

Research on the Storytelling Marketing Strategy of Hidden Advertising on Xiaohongshu

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Abstract: With the rapid development of social media, Xiaohongshu has become an important marketing platform, and hidden advertising has also emerged on it. This research deeply explores the storytelling marketing strategy of hidden advertising on Xiaohongshu, analyzes its presentation forms and strategic elements, reveals the existing problems and challenges, and puts forward optimization suggestions. Through this research, it aims to uncover the internal mechanism of the storytelling marketing of hidden advertising, provide effective strategies for marketing practices, offer references for platform regulations, and promote the healthy development of the Xiaohongshu platform. At the same time, it also hopes to supplement new theoretical perspectives for academic research in related fields, enrich the content system of social media marketing research, and drive the continuous progress of research in this field.

Keywords: Xiaohongshu; Hidden Advertising; Storytelling Marketing; Strategy Research; Platform Regulations

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background Development Status and Characteristics of the Xiaohongshu Platform

Xiaohongshu is a social platform dedicated to sharing lifestyles. Since its establishment in 2013, it has developed rapidly. Up to now, it has a huge user base covering various age groups and consumption fields, and has become an important place for young people to obtain lifestyle information, shopping recommendations, and social interactions. Xiaohongshu has remarkable characteristics. It attracts users with rich and diverse content forms such as pictures, texts, and videos, and emphasizes authentic sharing and user-generated content (UGC). Users can form a unique

consumption culture through "planting grass" (sharing good products) and "pulling grass" (purchasing recommended products). At the same time, the platform, based on algorithmic recommendations, accurately pushes content that meets users' interests, greatly improving the information dissemination efficiency. For example, content in fields such as beauty, fashion, and food is highly popular among users, and the popularity of related topics continues to rise, making it a popular position for brands and merchants to conduct marketing and promotion.

The Evolution of Advertising Marketing on Xiaohongshu and the Rise of Hidden Advertising

The advertising marketing on Xiaohongshu has evolved from traditional hard-selling advertisements to soft-selling advertisements, and then to hidden advertisements. In the early stage, the platform mainly focused on forms such as brand cooperation advertisements and official promotions. With the change in users' acceptance of advertisements, soft-selling advertisements gradually emerged, such as influencer recommendations and product trial reports. In recent years, hidden advertisements have become popular. That is, brands or creators implant advertising content in the form of seemingly ordinary sharing without directly indicating the advertising nature. The reason for this evolution is that consumers have become more vigilant against advertisements, and the effects of traditional advertising forms are limited. The rise of hidden advertising allows brands to promote products more covertly, but it also triggers a series of problems, such as consumers' doubts about the authenticity of the content. For example, some skincare brands promote new products through users' "good product sharing" notes without obvious advertising marks. Although it increases the product's exposure, it also causes some users to doubt its authenticity, believing that there may be exaggeration or false recommendations.

1.2 Research Objectives and Significance

Revealing the Internal Mechanism of the Storytelling Marketing Strategy of Hidden Advertising

Deeply analyze how hidden advertising attracts consumers through storytelling marketing, and study how story elements affect consumers' cognition, emotions, and behavioral decisions. For example, storytelling marketing can make consumers more easily immerse themselves in roles by constructing vivid plots and scenarios, thus enhancing their sense of identity with the product. By analyzing the psychological change process of consumers when they are exposed to hidden advertising stories, such as the stages of attention attraction, interest stimulation, and trust building, this research reveals the working principle of storytelling marketing in hidden advertising, providing a theoretical basis for marketers to more accurately apply the storytelling marketing strategy.

