Multiple source credibility: A study on the marketing effectiveness of online comment leaders from a psychological perspective

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the effect of online comment leader phenomenon on product marketing in the era of new media, explores the influence of multiple information sources and credibility of information sources on consumers' cognition and purchase intention. Through questionnaire survey and data analysis, this study found that online comment leaders generally have high credibility and can exert certain influence on both first-time consumers and non-first-time consumers. In the presence of multiple information sources, the influence of online comment leaders on consumers tends to depend on the quantity rather than the content. This research has certain significance for the development of product marketing means of network platform.

Key words: Multiple source reliability; Online comment leader; Willingness to consume; The marketing effect

1 Introduction

In recent years, the development of Internet technology is affecting and changing people’s lifestyle in many ways. On the consumption side, the platform nature of the Internet has almost eliminated the gap between time and space, which makes consumption an easy thing. Certainly, the development of online shopping is bound to be accompanied by the transplantation and progress of other links in the traditional

production and consumption chain, of which the marketing is an important link. We have found that the online sellers are increasingly focusing on marketing by presenting positive reviews from consumers because the impact of users feedback and interaction continues to grow. Consumers also tend to refer to the comments and make their choices when they are shopping. Therefore, the comments, which have useful contents and favorable reception usually occupy high positions and play an important part for both the buyer and the seller. We are curious about this phenomenon: Do the online comment leaders influence marketing effectiveness? How do they influence marketing effectiveness? We believe the research of these questions will deepen the understanding of marketing in the era of network media, expand marketing methods and promote further development in marketing field.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Online comment leader in the new media environment

The opinion leader theory proposed by American scholar Lazarsfeld (1940) systematically analyzes the influence of opinion leaders on the decision-making of most people in a team. However, the research at that time was carried out around the field of political communication, which was a one-way linear study. On this basis, subsequent scholars continue to explore and improve, taking the credibility of multiple sources as a competitive factor that affects the effect of marketing, intervening in the communication process, and adding three new dimensions that affect the credibility of sources, inclination toward truth (in other words, "the source will tell the truth"), the potential of truth ("the source knows the truth") and a presentation dimension (providing an intensifying function for the source credibility perception) (Martin Eisend, 2006).

In the era of network media, with the rapid development of social platforms such as microblogs, blogs and forums, online comments often provide positive or negative reference value to visitors. For enterprises, with the help of online review leaders, new products can quickly spread to consumer groups and achieve good sales (Chen, Wang 2014). The interest drives the network platform to emphasize to build the network comment leader, in order to enhance the competitiveness. Scholars Ge Yan, Zhao Danqing and Qin Yulin conducted a more detailed study on the influence of Chinese netizens' comments on consumption attitude and willingness from the aspects

of information stimulation, source credibility and brand experience. They showed that online commercial information has a significant impact on consumption attitude and willingness, the interaction between source credibility and network information will have an interactive impact. However, offline experience strongly constrains the influence of online information and source credibility (Ge Yan, 2010).

In general, in the new media environment, due to the enhanced network interaction, users' subjective initiative is enhanced. They no longer passively accept the single opinion from opinion leaders with high social status, but form a new mode of two-way interaction with public opinion speakers. Online comment leaders are born in the conflict of various opinions. Under this theoretical background, the possibility of any user becoming the leader of online reviews is greatly increased, which plays a certain positive role in marketing communication. How to build comment leaders has also become a new research topic.

2.2 Persuasion research on the credibility of information sources in the Internet media era

Hovland (1953), an American scholar, said in his study on the effect of communication that persuasion is an effective way to change people's attitude, that is, to guide the attitude and behavior of the receiver towards the intended direction of the communicator by giving certain demands(Hovland, 1953). Hovland (1951) supplemented the research on persuasion effect from the perspective of source credibility, pointing out that receivers are more likely to be persuaded when the information source is credible (Hovland, C., & Weiss, W, 1951). In addition, McCroskey (1974) proposed that receivers tend to respect the communicators with high credibility in the news source and their words are easier to be accepted (McCroskey, 1974). From a psychological perspective, source credibility may have different effects on thought confidence and persuasion depending on the position of the claim is supplemented by research that when the message is attitudinal, credible sources should begin to self-confirm because the recipient may be motivated to confirm (support) their existing views. In contrast, when appeals are counterattitudinal, recipients may have an incentive to defend their opinions and deny the information. In this case, stronger self-confirmation may occur when communicators lack credibility rather than possess it. When a piece of information is counter-attitudinal and contains weak argument, the

source of evidence for self-verification is less credibl. Among participants with higher defensive motivation, the results were consistent with the evidence that high confidence produced self-verification when support motivation was high (Jason & Abigail, 2014).

