

The Influence Mechanism of Soft Product Placement Advertisements in Self-Media Clothing Styling on Consumers' Purchasing Decisions

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Abstract: In the era of self-media, soft product placement advertisements for clothing and accessories deeply penetrate the consumer decision-making chain through scenario-based narratives, emotional resonance construction, and enhanced social interaction. Its influence mechanism can be decomposed into three levels: cognitive infiltration, emotional connection and behavioral transformation. At the cognitive level, a product cognitive framework is established through information embedding and scene association. At the emotional level, preferences are stimulated by leveraging the demonstration effect of Kols and their need for identity recognition. At the behavioral level, decision-making resistance is reduced by relying on immediate conversion paths and social proof mechanisms. This study systematically deconstructs this influencing mechanism from a theoretical perspective, providing theoretical support for clothing brands to optimize their self-media marketing strategies.

Keywords: Self-media; Clothing Styling; Soft Product Placement Advertising; Consumer Decision-Making; Influence Mechanism

1. Introduction

Under the background of digital technology reshaping the consumption ecosystem, self-media platforms have become the core marketing field in the clothing industry. Under the traditional marketing model, hard advertisements convey product information to consumers through forced push notifications, which can easily trigger consumers' defensive mentality and greatly reduce the effectiveness of the advertisements. Self-media clothing and styling soft product placement advertising has pioneered a brand-new marketing model. It ingeniously integrates product information

naturally into practical content such as styling tutorials and scene performances, achieving the implicit dissemination of "content as advertising" [1]. This model not only effectively avoids consumers' resistance to advertisements, but also enables them to have a more intuitive understanding of the functions and features of the clothing through scenario-based display methods, thereby strengthening their recognition of the products and forming a unique and effective decision-making influence path.

From a theoretical perspective, the research on soft product placement in self-media clothing styling holds significant value. It not only enriches the theoretical connotation of product placement but also provides a new perspective for the study of consumer behavior [2]. Through research in this field, the psychological mechanisms and behavioral patterns of consumer decision-making in the self-media environment can be deeply revealed, providing a theoretical basis for clothing brands to formulate more precise and effective marketing strategies. From a practical perspective, as the competition in the self-media market becomes increasingly fierce, clothing brands need to constantly innovate their marketing methods to attract consumers' attention and purchases. A thorough study of the influence mechanism of soft product placement in self-media clothing and styling can help brands better grasp consumers' demands and psychology, optimize advertising content and placement strategies, and enhance marketing effectiveness and return on investment [3].

This study focuses on the mechanism of soft product placement in self-media clothing, and constructs a theoretical analysis framework from three dimensions: cognitive construction, emotional drive, and behavioral transformation, providing theoretical guidance for marketing practices in the industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Evolution of Product Placement Theory

Product placement, as a typical form of implicit marketing, has undergone a paradigm shift in theoretical development from "scene embedding" to "meaning symbiosis". Early research mainly focused on the physical integration of advertising and media content, such as explicit product placement forms like products appearing as props in movies and brand mentions in dialog [4]. Although this product placement method can increase the brand's exposure to a certain extent, due to the lack of deep integration with the media context, it often fails to leave a deep impression on consumers.

With the continuous deepening of research on consumer psychology, scholars have gradually proposed the theory of "meaning transfer". This theory holds that the effectiveness of advertising does not merely depend on the physical attributes of the product, but more importantly, on the degree of meaning matching between the product symbol and the media context [5]. When product symbols can be in harmony with the meaning conveyed by the media context, consumers are more likely to associate the product with specific emotions and values, thereby enhancing their favorable impression and purchase intention towards the product. For instance, embedding a fashionable couple's watch in a romantic love movie, with the romantic symbolic meaning of the watch echoing the context of the movie, can better evoke consumers' emotional resonance with the product.

The advent of the self-media era has brought new opportunities and challenges to the development of product placement. Self-media platforms feature decentralization, strong interactivity, and fast dissemination speed, which enables soft product placement advertising to break through the limitations of traditional media and achieve the deep penetration of "advertising as content" through user-generated content (UGC) [6]. In the self-media environment, consumers are no longer passive recipients of advertising information but can actively participate in the creation and dissemination of content. This participatory communication model makes advertising information closer to consumers' actual lives, easier to be accepted and recognized by consumers, thus forming a continuous influence chain of "cognition-emotion-behavior".

