The Marketing Theory of 4Cs and Visual Communication: A Study of the Communication Effects of Brainwashing Advertising

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Abstract: The attention economy is particularly prominent in the Internet era, and brainwashing advertisements, led by "Honey Snow Ice City" and "Lium", have become an important branch in the advertising field. This paper uses The Marketing Theory of 4Cs and visual communication as the theories and adopts two empirical research methods, namely questionnaires and in-depth interviews, to analyze the reasons for the powerful communication effects of brainwashing advertisements. The study finds that the repetition, contrast, and rhythm of brainwashing advertisements have an impact on the audience's attention and willingness to consume, and the results of the study are expected to provide ideas for the subsequent development of brainwashing advertisements.

Keywords: brainwashing advertising, visual communication, The Marketing Theory of 4Cs

1 Introduction

With the rapid development of the Internet, audiences are gradually becoming resistant to marketing methods that simply showcase product performance or KOL recommendations, and the attention economy has become a powerful weapon for more brands to leverage traffic growth. Among them, strong eye-catching brainwashing advertisements such as Honey Snow Ice City, BOSS Direct, mafengwo.com, and Zhihu stand out from the crowd of marketing content and gradually become an essential branch of advertising.

Brainwashing advertisements are characterized by high repetitiveness, compulsion, a strong sense of contrast, and a strong rhythm. The "You love me, I love you" commercial song of Honey Snow Ice City has become a brainwashing "magic song" sung by everyone with its simple and upbeat melody. This paper will therefore use an empirical study to explore the reasons for the powerful effects of brainwashing advertising.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Review of research on Marketing and The Marketing Theory of 4Cs

Marketing is the act of "doing and selling" in the marketplace. In 1960, Jerome McCarthy, an American marketing expert, proposed The Marketing Theory of 4Cs, which suggests that marketing strategies should be developed from four aspects: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. Robert F. Lauterborn proposed a new customer-centred marketing model, namely The Marketing Theory of 4Cs.

Lauterborn's The Marketing Theory of 4Cs believes that the components of the marketing mix should be Customer, Cost, Convenience, and Communication, requiring that the needs of the customer be the core of marketing, followed by efforts to reduce the cost of customer purchases, then full attention should be paid to the customer purchase process Convenience, and finally, effective marketing communication should also be implemented with the consumer in mind, transforming the previous producer-centred concept.

He Yijun combines The Marketing Theory of 4Cs with Internet marketing and proposes that The Marketing Theory of 4Cs should be used as the basic framework to analyze modern Internet marketing[[[]He, Y.J. (2014). Research on online marketing strategy based on 4C theory. Enterprise Research , (16), 35-36. (in Chinese)

2.2 Review of research on Visual Communication and Brainwashing Advertising

Visual communication is an important component of new media advertising. From its inception to the present changes and developments, many scholars have analyzed the presentation of visual communication in advertising from different perspectives with the help of different academic theories.

In 2004, Paul Messaris, in his book Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising, used symbols to define the semantic characteristics of visual images and discussed the use of visual image theory for the purpose of visual persuasion[[[]Paul, M. (2004). Visual Persuasion: The Role of Image in Advertising, Xinhua Publishing House.

With regard to the research on brainwashing advertisements, Liu Zhongjing starts from the birth of brainwashing advertisements and the ethical controversy, and points out that the creation of advertisements should be guided by creativity and the appropriate use of repetition strategies[[[]Liu, C.J. (2019). Ethical analysis of the prevalence of brainwashing advertisements and the path to solve it. New Media Research, (15), 46-47+50. (in Chinese)

From the collation of related research, it can be found that most of the research results based on The Marketing Theory of 4Cs are based on its strategies for brand communication and online marketing as the starting point. Most of the research on visual communication and advertising is focused on advertising itself, and there is a lack of precise research on a particular branch of

advertising. Domestic research on brainwashing advertising focuses on the ethical problems of brainwashing advertising and its improvement path from the perspective of combining theory and case studies, but lacks empirical analysis of the communication effects of brainwashing advertising. Therefore, this paper will analyze the motives behind the strong communication effect of brainwashing advertisements from the perspective of visual communication by comprehensively applying The Marketing Theory of 4Cs, and carrying out a combination of theory and practice.