By sorting out the existing studies, this paper found that although most literatures studied the influence of source credibility on users' selection, they ignored the influence of user's subjective initiative on marketing effect under the influence of multiple information sources in the network environment due to the one-way starting effect of comment leader. In addition, there is a lack of researches from the perspective of psychology. Therefore, we will combine the background of the network era and introduce the concept of self-confirmation in psychology into the research on the marketing effect of online review leaders, so as to supplement and improve the related fields.

3 Method

We try to answer the above questions by questionnaire and propose the hypotheses:

H1: The credibility of online comment leaders is positively correlated with the marketing effect for the initial marketing stage/first-time consumer groups.

H2: There is no significant correlation between the credibility of online comment leaders and marketing effect for the later stage of marketing/non- first-time consumer groups.

H3: The marketing effect of positive comments is weaker than that of negative comments for both the first-time and non-first-time consumer groups.

3.1 Set the variable

To explore the impact of online comment leaders on new and old consumers, we set the credibility of online comment leaders as independent variable and the consumption intention of respondents after receiving online comments is dependent variable.

The online comment leader refers to the person on the platform who can influence the majority of consumers' decisions in the comment section. These people, such as VIP users and regular customers, usually have rich consumption experience and their comments are detailed and graphic, which are more likely to influence consumer behavior.

3.2 Selection of research subjects

To explore the impact of online comment leaders on first-time consumers and non-first-time consumers, the objects of our investigation are the users who consume on the network platform. Respondents were asked to answer questions that their attitudes towards the goods and merchants through comment content and identity of the reviewer from two perspectives, which are "people who have never consumed the product" and "people who have consumed the product". At the same time, in order to supplement the impact of online comment leaders' comments on marketing effect. the negative comments of online comment leaders have a greater impact on consumers. We compare the positive and negative comments of online comment leaders to verify that the negative comments of comment leaders have a stronger impact on consumers. The questionnaire will use the Richter 5 scale.

4 Results

4.1 Data cleaning and sample description

This questionnaire sets the survey object as the group with platform consumption experience. To meet the needs of epidemic prevention and control policies, the author designed questionnaires by using Questionnaire Star. 218 questionnaires were distributed online, and 218 were effective, with an effective rate of 100%. According to the survey, the majority of the respondents were middle-aged people between 31 and 50 years old, and 64.68% were female. The highest degree of the sample is mainly in the undergraduate, and the consumption life of the platform is more than 5 years.

4.2 Research Process

4.2.1 For first-time consumer groups, credibility of online comment leaders is positively correlated with marketing effect.

Table 1 Analysis of variance for first-time consumer group

Analysis of variance							
	16. When you buy a product for the first time, do the comments of the comment leaders such as high praise or VIP users affect your purchase behavior? (Mean ± Standard deviation)					F	p
	Have certain influence (n=111)	Have a great influence (n=38)	Have very little influence (n=33)	Have more influence (n=15)	Have less influence (n=21)		
Credibility	12.38±2.81	8.89±3.65	13.20±4.48	10.62±2.91	12.52±2.82	11.093	0.000**
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01							

Therefore, according to the Pearson correlation test, the variance analysis of the credibility of the leader in the first review and the marketing effect shows that P <0.01, indicating that there is a significant difference between them, and hypothesis 1 is valid.

4.2.2 For non-first-time consumer groups, the credibility of online comment leaders still has an impact on the marketing effect

Table 2 Analysis of variance for non-first-time consumer group

Analysis of variance							
	17. When you buy a product again, do the comments of the comment leaders such as high praise or VIP users affect your purchase behavior? (Mean ± Standard deviation)					F	p
	Have certain influence (n=82)	Have a great influence (n=30)	Have very little influence (n=19)	Have more influence (n=19)	Have less influence (n=68)		
Credibility	16.65±2.71	16.73±6.81	15.26±3.07	16.42±2.85	15.91±2.98	0.867	0.485
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01							

Therefore, according to the Pearson correlation test results, the variance analysis between the credibility of leaders with non-initial reviews and the marketing effect shows that P >0.05, indicating that there is no significant difference between the two, and the null hypothesis H2 is invalid.