Providing References for Marketing Practices and Platform Regulations

In terms of marketing practices, it helps brands and creators optimize the storytelling marketing strategy of hidden advertising and improve marketing effectiveness. Through the analysis and summary of successful cases, it extracts experiences that can be learned, such as how to select appropriate story themes, create attractive content, and match effective visual elements. At the same time, in response to the problems existing in hidden advertising, such as authenticity issues and platform supervision dilemmas, corresponding regulatory suggestions are put forward, which is helpful for the platform to formulate more reasonable policies, balance commercial interests and user experiences, and maintain a good platform ecosystem. For example, it provides guidelines for brands and creators on honest marketing, guiding them to follow the principle of authenticity in story creation, avoiding overmarketing and false propaganda. It also provides references for the platform to strengthen content review and improve the supervision mechanism, protecting consumers' rights and interests.

2. Theoretical Basis and Literature Review

2.1 Theories Related to Storytelling Marketing

Storytelling marketing is a marketing method

that integrates brand information into attractive stories. Through the dissemination of stories, it triggers emotional resonance among consumers, thereby influencing their purchasing decisions. It is not just about telling a story, but also about transmitting brand values, shaping brand images, and establishing an emotional connection between the brand and consumers. Stories can transform abstract product features into vivid scenarios, making it easier for consumers to understand and accept.

Stories can attract consumers' attention and immerse them in the plot. In this process, consumers will generate emotional resonance based on the characters, plots, and scenarios in the story, such as joy, sympathy, and curiosity. This emotional resonance will enhance consumers' sense of identity with the brand or product, and then affect their purchasing intention. In addition, stories can also serve as a carrier for information transmission, helping consumers better understand the functions, features, and usage methods of products, reducing the sense of risk in purchasing decisions^[1].

2.2 Research Status of Marketing on Xiaohongshu

Research on the Marketing Model and Characteristics of the Xiaohongshu Platform

The marketing model of Xiaohongshu is mainly based on UGC content sharing and social interaction. Brands cooperate with influencers, and influencers release real-life product usage experiences and recommendations to attract users' attention and purchases. The characteristics of the platform include accurate algorithmic recommendations, which can push relevant content to interested users; rich content forms, such as pictures, texts, and videos, to meet the consumption habits of different users; and a strong community atmosphere, with high interaction and trust levels among users, forming a unique "planting grass" culture. However, existing research has insufficient analysis of the differences in the application effects of the Xiaohongshu marketing model in different industries and product types, and lacks in-depth exploration of the impact of the platform's algorithmic recommendation mechanism on marketing effectiveness.

Previous Discussions and Limitations on Advertising Marketing on Xiaohongshu

Previous research has classified and analyzed

the advertising marketing forms on Xiaohongshu to a certain extent, such as brand cooperation advertisements and influencer promotions. However, there is relatively little and insufficient in-depth research on the emerging hidden advertising form. When discussing the advertising marketing effect, it mostly measures from surface indicators such as exposure volume and the number of likes, lacking research on consumers' deep-level psychological and behavioral changes, as well as the evaluation of the long-term effect and sustainability of advertising marketing^[2].

2.3 Review of Hidden Advertising Research

Definition and Feature Definition of Hidden Advertising

Hidden advertising refers to the act of brands or creators implanting advertising information in content in a covert way without directly indicating the advertising nature. Its characteristics include disguise, that is, it seems like ordinary sharing content but actually contains advertising intentions; misleading, which can easily make consumers accept advertising information without being aware of it; and transmissibility, which can spread rapidly through the platform's social attributes and user sharing mechanisms.

The Spread and Controversies of Hidden Advertising on Social Media

Hidden advertising spreads quickly on social media and can rapidly expand through users' social relationship chains. However, it also causes many controversies, such as undermining consumers' right to know, destroying the authenticity of the platform's content ecosystem, and triggering trust crises among users towards the platform and brands. However, existing research has insufficient analysis of the differences in the spread laws of hidden advertising on different social media platforms, and there is little research on how to balance the commercial value of hidden advertising and users' rights and interests.

3. Presentation Forms of the Storytelling Marketing of Hidden Advertising on Xiaohongshu

3.1 Life Scene Integrated Stories

Creators depict daily life scenes, such as morning skincare routines, weekend travel preparations, etc., and naturally integrate

products into them. For example, in a note titled "An Efficient Morning for Office Workers", the creator shows how to use a certain brand's facial cleanser, skin care products, and cosmetics in a busy morning, making readers feel as if they are in the same scene, enhancing the credibility and sense of immersion of the content.