3 Research Methodology

3.1Questionnaire

3.1.1 Asking the questions

In order to prove the hypothesis, this study used a questionnaire method in the hope of exploring why brainwashing advertisements can produce strong communication effects. And are there any disadvantages to brainwashing advertising?

3.1.2 Sampling process

This questionnaire contains three independent variables (repetition, sense of rhythm, sense of contrast) and two dependent variables (audience attention, willingness to consume), as well as two demographic statistics questions, for a total of 19 questions.

This hypothesis corresponds to a study population of mainly university students in school. Firstly, we conducted a stratified random sampling of this group and selected the student population of Beijing Normal University (Zhuhai) and Xi'an University of Posts and Telecommunications as the overall population for the study. Secondly, we prepared the sampling frame for the overall population based on the academic qualifications in the two schools, divided into two sample structures: undergraduate and postgraduate students.

This survey completed the data collection, collation, and analysis process on 11 October 2022. It was distributed and researched through a combination of online and offline methods, in friends, WeChat communities, Douban, and offline.

3.2In-depth interview

3.2.1Interview outline production

The interview questions were divided into three main sections.

Firstly, it mainly concerns the basic information of the interviewees, including age,

education, and profession.

Secondly, the research questions were downscaled to interview questions, including the one work of advertising that impressed them most, their attitudes towards brainwashing advertisements, and their acceptance of the advertisements.

Thirdly, prepare the main design for a possible deep dive.

3.2.2Selection of interviewees

In this study, 10-minute semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with young people in each of the two age groups: post-90s and post-00s. The interviews began on 20 September 2022 and ended on 30 September 2022. The interviewees included firstly university students and secondly, a larger research sample was collected through online volunteers. In accordance with the maximum sampling principle of qualitative research methods, by the time the 15th interviewee was recruited, all interviews were sufficient to answer the research questions and the sample collection was closed. Respondents varied in terms of gender, age, profession, and the highest level of education, with a low level of homogeneity. Interviews were conducted as a combination of telephone interviews and one-to-one face-to-face interviews.

The results of the interviews were collated into verbatim transcripts, which totaled 18,771 words. The process of processing the content of the interviews was carried out by both the first and second works. The basic profile of the interviewees is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Basic information about the interviewees

No.	Gender	Academic qualifications	Subjects studied
01.	Female	Undergraduate	Advertising
02.	Female	Undergraduate	Environmental design
03.	Female	Undergraduate	Applied Psychology
04.	Male	Undergraduate	Chinese International Education
05.	Female	Undergraduate	Web & New Media
06.	Male	Undergraduate	Food Engineering
07.	Female	Undergraduate	Marketing
08.	Male	Undergraduate	English
09.	Female	Undergraduate	Finance
10.	Male	Undergraduate	Automation
11.	Female	Undergraduate	Digital Media Arts
12.	Female	Masters	Social Work
13.	Male	Masters	Applied Psychology
14.	Female	Masters	Radio and Television Studies
15.	Male	PhD	Systems Science

4.Analysis of findings and results

4.1Sample characterisation

The survey was designed and released through the Questionnaire Star platform and 356 questionnaires were returned. After screening out 30 invalid questionnaires, 326 valid sample data were obtained, with an effective rate of 92%. Among them, 68% were female and 32% were male. The distribution of academic qualifications was 77.81% for undergraduates, 15.17% for masters, and 5.9% for PhDs. Ninety-two percent said they had seen the brainwashing advertisements.

4.2Description of the results of the structural analysis

In this study, the sense of contrast, rhythm, repetition, audience attention, and purchase intention variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale, and the corresponding measurement statements for these variables were summed and averaged to generate a variation for subsequent analysis prior to data analysis.