4.2.3 Under the condition of multiple information sources, the higher proportion

of positive and negative comments is more likely to influence consumer decision making

The results showed that negative comments were slightly more reliable than positive ones, with the majority (30.73%) believing that comments with a high proportion were more reliable. The null hypothesis H3 is not true. According to the above data analysis results, hypothesis 1 is valid, while hypothesis 2 and 3 are not.

In general, in the new media era, under the influence of multiple information sources, this paper studies the influence of credibility of online comment leaders on marketing effect based on the theory of persuasion and the psychology of first-time consumer groups and non-first-time consumer groups. The research shows that for the first-time consumer group, the more credible the online comment leader is, the better the marketing effect is, which is manifested as the comments of highly praised /VIP users and the detailed comments are more trusted. Secondly, for the non-first-time consumer group, the influence of online comment leaders is still the important basis for users to make purchase decisions. Finally, the influence of online comments on platform users is too simple only from the positive and negative aspects of content. When faced with multiple comments with high credibility, the number of comments also becomes an important basis for users to purchase.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Online comment leaders have a strong influence on both first-time and non-first-time consumer groups

Bone(1995) put forward that it will produce better results and be more credible than a single information source when two or more pieces of information support each other(Shengqiang Lai, Min Zhu, 2009). And Lee(2007) proved through experimental methods that high-quality comment information containing detailed description of products or services or detailed introduction of consumption experience has greater influence than low-quality online comment information that only makes simple recommendations or has unclear meaning(Jumin Lee, Do-Hyung Park, Ingoo Han).

On the basis of previous studies, we combined multiple sources with information content and added communicator identity factor. Then a survey of consumers' attitudes

towards the credibility of different online comment leaders was set up in the question. Finally, according to the above data analysis, we came to the conclusion: Online comment leaders have certain influence on both first-time consumers groups and non-first-time consumers groups. And for the consumer group that buys for the first time, credibility is positively correlated with marketing effect, which means the higher the credibility, the higher the trust of consumers, the more likely to be affected by the review content to adjust the purchase intention, so as to facilitate merchants to achieve marketing effect.

5.2 Multiple information sources cause single content marketing to fail

In terms of cognition, by setting survey of consumers' attitudes towards positive and negative comments are investigated, what we find is that when only comment credibility is considered, negative comments generally have higher credibility positive ones in consumers' perception. This view is also supported by previous research: For consumers, negative word-of mouth has more influence on brand evaluation than positive word-of-mouth, and it is more convincing (Chevvalier,Mayzlin,2006).

In terms of consumption intention, based on the conclusion that negative word-of-mouth has a greater influence on consumers. When consumers share negative experiences of using products or shopping through the Internet, users' purchase intention will be reduced and their consumption behavior will be affected, also consider that in the era of new media, users are in the constant flow of information space, we include multiple information sources as an important factor in our questions about positive and negative reviews and consumer attitudes. Finally we find when multiple information sources are equally trustworthy, consumers are more inclined to consider the number of reviews than to just believe positive or negative reviews.

Therefore, we agree that negative reviews have a higher cognitive impact on consumers than positive reviews. However, consumers' actual willingness to consume does not tend to trust negative comments and thus decrease, but depends on the proportion of positive or negative comments in multiple information sources because of the presence of multiple information sources. Reviews with a high proportion are more likely to gain the trust of consumers so that they can affect the marketing effectiveness. The reasons for this conclusion are also discussed briefly. We think that because multiple information sources have certain group characteristics in nature, individuals

are prone to herd psychology based on group opinions. Since this study did not explore the cause of this phenomenon, the above views are speculative, so we will not give more explanation here.

Based on all the conclusion drawn in the study, we put forward the following suggestions for online marketing in the new media era.

Firstly, in online sales channels, businesses should pay attention to the role of online comment leaders, and actively use the influence of online comment leaders' high credibility on consumer groups to effectively promote product marketing. No matter in the initial or later stage of marketing, the role of online comment leaders can not be ignored in the face of first-time consumers or non-first-time consumers.

Secondly, when the comments of several online comment leaders exist simultaneously in the same scene, businesses can construct most positive comments even if there are more credible negative comments. By virtue of the number advantage, the credibility of reviews in the hearts of consumers is reduced and the marketing effect is improved.

This study also has many shortcomings. For example, we did not consider the gender, age, occupation and other personal factors of respondents as variables. We also did not differentiate between different platforms and products, but made assumptions about online consumption in general to investigate consumers' intentions and attitudes. Therefore, there are many details and space for further analysis of the conclusions drawn from this study.

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