In the construction of the scene, the product is closely connected with the plot. Taking the promotion of household items as an example, in the story of "Creating a Cozy Little Home", the creator tells how to decorate the room. When describing the decoration process, the creator naturally mentions the bedding, decorations, etc. of a certain brand used. The product becomes a part of promoting the plot, rather than a blunt implant.

3.2 Personal Experience Narrative Stories

Creators base on their own personal experiences and share the whole process of using the product. For example, in the promotion of weight-loss products, the creator details the weight-loss journey, from the initial distress, the failure of trying various methods, to the effect changes after using a certain weight-loss product. From the first person perspective, readers can have a stronger sense of empathy, increasing the authenticity of the story.

By sharing the joys and sorrows in personal experiences, creators establish an emotional resonance with readers. When telling the story of skin allergies and the use of a certain repair product, the creator expresses the pain, anxiety during the allergic period, as well as the surprise and gratitude after using the product. This makes readers emotionally connected with the creator, thus establishing trust in the recommended product^[3].

3.3 Character Shaping and Interactive Stories

Create unique characters for brands or products, endowing them with personalities and characteristics. For example, a pet food brand creates a cute and lively pet image in hidden advertising. Through the daily interesting stories of the pet, it shows the pet's health and happiness after using the brand's food, making consumers have a favorable impression of the brand.

Creators encourage users to participate in comments and sharing by asking questions, initiating topic discussions, or setting up interactive links. In a hidden advertisement for

recommending a tourist destination, the creator asks readers at the end whether they have similar travel experiences or are interested in the recommended place, triggering user interaction and increasing users' attention and participation in the story.

4. Strategic Elements of the Storytelling Marketing of Hidden Advertising on Xiaohongshu

4.1 Story Theme Planning

Fit the Interests and Needs of the Target Audience

Deeply understand the interests, lifestyles, and consumption pain points of the target audience, and select story themes related to them. For example, for young female consumers, themes such as fashion styling, beauty and skincare, and emotional life are more likely to attract their attention; for fitness enthusiasts, themes such as sports challenges and healthy diets are more appealing.

Highlight the Core Value and Unique Selling Points of the Product

Integrate the core value and unique selling points of the product into the story theme. If it is a skincare product with high efficiency moisturizing function, the story theme can revolve around "The Secret to Hydrated Skin", highlighting the excellent moisturizing effect of the product and its differential advantages compared with other similar products.

4.2 Content Creation Skills

Attractiveness and Coherence of Plot Design

Create attractive plots, set up suspense, conflicts, or surprises to make the story fascinating. For example, in the story of a food-tasting tour, first describe the anticipation for the restaurant and the small twists and turns on the way, then the amazement when tasting the food, and finally share the story or culture behind the food. The plot is coherent and full of fun, attracting readers to continue reading^[4].

Intimacy and appeal of Language Style

Adopt an intimate, natural, and colloquial language style to narrow the distance with readers. Use vivid adjectives, vivid metaphors, and emotionally rich expressions to enhance the appeal of the content. For example, when recommending a perfume, use a description like "This perfume is like a gentle breeze in spring, gently caressing your heart, bringing a touch of

freshness and sweetness", making it easier for readers to associate and resonate emotionally.

4.3 Visual Element Matching

Selection and Processing of Pictures and Videos

Select high-quality, clear pictures or videos related to the story content. Appropriately adjust the color, crop, and label the pictures to highlight product details and key information; for videos, pay attention to the editing rhythm and picture stability to ensure good visual effects. For example, when promoting an electronic product, take multi-angle pictures of the product's appearance, shoot function demonstration videos, and show pictures of users' actual usage scenarios, so that consumers can have a more comprehensive understanding of the product.