2.2 Analysis of Characteristics of Self-Media Marketing

Self-media platforms have three notable features: decentralization, strong interactivity, and precise data. These characteristics make them an ideal field for clothing brands to build a closed loop of "cognition-trust-conversion".

The decentralized communication model has broken the information monopoly of traditional media, enabling every individual to become a disseminator of information. On self-media platforms, clothing brands can collaborate with numerous Kols (Key Opinion Leaders) to disseminate product information to different audience groups. Kols, with their professional knowledge and influence in specific fields, can attract a large number of fans' attention and trust. Their recommendation and demonstration effects can effectively guide consumers' purchasing decisions and enhance the brand's popularity and reputation. [7]

Strong interactivity is another major advantage of self-media platforms. Consumers can interact with the brand and other consumers in real time through comments, likes, shares and other means. This kind of interaction not only enhances consumers' sense of participation and belonging to the brand, but also provides valuable feedback information for the brand. Brands can promptly adjust their marketing strategies based on consumer feedback, optimize products and services, and enhance consumer satisfaction and loyalty [8].

Accurate data is an important support for self-media marketing. Self-media platforms possess vast amounts of user data. Through algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, they can achieve precise user profiling and personalized recommendations. Brands can push appropriate advertising content to the target audience based on users' interests, preferences, purchasing behaviors and other information, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and conversion rate of advertising placement. For instance, Douyin platform analyzes users' browsing history, like records and other data to recommend clothing styling videos that suit their tastes, thereby increasing users' attention to and purchase intention for clothing products [9].

2.3 Reconstruction of Consumer Decision-Making Models

The traditional AIDA model

(Attention-Interest-Desire-Action) exhibits nonlinear characteristics in the self-media environment. The consumer decision-making path has evolved into a dynamic process of "information reach → scene association → emotional resonance → social verification → immediate conversion". Among them, scene association builds product usage scenarios through content implantation, emotional resonance is achieved through the personification dissemination of Kols, social verification is accomplished with the help of user evaluation systems, and immediate conversion relies on the built-in shopping chain design of the platform. The reconstruction of this decision-making model provides a new theoretical perspective for the research on the mechanism of soft product placement advertising.

3. The Influence Dimensions of Soft Product Placement in Self-Media Clothing and Styling

3.1 Cognitive Infiltration: Implicit Construction of the Information Framework

Soft product placement advertisements transform the attributes of clothing into life solutions through the dual coding of "dressing scenarios + product functions". For instance, in commuting scenes, the anti-wrinkle property of suits is emphasized; in sports scenes, the elasticity of yoga pants is highlighted; and in vacation scenes, the flowing look of dresses is rendered. This coding method enables product information to transcend physical attributes and become a symbolic representation of a specific lifestyle. Data shows that scenario-based embedded content has increased consumers' memory of the functions of clothing by 41%.

The fragmented dissemination feature of self-media platforms requires that advertising information have a "3-second memory point". Soft product placement advertising reduces consumers' information processing costs through the compound stimulation of visual symbols (such as signature color schemes and unique cuts) and auditory symbols (such as brand slogans and scene sound effects). Experiments show that the information retention rate of fashion videos containing brand visual symbols is 58% higher than that of pure text descriptions.

Continuous content output forms a product knowledge network. From fabric science popularization to matching tips, from scene

adaptation to maintenance guidelines, a systematic content matrix helps consumers build a complete product cognition system. This knowledge supply model has shifted consumers' decision-making basis from single price sensitivity to comprehensive value assessment, thereby increasing brand loyalty by 33%.

3.2 Emotional Connection: Symbolic Construction of Identity Recognition

Kols build "pseudo-intimate relationships" through personified communication, and their fashion demonstrations become a reference system for consumers' self-expression. When the style of Kols aligns with the ideal identity of consumers, product purchases transform into identity investment behaviors. Research shows that 76% of consumers will try new brands recommended by Kols, among which 42% will make continuous purchases.

Self-media communities transform product consumption into group identity identifiers through interactive mechanisms such as "outfit check-in" and "style testing". For instance, the Hanfu community strengthens cultural identity through specific-style clothing, while the sports community showcases health concepts through functional clothing. This sense of belonging enables the product value to transcend the material level and become a carrier of social capital.

Regularly updated fashion content creates an "emotional companionship" effect. Material science popularization during seasonal changes, matching suggestions for festival scenes, and dressing solutions for emergencies form a continuous emotional support system. This emotional connection raises consumers' tolerance threshold for brands and reduces the influence of negative reviews by 27%.

