

Research on the Use of Social Media to Grasp Consumers' Psychology and Create Traffic: A Case Study of Brandy Melville

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Abstract. In recent years, Brandy Melville (Hereinafter referred to as BM), an Italian clothing brand, has gained popularity in mainland China because of the style of its slim tops and skirts, which echos the “freedom to dress” speech that has been popular in recent years. However, BM only produces one size and only girls who are thin enough can wear it. This makes other girls feel that their bodies are not recognized. Therefore, BM is also known as the “creator of body anxiety”. Nevertheless, wearing BM has become a hint to prove one’s “good figure”, and BM’s marketing strategy also cleverly utilizes consumers’ vanity to achieve the purpose of marketing itself. So even though there are a lot of critical comments, BM is still gaining popularity from the public. The purpose of this case study is to explore how Brandy Melville grasps consumers’ psychology and controls their emotions, and how it takes advantage of hot comments and critical comments to build its own image and drive consumers to buy. Through the case study of Brandy Melville and the interview with its audience and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), this paper aims to find out how social media is used to influence and guide the public’s psychology and emotions. Results show that social media can be used to build the brand image, lead the fashion trend, echo hot topics, and create public sentiment to grasp consumer’s psychology and create traffic.

1 Introduction

Today, people are living in a consumer society, where consumers’ desire to buy is constantly stimulated for the market expansion and pursuit of profits [1]. O2O (online to offline) came into being, making the Internet a platform for offline transactions [7]. In this situation, fast fashion brands influence and attract female groups through Internet marketing, and gain benefits by controlling female body desire [1][2]—the desire of consumers to create personal identity through fashion consumption [3]. Fast fashion brands are committed to using the Internet to explore female desire, lead female trends, and indirectly attract women to buy [4]. In East Asia, the aesthetic of “white, thin, and young” occupies a dominant position. In China, white is regarded as beauty since ancient times, and the delicate figure and harmless young face are even more popular [5]. Capital quickly captures the marketing trend of body anxiety, shaping and exacerbating the aesthetic trend of “white, thin, and young”, which has become a “perfect” norm and aesthetic standard [5]. Young women are sensitive to the aesthetic standards portrayed on social media. They are led by blind conformity and are easily to be attracted by the figure or dress of celebrities and influencers of social media [4]. Meanwhile, with the support of fan economy, bloggers start to compete for data traffic and hot topics, and make use of their fan effect by adding specific tags [6]. Brandy Melville promotes the high quality content of self-shaping “thin and white” body

on the online social platform, and achieves accurate matching through big data, thus harvesting traffic dividends [5]. This paper takes Brandy Melville as an example to explore its media marketing strategies, thereby making reference for similar brands to promote themselves in mainland China.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Participants

The author conducts interviews from two different groups of interviewee: KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) and consumers. From KOLs, it can be known whether they have enjoyed the dividends brought by “BM wind”, and how to use the BM trend to attract the public’s attention. From consumers, their emotional feelings and psychological cognition of BM style, as well as BM’s influence on their consumption behavior can be known. All the KOLs and consumers will be connected from the Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and WeChat, because these three platforms currently have the largest number of mainland users [7], and the interviewees from these platforms are more representative. The demographics of participants are shown in Table 1.

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Table 1. Demographics of participants.

Participants (only surname or screen name)	Gen der	Age	Length of Use Year	Type of Interviewees Consulted (for whom)
Li	F	26	4	consumer
Gao	F	30	3.5	consumer
Huang	F	22	3	consumer
Greenie	F	25	4	KOL
Xu	F	19	2	KOL

2.2 Research Design

This paper uses qualitative research, and the main methods are case study and interview. Because fast fashion brands mainly use consumers' psychology and emotions to carry out social media marketing, a case study (BM as an example) is the most clear and direct way to give readers an object to think and analyze, and can provide detailed information about individuals. However, this paper focuses on the analysis of consumers' emotions and psychology, and there are great subjective differences among individual consumers. However, the conclusion obtained by using the case study only is too theoretical and easy to deviate from the actual situation, and it is difficult to be extended in depth. Therefore, an interview will be analyzed together with the case study in the form of thematic divisions. The interview questions are designed as follows:

To KOLs:

1. What is your general opinion on BM style?
2. Have you ever enjoyed the dividends brought by "BM style"? What way does BM use to attract traffic?
3. What do you think about BM's creating body anxiety? Do you ever feel body anxiety from BM style? If so, will such negative emotions motivate you to buy BM and strive for identity, or will you choose to boycott it directly?