The Creation of Story Atmosphere by Visual Effects

According to the story theme and emotional tone, select appropriate visual elements to create an atmosphere. If it is a recommendation for a romantic date makeup look, the color tone of the pictures and videos can be inclined towards soft and warm pink, with a warm lighting effect, enhancing the romantic atmosphere of the story and allowing readers to better immerse themselves in the story scene.

5. Problems and Challenges of the Storytelling Marketing Strategy of Hidden Advertising on Xiaohongshu

5.1 Authenticity and Integrity Crisis

Phenomena of Over-Packaging and False Stories

Some creators, in pursuit of commercial interests, exaggerate product effects and fabricate false usage experiences and stories. For example, some weight-loss products claim that users can lose ten pounds in a week, but the actual effect is far from that; some skincare products claim to be able to instantly eliminate wrinkles, which is clearly contrary to scientific common sense. Such over-packaging and false stories seriously damage consumers' interests.

The Damage to User Trust and Its Consequences

Damaging user trust has serious consequences. Users will reduce the use of the product or service and turn to competitors. Through word-of-mouth communication, potential

customers will also be lost. Once trust is damaged, it is difficult to rebuild, and a large amount of cost is required to recover it. In the long run, the brand image will collapse, the market share will decline, posing a major threat to sustainable development.

5.2 Platform Supervision and Regulation Dilemmas

Deficiencies in Existing Supervision Policies and Measures

The current supervision policies of the Xiaohongshu platform have certain difficulties in identifying and dealing with hidden advertising. The concealment of hidden advertising makes it difficult to be completely detected by traditional supervision means. Some illegal content may continue to spread for a certain period of time, affecting the quality of platform content. At the same time, the punishment for illegal creators and brands is not severe enough to form an effective deterrent^[5].

Difficulties in Balancing Commercial Marketing and User Experience

The platform needs to find a balance between meeting the commercial marketing needs of brands and ensuring a good user experience. On the one hand, excessive restrictions on advertising may affect the platform's commercial revenue and development; on the other hand, too many hidden advertisements and low-quality marketing content will reduce user satisfaction. How to formulate reasonable rules that can regulate advertising marketing behavior and ensure that users can obtain real and valuable content is one of the challenges faced by the platform.

5.3 Audience Aesthetic Fatigue and Immunity Homogenization of Storytelling Marketing

With the popularity of the storytelling marketing of hidden advertising, many story contents and forms tend to be similar and lack innovation. For example, in the recommendation of tourist destinations, most are stereotypical beauty displays and regular itinerary introductions; in the promotion of beauty products, similar trial experiences and before-and-after comparisons are often used. This homogenization phenomenon is likely to cause aesthetic fatigue among the audience and reduce the marketing effect.

The Improvement of Consumers' Ability to Identify Hidden Advertising

After being exposed to a large number of hidden advertisements, consumers have gradually improved their ability to identify them and can more acutely perceive the advertising intentions in stories. Once consumers identify hidden advertising, they may have a negative attitude towards the content and are no longer easily influenced by the story, thus weakening the marketing effect of hidden advertising.

6. Suggestions for Optimizing the Storytelling Marketing Strategy of Hidden Advertising on Xiaohongshu

6.1 Strengthen the Self-Discipline of Brands and Creators

Establish Honest Marketing Guidelines and Norms

Brands and creators should jointly formulate and abide by honest marketing guidelines, clearly prohibiting false propaganda, over-packaging, and other behaviors. Establish an internal review mechanism to strictly review the content to be released, ensuring that the story content truly and objectively reflects the product features and usage effects. For example, require creators to provide real usage evidence when recommending products, such as indicating the shooting time and usage period for before-and-after comparison photos.

Improve the Authenticity and Quality Control of Story Creation

Encourage creators to deeply experience products, explore the real value of products, and create stories from the perspective of consumers. Pay attention to the depth and connotation of the story content, and avoid empty and exaggerated expressions. Through training and learning, improve creators' story-creating abilities, making the stories more attractive and appeal while maintaining authenticity.