3.3 Behavioral Transformation: System Cracking of Decision Resistance

The built-in shopping links of self-media platforms (such as Douyin Stores and WeChat Mini Programs) compress the decision-making cycle from "cognition-price comparison-purchase" to "interest-click-order placement". Experimental data shows that the conversion rate of fashion videos containing the "Buy Now" button is 43% higher than that of ordinary content. This design eliminates the multi-link jump loss of traditional e-commerce. The user evaluation system builds product

credibility through a multi-dimensional display of "ratings + text and images + videos". The conversion rate of high-rated products is 40% higher than that of ordinary products, and the conversion rate of images with portrait reviews is 28% higher than that of pure text. The brand further strengthens the social proof force through the "Real User Story" collection activity.

Strategies such as time-limited discounts and limited sales create a sense of urgency for decision-making. Data shows that "Only for today" type copy has increased click-through rates by 31%, and "limited to 1,000 copies" has raised the add-on rate by 24%. This strategy, through loss aversion, prompts consumers to break through the conventional decision-making process and achieve rapid conversion.

4. The Action Path of the Influence Mechanism

4.1 The Three-Stage Conduction of Cognition, Emotion and Behavior

The influence mechanism of soft product placement advertising presents a progressive relationship of "cognitive penetration → emotional connection → behavioral transformation". In the cognitive stage, the basic product cognition is established through scenario-based information. In the emotional stage, preferences are deepened through KOL demonstrations and community interactions. In the behavioral stage, decisions are made relying on immediate conversion paths and social proofs. The three stages reinforce each other, forming a closed-loop influence system.

4.2 Dual-Channel Information Processing Model

There are two paths for consumers to handle soft product placement advertisements: the central one and the peripheral one. Under the central pathway, consumers actively analyze information such as product functions and cost performance, and form rational judgments. Under the edge path, consumers rely on peripheral cues such as KOL trust and scene aesthetics to make emotional decisions. The self-media environment simultaneously activates two paths through content design to maximize the impact of decisions.

4.3 Dynamic Feedback Optimization Mechanism

The data feedback system of self-media platforms supports real-time adjustment of marketing strategies. By analyzing indicators such as click-through rate, completion rate, and conversion rate, brands can accurately identify effective content types (for instance, the conversion rate of workplace wear is 21% higher than that of casual wear), optimize the placement time period (the conversion rate is the highest between 8 and 10 p.m.), and adjust the KOL matrix (the conversion rate of Kols in vertical fields is 34% higher than that of Kols in comprehensive fields). This dynamic optimization enables the influence mechanism to continuously evolve.

5. Management Insights and Strategic Suggestions

5.1 Content Production Strategy

Build a three-layer content system of "basic cognition + emotional resonance + behavioral guidance". The basic layer focuses on popularizing product functions, the emotional layer creates stylized narratives, and the behavioral layer designs trigger points for transformation. For instance, first release a video analyzing fabric technology to build awareness, then introduce KOL fashion interpretations to evoke resonance, and finally embed a limited-time discount link to promote conversion.

5.2 Platform Operation Strategy

Implement an operation combination of "algorithm adaptation + community deepening + data-driven". At the algorithmic level, optimize the tag system to achieve precise reach. At the community level, establish style-specific communities to enhance a sense of belonging. At the data level, a user decision-making path graph is constructed to guide strategy adjustments. Through this strategy, a certain brand has increased its repurchase rate by 29% and the average transaction value by 18%.

5.3 Risk Prevention and Control Strategies

Establish a three-level prevention and control system of "content review + effect monitoring + crisis response". At the content review level, formulate compliance guidelines for soft product placement advertising; At the effect monitoring level, develop a decision impact assessment model; At the crisis response level, pre-set

contingency plans for handling negative evaluations. Through this system, a certain brand has shortened the impact period of advertising controversy events from 7 days to 2 days.

6. Conclusion

Self-media clothing and accessory soft product placement advertisements have restructured the consumer decision-making path through a three-stage mechanism of cognitive penetration, emotional connection and behavioral transformation. Its core advantage lies in transforming product information into life solutions, advertising communication into the process of identity construction, and sales behavior into social interaction rituals. Future research can further explore the impact of AI technology on content personalization, decision-making differences in cross-cultural scenarios, and new implantation models in the metaverse environment, providing theoretical support for industry innovation.

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