To Consumers:

1. What is your general opinion on BM style?
2. How does the "BM style" notes on social platforms affect your mood? (Does it make you want to follow or does it cause body anxiety and disgust?)
3. What do you think about "BM style" creating body anxiety? Do you ever feel body anxiety from BM style? If so, will such negative emotions motivate you to buy BM and strive for identity, or will you choose to boycott it directly?
4. Will you try BM because of the blogger's promotion (influenced by marketing)?

Above are the preliminary basic interview questions. To better understand the interviewees' emotions and psychology, extra questions may be added based on the communication with the interviewees and their thoughts. The way to gratitude these interviewees will be inviting them to the Suzhou hotel/restaurant for free experience (it is easy to get these experience because of the author's work), so as to motivate and appreciate interviewees to participate in the survey and actively express their feelings.

3 Results and Analysis

From the above case study and interview, the findings will be analyzed through four aspects: the image building, fashion trend leading, hot topic echoing, and public sentiment creation.

3.1 Building Image

BM adheres to the slogan "one size fits all" and gives girls who fit into BM an honor of showing off their body. This has given BM an image of only suitable for thin girls. As Li and Huang (the consumer) said: "It is suitable for girls with a good shape. For the girls who are not thin enough, it is quite unfriendly. Taking my friend who is a bit fat as an example, she cannot find even one suitable dress in BM. Sometimes, wearing a BM makes me feel that I am in a good shape, and that feeling makes me happy."

"This brand gives me a feeling that I am proved to be thin enough if I can wear it or dress it well. Cause we all subconsciously think that BM is only for thin and young girls, and these two elements are the basic of being a beauty for most of the people. So wearing BM makes me feel good."

By insanely implying that "women who can fit into BM are attractive girls", more and more girls join in the practice of wearing BM under this ideology, thus feeling the self-identity they pursue through this purchase behavior [8]. This has also deepened the "white, thin, and young" aesthetic bias.

As Li admitted: "As more friends praised me like 'you are so thin!' when I wear BM, honestly I feel quite happy. This makes me have a feeling of closeness to this brand, which prompts me to buy more clothes in this style...I was not a pursuers of 'white, thin, and young' aesthetic before, but after I tried this BM style and found that I am quite suitable for it, I started to pay close attention to it and gradually fell in love with it. I still think it is not the only aesthetic standard, but for me, it becomes the first standard."

3.2 Fan Culture

BM takes advantage of fan culture and uses stars and Internet celebrities to market itself. The Chinese star Yang Mi, who has 111 million followers on Weibo, makes BM fashion more popular with her BM outfits. At the same time, Internet celebrities pay more attention to user-generated content (UGC), for example, the bloggers of Xiaohongshu use the platform to spontaneously share their daily BM outfits. Most Internet celebrities and consumers are willing to follow fashion trends.

As Li (the consumer) said: "I do like Yang Mi, and most of my friends love her BM outfits. Her all-black BM look which is famous on Weibo do surprise me and the next day, I went to the BM shop to find the similar clothes. I have been a fan of Yang Mi for about 5 years, and, coincidentally, she is quite suitable for BM style, which makes this brand even more famous. I think she suits the BM brand style quite well and this has attracted more consumers."

Xu (the KOL) said: “I am thin and ‘white, thin, and young’ is the label and characteristics I attract my fans. BM got famous these years, and I always need to grasp the trend. I remembered the first time I tried it and posted it on Xiaohongshu with a BM tag, I got 3000+ likes. The fans commented it as amazing/good shapes.....and I know I successfully grasp the trend and made them feel I am fashionable. Now BM is not a new trend, but still has its traffic. Most of my fans are willing to click on it when I post something related to BM style.”

In conclusion, wearing BM can help celebrities prove their own figures and cater to the label of “white, thin, and young”. Additionally, the spontaneous sharing of influencers can also in turn promotes BM fashion to become a trend. As Jia and Yue pointed out, producers and advertisers work together to influence mainstream aesthetics and promote the development of the consumer market for ordinary women by taking advantage of the body demonstration effect of celebrities and Internet celebrities [9].

At the same time, as Shi and Li said, young and beautiful bodies are the capital of stars and Internet celebrities [5]. They are double body performers, that is, a capital performer and an idol performer, so they become the biggest beneficiary of the body commercialization and the most powerful promoter of the body consumption myth.

3.3 Echoing Hot Topics

BM has gained popularity by catering to the current hot topic of “freedom to dress”. The social dogma and media environment in the mainland make women constantly struggle in the discipline for a long time, and women’s self-awareness makes them have corresponding rebellious behaviors [10].