6.2 Improve the Platform Supervision Mechanism

Strengthen Content Review and the Application of Intelligent Recognition Technology

The Xiaohongshu platform should increase the intensity of content review, add professional reviewers, and improve review efficiency. At the same time, use artificial intelligence technology to develop an intelligent recognition system to accurately identify hidden advertising content. For example, by analyzing multi-dimensional

data such as text semantics, picture features, and video content, automatically judge whether the content has advertising suspicion, and promptly discover and handle illegal hidden advertisements.

Formulate Clear Hidden Advertising Identification and Disclosure Rules

Require creators to clearly mark the advertising nature when publishing content containing hidden advertising, such as using tags like "#Advertisement" or "#Cooperation", so that consumers can clearly know that it is advertising content before reading the story. At the same time, formulate detailed disclosure rules, stipulating that creators need to disclose their cooperation relationship with the brand and product - related interest information at an appropriate position in the story to protect consumers' right to know.

6.3 Innovative Marketing Techniques and Content

Explore Diverse Story Themes and Forms

Encourage creators to break through traditional story themes and forms, and combine current social hot-topics, cultural trends, and changes in consumers' interests to explore novel story materials. For example, integrate the concept of environmental protection into product promotion stories, or use emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to bring users brand-new story experiences, attracting consumers' attention and stimulating their desire to share.

Combine Emerging Technologies and Trendy Trends

Pay attention to the development of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big - data analysis, and use these technologies to achieve more accurate user positioning and personalized marketing. At the same time, keep up with the trend in fashion, entertainment, technology and other fields, and integrate popular elements into hidden advertising stories to make the story content more contemporary and appealing. For example, when promoting electronic products, you can combine the current popular e - sports culture or smart home trends to create story content with high topicality.

7. Conclusions and Prospects

7.1 Research Summary

The main features of the storytelling marketing

strategy of hidden advertisements on Xiaohongshu include diverse presentation forms, such as life-scene-integrated, personal-experience-narrative, and character-shaping and interactive stories. These forms can skillfully integrate product information into captivating stories, attracting consumers' attention. In terms of strategic elements, it emphasizes the fit between story themes and the target audience. By carefully designing plots, using an intimate language style, and matching appropriate visual elements, it enhances the attractiveness and appeal of the stories. These strategies have, to a certain extent, increased product exposure and consumers' purchase intentions, promoting brand promotion and sales growth. For example, many niche brands have achieved high popularity and market share through the storytelling marketing of hidden advertisements on Xiaohongshu.

The discoveries and innovations of this research lie in deeply analyzing the impact mechanism of storytelling marketing of hidden advertisements on consumers' psychology and behavior, revealing how story elements play a role in the consumer decision-making process. At the same time, it comprehensively analyzes the existing problems in the storytelling marketing strategy of hidden advertisements on Xiaohongshu and puts forward targeted optimization suggestions, including strengthening the self-discipline of brands and creators, improving the platform supervision mechanism, and innovating marketing techniques and content. These suggestions provide new ideas and methods for solving the current challenges faced by hidden advertising marketing.

7.2 Research Prospects

With the continuous development of social media technology and changes in user behavior, hidden advertising strategies will face new challenges and opportunities. For example, adjustments to social media platform algorithms may affect the exposure and dissemination effects of hidden advertisements; users' increasing demands for privacy protection and content authenticity may prompt further evolution of the forms and content of hidden advertisements. Future research can focus on these changes and deeply explore how to adapt to the new marketing environment and optimize hidden advertising strategies.

In the future, further research can be conducted

on the differences in the application effects of hidden advertisements in different industries and product types, and on how to formulate more targeted storytelling marketing strategies for hidden advertisements according to product characteristics. At the same time, long-term follow-up research can be carried out on consumers' acceptance and attitude changes towards hidden advertisements to deeply understand the trend of consumers' psychological changes and provide a basis for the continuous optimization of marketing strategies. In addition, research can also be conducted on how to strengthen cross - platform supervision and regulation of hidden advertisements, establish unified industry standards, and promote the healthy development of social media marketing.

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