4.2.1The sense of contrast is positively correlated with audience attention and consumption intention

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed that the sense of contrast in brainwashing advertisements showed a significant positive correlation with audience attention ($r=0.474$, $p=0.000$), indicating that the stronger the sense of contrast in brainwashing advertisements, the more likely it is to attract audience attention, and research hypothesis H1 was supported.

At the same time, the sense of contrast in brainwashing advertisements showed a significant positive correlation with purchase intention ($r=0.652$, $p=0.000$), indicating that the stronger the sense of contrast in brainwashing advertisements, the more likely it is to promote consumption intention, and the research hypothesis H2 was supported.

4.2.2Repetition is positively correlated with audience attention and willingness to consume

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed that the repetition of brainwashing advertisements showed a significant positive correlation with audience attention ($r=0.349$, $p=0.000$), which indicated that the stronger the repetition of brainwashing advertisements, the more likely they were to attract audience attention, and the research hypothesis H2 was supported.

At the same time, the sense of contrast in brainwashing advertisements showed a significant positive correlation with purchase intention ($r=0.457$, $p=0.000$), indicating that the more repetitive brainwashing advertisements are, the more likely they are to promote consumption

intention, and research hypothesis H4 was supported.

4.2.3A sense of rhythm is positively correlated with audience attention and consumption intentions

The sense of the rhythm of the brainwashing advertisement showed a significant positive correlation with the audience's attention (r=0.649, p=0.000), which indicated that the stronger the sense of the rhythm of the brainwashing advertisement, the more likely it was to attract the audience's attention, and research hypothesis H3 was supported.

At the same time, Pearson correlation analysis revealed that the rhythm of brainwashing ads showed a significant positive correlation with purchase intention (r=0.164, p=0.000;)

This suggests that, for consumers, the repetition, contrast, and rhythm of the brainwashing advertisements influence their attitudes towards the brainwashing advertisements and the products themselves; the consumers' attitudes also have a direct impact on the conversion of consumer behavior.

5. Summary analysis

5.1 Repetitive increased exposure effect

Brainwashing advertisements are often repeated, and when the same content is shown to the audience several times, there is an "increase in the viewer's enjoyment of the thing", also known as the "exposure effect"

In the interview, interviewee number 15 said, "I would not be used to suddenly changing from a brainwashing ad to another style because it has (left) a deep impact on me, and even if I change the style, what I remember is still what I had before." This shows that when a brand first enters the market, brainwashing ads are more likely to be remembered by the audience and leave a positive impression of the brand, which in turn can lead to a conversion in consumer behavior, as seen in the case of BOSS Direct, which was placed on multiple channels, both online and offline, and which saw BOSS Direct double its profits the year after the ads were placed.

5.2 A sense of rhythm enhances audience involvement

Bozman has found that at low levels of involvement, well-paced ads are more likely to boost consumer goodwill towards a brand [[[]Carl, S. B.,Darrel,M.,Kathy,L.P.M.(2011).The Directional Influence Of Music Backgrounds In Television Advertising. Journal of Applied Business Research, (1).]]. Brainwashing ads, however, immediately engage audiences whether they are at a high involvement level or not, and even promote consumption. During the

interviews, most of the respondents felt that rhythmic brainwashing ads like Honey Snow Ice City "make you sing along" and that the rhythm of the ad makes you buy. This is because, according to the author, rhythmic content can reduce the energy cost of receiving information and increase the audience's interest in the brand, even to the point of generating consumer interest.

In addition, we were surprised to find some brainwashing ads that quickly went viral due to their strong rhythm. When asked about the "first brainwashing ad I can think of right now", respondent 12 said "Heijiro" came to mind. When asked why, he said, "I saw a video on ShakeTV of someone doing a hand gesture dance to the soundtrack of that ad. I got involved in it and made one hahaha." Brainwashing commercials with a strong or distinctive sense of rhythm is more likely to trigger good brand associations and even inspire audiences to participate in the communication process and become "wild spokespeople" for the brand.

