Alibaba tried to leverage on its strengths and overcome its weaknesses. By knowing the weaknesses of the competitors, Alibaba had implemented some differentiation strategies to differentiate itself from other competitors. For example, it performs a unique business model other than eBay and Amazon. It is mainly focused on selling to businesses which is significantly different from Amazon which emphasizes customers (Fathima, 2023). This unique business model has provided a chance for the merchants to approach a variety of new buyers. It is not only customer-centric but also seller-centric as Alibaba deeply understands that seller and buyer satisfaction play a significant role in achieving success (Oakley, 2022).

Theory 5: The enemy is greedy for small advantages, offer baits to lure him (Chapter 1).

Alibaba Group Holding Limited Corporation implies the theory that “The enemy is greedy for small advantages, offer baits to lure him”. The date, November 11 (double 11), was chosen because of the significance of the number "1" representing singles. Alibaba Group, one of the largest e-commerce companies in the world, played a crucial role in commercializing this event. In particular, Alibaba's online shopping platforms, such as Tmall and Taobao, have been at the forefront of the Double 11 shopping festival.

During the event, the customer will get massive sales and discounts, (Huang, 2021). Double 11 is known for its massive discounts and promotions across various products, from electronics and fashion to beauty and household items. Many online retailers and brands participate, offering deep discounts to attract consumers. Therefore, Alibaba Group has made record-breaking sales and reported amazing sales figures during this event.

Moreover, Taobao and Tmall provide live streaming and interactive marketing to attract consumers. Livestreaming has become a popular marketing tool during Double 11. Sellers and influencers often showcase products through live broadcasts to engage with potential buyers. Interactive marketing campaigns, such as games and contests, are used to keep consumers engaged.

Section D: Recommendation

Theory 1: In war, it is better to go shift victories rather than engage in prolonged military campaigns (Chapter 2)

The practice that I recommend is the Singles' Day Sales Event. The Singles' Day Sales Event exemplifies concentrated efforts within a limited timeframe. Alibaba concentrates all its resources, marketing, and operational efforts into a single day. The organization maximizes impact and produces significant results in a short period thanks to this concentrated approach.

Theory 2: For the troops to plunder the resources of the enemy, they must be motivated by material rewards (Chapter 2)

The practice that I recommend is the Customer Loyalty Program. Just as troops motivated by material rewards are more likely to engage in successful plundering, customers motivated by discounts and rewards are more inclined to make more purchases. Alibaba wants to ensure that its customers stay on their platforms for their shopping needs by developing customer loyalty. This repetition of transactions is akin to soldiers repeatedly seizing resources during warfare.

Theory 3: Who is able to unite himself with his officers and men as one mind, spirit and purpose will win (Chapter 3)

In my opinion, companies should encourage different departments to work together and make it easy for everyone to talk openly. When the team does well together, acknowledge and celebrate these accomplishments. Also, develop a strong organizational culture based on values, principles, and norms that everyone shares and most importantly, ensure that these values are not just words but are reflected in daily practices and decision-making processes. A company should encourage its teams to try new things, take safe chances, and adjust when things change. They can make a space where people feel excited to share and explore fresh ideas. Invest in building trust among team members.

Theory 4: Who knows the other side and knows himself will not be defeated in a hundred battles (Chapter 3)

The fourth theory, "Who knows the other side and knows himself will not be defeated in a hundred battles". Alibaba implemented this theory by carrying out some differentiation strategies which led to its uniqueness and success. It is recommended to keep up to date on the market movements so that the company can reduce the risks by taking preventive measures early.

Theory 5: The enemy is greedy for small advantages, offer baits to lure him (Chapter 1).

Alibaba Group is one of the largest e-commerce companies in the world. I think that Alibaba's online shopping platforms, such as Tmall and Taobao can imply the technology of Augmented Reality (AR) Shopping, (Owens, 2022). Integrate AR technology to allow consumers to virtually try on clothing, accessories, or test products before purchasing to create an interactive shopping experience and enhance engagement for the customers.

Furthermore, the improvement of mobile experience is undeniable, optimizing mobile platforms for a smoother and more user-friendly shopping experience, as mobile devices play a significant role in online shopping. Implement mobile-specific features, such as easy navigation, quick checkout options, and mobile-exclusive deals. Last but not least, online cybersecurity must be measured. Strengthen cybersecurity measures to protect user data and ensure secure transactions, given the increased frequency of online shopping during major events.

Section E: Conclusion

In a nutshell, taking everything into consideration, Sun Tzu's Art of War is not only useful in wars but also versatile enough to be used in organization management, leadership, and even marketing and business war or competition. Alibaba Group Holdings Company has become an example of using strategies to achieve the ultimate goal and have a high reputation of the company. Also, the success of the company has been proven that reading and using the knowledge of Sun Tzu's Art of War, especially the strategies are important, and these can bring out the benefits and the advantages of managing the organization and doing well in business and marketing management of a company so that the company able to be successful and well performed for having the accomplishment.

For instance, the second theory that we have used in this research, for the troops to plunder the resources of the enemy, they must be motivated by material rewards, has been used satisfyingly by Alibaba Group Holdings Company, no matter in which aspect that it has used the theory. Many people claim that humans are a creature or animals that have been defined as highly intelligent, but they will be led by the nose if the benefits are in front of them and there are things that they would like to have. This company is able to introduce some programs and marketing techniques that have been mentioned above in the previous section with employee incentives and reward programs, affiliate and seller incentive programs, and customer loyalty programs. The company is able to attract customer or consumer to their online retail store by using customer loyalty programs which come with some discount and points that can let them buy their products at an attractable and affordable price in the online retail store and these will be a norm which are able to be seen in some events that hold by the company such as single's day sales event. The consumers will have their shopping again and they will hope that there will be more discounts for product purchasing. In addition, the

employees will be rewarded with some bonuses which are given by the company and be counted by the result that they have got in the entire month or year. By using the employee incentives and reward programs, the employees of the company will be encouraged to be hardworking on working as they will be able to get the reward if they have good results in the total profit of the company.

Hence, we are able to notice the importance of using Sun Tzu's Art of War strategies and the benefits that have been brought out by using these strategies and theories. All of the marketing techniques or the programs and plans that have been created by not only this company but also the companies globally have come from the theories of Sun Tzu's Art of War strategies. Also, this research has shown us that we are able to use these strategies and theories not only in the marketing or business sectors but also all of the sectors or fields, even though we are playing some board games such as Chinese chess or some card games such as Uno or we are able to get some information secretly by using the strategies. Therefore, Sun Tzu's Art of War strategies are the theories that have to be learnt and practiced in our daily lives and we should not underrate or look down upon the strategies and think that the strategies are useless.

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Appendix

Appendix for the plagiarism and similarity checking.

| ORIGINALITY REPORT | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
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| SIMILARITY INDEX | INTERNET SOURCES | PUBLICATIONS | STUDENT PAPERS |
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