As Gao (the consumer) said: “I was shamed to wear such kind of clothes before. My mum is likely to say they are too short and she always doesn’t like me to wear clothes that are not conservative. I know it is wrong old thought but I am still affected.....but until the appear of BM trend, it seems that all the girls are aware that they can wear the short skirts and tops, and prove that they are not wrong for they have this right. So for me, I have changed a lot from a girl who dares not to wear tight dresses to be willing to show my figure. It is a ideological awakening for me.”

Greenie (the KOL) also said: “The society seems to become more inclusive now. More people would like to see my diverse outfits, and there is less jarring voice about ‘You are wearing too revealing clothes’...It seems that the expression of female body has been accepted by most people.”

All in all, BM’s bold expression of femininity makes women accept themselves both psychologically and physiologically. Wearing BM makes them show their personality charm and cater to “freedom to dress” speech. It is also a declaration of war to some rigid feudal thoughts. Therefore, for BM pursuers, the popularity of this style is also a reflection of dress freedom and social progress.

3.4 Creating Public Sentiment—Anxiety

On the one hand, women take the initiative to lead the fashion trend and are also shaped by this fashion trend. They enjoy the pleasure brought by fashion and the perfect visual image. On the other hand, women also feel controlled by the aesthetic power created by the media [11], which brings negative influence to the brand. For example, BM builds a loyal community with an exclusive culture to meet the demands of some women to share and show their “perfect figures” on social platforms to gain superiority. After such “figure showing off” is amplified on social platforms, it causes more women’s dissatisfaction and anxiety about their figures. Female consumers will find themselves in the dilemma of subjectivity loss when they pursue the fashion trends again and again [12].

As Gao and Huang (the consumer) said: “I am not too fat and not too thin. When I see the notes about BM shared by others, I will immediately buy them if I thought they are beautiful. Some of the clothes are not looking ideal on me, and at that time, I will think whether I should lose a little weight so that I can look good in it. And that kind of feeling makes me a bit anxiety because losing weight is not so easy for me. Also, I realize that I am not thin enough and I am not recognized by BM completely.”

“I am strict on myself, so I also have some anxiety. Now, I think the society is pretty unfriendly to girls. Although I like BM very much, I can’t deny that it helps rationalize the standard, as if fitting into a BM is a proof of a slim and perfect figure. Sometimes I feel tired of viewing the post of marketing, showing how good the body is by wearing BM. I think whether it is the only standard for girl’s shape.”

Xu (the KOL) also said: “I do not always use BM to attract fans. There are some critical comments like ‘creating body anxiety’. Dramatically, BM helps women out of the old thoughts and get the freedom to dress, but meanwhile, it puts women into another frame. More people realized that and they tend to boycott it if I post too much BM speech. But in such collisions, topics often appear, and that’s why BM has so much traffic though the critical comments.”

To conclude, BM presents the “perfect figure” constructed by the media, which becomes the password for bloggers to attract traffic. When they share their notes about the figure, on the one hand, it satisfies the purpose of bloggers to prove themselves and earn traffic and attention, on the other hand, it intensifies the anxiety of the audience. As a result, the female group with the original entertainment mentality will have self-doubt and an increasing amount of anxiety after browsing the notes [13]. As Gu and Kui said, when more and more girls are able to show off by wearing BM clothes, BM will evolve from a brand name to an open-ended style symbol [14]. Girls who are well dressed are automatically divided into the same camp, and through the filter of body size rating, people are judged according to their clothes, which is an invisible irony to women who fail to try BM style, thus triggering the resistance of some consumers. The appear of collisions and the arising of the topics make the BM get more traffic and become more famous.

4 Conclusion

Brandy Melville's successful marketing can be seen from four aspects: the image building, fashion trend leading, hot topic echoing, and anxiety creating. It provides a way for women to pursue dress freedom from old thoughts and encourages them to show their beautiful shape confidently. However, it also ties women into another frame—the standard of “white, thin, and young”. The label becomes a way of marketing for BM and it helps BM get traffic again. The anxiety it created gives it another topical image. As Yin said, under the pressure of staring and being stared at, women's bodies become objects of social media consumption, constantly constructed as the “anxiety” itself. It is not right to praise or criticize BM blindly. However, what other brands should learn from BM is that it captures the audience psychology, the current hot topics, and characteristics of social media to constantly create traffic for itself and keep the popularity. Nonetheless, the interviewees in this research are all from the author's resource, which is hard to represent all the consumers and KOLs. The further study could find other minority consumers for more comprehensive research.

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