5.3 The sense of contrast reinforces audience goodwill

Analysis of the questionnaire data revealed that a whopping 89% of the sample had seen brainwashing commercials in the snack category, with the majority of respondents accurately recalling the contrasting episodes in the brainwashing commercials. "I remember the rainbow candy and giraffe brainwashing ad three times after a few seconds of rotation because it's so weird." So said interviewee 01. The contrast in the brainwashing advert dissolves the stereotypes of the audience, and at the same time gives them a novel audio-visual experience. As we can see, brainwashing ads are not only beneficial to brands that have just entered the market; for relatively mature brands or products, choosing brainwashing ads with a high sense of contrast can enrich the brand image, bring them closer to consumers, attract potential consumers and promote the conversion of their consumption behavior.

In addition, virtual characters have also become one of the trump cards of brainwashing advertising. Unlike ordinary beverages, which simply showcase the purity of the ingredients used, Honey Snow Ice City repeatedly uses avatars to capture the audience's attention quickly and accurately; successfully moving from a 'cheap' to a 'personable' image. interviewee number 4 said. "Because Snow King is so cute! I was so impressed with the brand." Similarly, nearly half of the respondents in the interview agreed that "health product advertisements use a loudspeaker-like approach, saying very bluntly what the effect of buying it is and that you are better after taking it." But Brain Power is going against the grain and responding to the demand of the elderly for "youthful, healthy products".

5.4 Limited impact of brainwashing advertising on consumer intentions

The core strategy of brainwashing advertisements is constant repetition, which uses high-intensity stimulation and repeated messages to attract consumers' attention and deepen their memory of the brand; however, it is worth noting that although repeated exposure of advertising

messages in brainwashing advertisements can strengthen the audience's memory of the brand, excessive or inappropriate repetition can sometimes trigger a rebellious mentality among the audience and damage the brand image. At the same time, brainwashing advertisements often adopt a narrative style with strong contrast and rhythm in their visual and aural presentation, giving people a strong visual and audio impact, and attracting the audience's attention by means of visual and audio violence. From an aesthetic point of view, this makes the aesthetics of the advertisements disappear, which further leads to a negative attitude towards the perception of the brand image by the audience.

In addition to this, the survey found that audiences' willingness to choose products in brainwashing advertisements varies depending on the cost of consumption, with the lower the cost of consumption, the higher the willingness to choose, and vice versa. Nearly a third of the respondents said that for products with low cost of consumption, such as snacks or a platform, they might prefer the products featured in the brainwashing advertisements; but for products with a higher cost of consumption, such as travel photography, they would choose them on balance. Respondent 01 said: "It depends on what the product is. If it's something low-cost, I'll buy it straight away because of the brainwashing ads. But if the amount is high or if it's important, I'll do more research and then choose." Therefore, this study concluded that the impact of brainwashing advertisements on consumption intentions cannot be generalized and should be broken down according to product category and consumption cost.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Research limitations

This study focuses on university students as the target group to explore the reasons for the strong communication effect of brainwashing advertisements on university students, who are only one of the main audiences of brainwashing advertisements and are not fully representative. In addition, due to the constraints of the study, only questionnaires and interviews were used to measure the audience's attention, and there was a lack of more precise and scientific experimental research on the "attention" variable, which has a certain impact on the objectivity of the research results.

6.2 Reflection

In the Internet era, the attention economy is particularly important. Brainwashing advertisements can, on the one hand, attract the audience's attention and increase their willingness to choose, but on the other hand, they have negative effects such as a lack of aesthetics and an impact on the brand image. In this paper, we investigate the motivation behind the powerful effect of brainwashing advertisements on university students and point out several

negative effects of brainwashing advertisements that deserve attention. However, due to the lack of knowledge, We do not have a comprehensive grasp of the relevant characteristics of brainwashing ads, and only point out that brainwashing ads have the characteristics of a "sense of contrast, repetition, and rhythm", which is not deep enough to analyze and may have certain shortcomings. In the future, We will continue to study and improve the study.

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