

Research on Predisposition and Perceived Function of the Third-person Effect-- A Case Study of the Zero Sugar Drinks Advertisement

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Abstract: The sugar-free beverage advertisement emerged in 1980s. Recently, with the general health trend disseminating away, sugar-free beverage consumption has become a new fashion among the youth, of which the advertisement spread on social media has increased its effects in the Gen Z. While it has been extensive and unique on the aspect of advertising, this paper mainly revealed that the methods of text analysis and literature analysis have been applied here, for what has been explored to depict how the third-person effect did work on explaining the advertising communication of sugar-free beverages. This paper finds that the path of advertising attaches importance to attracting the audience with the third-person effect, which directly affects other types of beverage advertisements. This paper depicts that the main value is to provide reference or other kinds of contribution to the research on beverage advertising.

Key words: Zero Sugar Drinks; Advertisement; the Third-person Effect; Psychology

1. Introduction

On aspects of communication theory, the third-person effect is of great significance to advertisement research. Among the related works, the third-person effect is applied to commodity advertising practice, while it is necessary to determine whether there is a third-person effect cognition, thus, the main theory of marketing communication is meaningful to study the impact of the third-person effect on the audience (Zeng & Cheng, 2013). In the practice of mass communication, it is of certain academic significance to discuss the influence of the third person effect on advertising and its mechanism. For example, some scholars have talked about the influence of perceived exposure, perceived tendency and perceived similarity on the third person effect. (Lv & Wu, 2021). Based on this, this study uses the case analysis of sugar-free beverage advertising to complete the judgment of the mechanism of the third person effect. Sugar-free beverage advertising has become a social trend in recent years. The causes of its communication phenomenon and the marketing strategies of food advertising related brands focus on the basic demands of social psychology to pursue health. In China, sugar-free beverage advertising focuses on sugar substitutes such as 'zero sucrose' and 'xylitol' to carry out marketing based on product content, highlighting the selling points of 'zero calorie' and 'zero sucrose', catering to the social fashion of pursuing health and slimming. Based on this, this study analyzes the content of sugar-free beverage advertising,

and analyzes the communication strategy of sugar-free beverage advertising from the 'third-person effect' of communication theory, so as to provide a positive reference for further standardizing food advertising and creating a good market atmosphere.

The third person effect was proposed by Davidson of Columbia University in 1983. It focuses on the influence of the mass media on the audience's attitude. The specific performance is that the audience often exaggerates the influence of media information on others. In the sugar-free beverage advertisement, the audience's understanding of 'high sugar is harmful' and 'sucrose is harmful' is directly affected by the advertisement. At the same time, the audience's attitude towards sugar-free beverage has undergone different stages of change. The important theoretical support for analyzing these changes is the theory of third-person effect. This study found that on social media platforms, sugar-free beverage advertisements might adapt rich forms of advertising communication to convey core concepts such as 'zero sugar, zero fat, zero calories' to consumers. It is believed that the third-person effect can have an effective persuasive effect on consumers. The audience tends to overestimate the persuasive effect of sugar-free beverage advertisements on others, which in turn affects individual purchase behavior. In general, there are still gaps and deficiencies in the research on sugar-free beverage advertising in the field of communication. Relevant research mainly starts from the perspectives of nutrition and chemistry, and there are few research results in the

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field of communication. The study found that the social level should rationally recognize the new concept of sugar-free beverages, and exert multiple forces to regulate its advertising communication behavior, which could also safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of consumers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The sugar-free beverage advertisement

Judging the threat and risk of sucrose to health has been an important issue in public health and health communication research in recent years. The relationship between sucrose and chronic diseases, the effect of sucrose on body weight, the discussion of these issues further stimulated the development of sugar-free food and sugar substitute food industry. As far as advertising is concerned, sugar-free beverage advertising attaches importance to the psychological satisfaction of the audience's pursuit of health, emphasizes that sugar-free beverages have little effect on body weight, and focuses on adding advertising slogans such as 'zero calories and zero sucrose' to beverage advertising. These settings strengthen the audience's perception of the product and further stimulate purchase behavior.

Sugar-free beverage advertisements use exaggerated expression techniques to strengthen the audience's perception of the hazards of high-sugar foods, which may creatively use concepts such as 'saccharification' to describe sub-health status including obesity. At the same time, sugar-free beverage advertisements intentionally blur the differences between different types of sugar substitutes, and do not place a beak on the uniqueness and potential hazards of sugar substitutes such as fructose, xylitol, and erythritol. Especially in the current advertising communication, there is almost no hint to tell consumers about the health risks of sugar substitutes.

As a means of brand marketing, exaggerating the function or effect of products is common in the history of advertising. For example, the publicity of the function of health care products in early TV advertisements and the publicity of various drugs in modern newspaper advertisements often blur the efficacy of products under the premise that the advertising law has not yet been clearly defined, so that consumers have an illusion, and then change the audience's purchase behavior. Specifically, propaganda appeals such as 'calcium supplementation' and 'smoking cessation' have relied on exaggerated visual expression techniques in advertising practice. These advertisements often stimulate the audience to produce complex psychological activities such as fear and anxiety, and provide basic guarantees for consumer behavior.

2.2 Third-person effect

As a classical communication theory, the third-person effect describes that when the audience judges the influence of mass communication, there is a general perception stereotype, that is, the audience thinks that the information of mass communication may not have much influence on 'me' or 'you', but will have an

immeasurable impact on others. Because of this perception set, the audience will make a reaction related to the third person in behavior, and the individual will also make a wrong prediction after perceiving the information of others, and then affect the individual's own behavior. Davidson, the author of this theory, added in his 1996 article that the third person effect is a complex phenomenon that changes according to different information types, different audience characteristics and different scenarios. Later scholars also concluded that the type of advertising and the nature of information are important predictors of third-person effects. Specifically, the more negative information, the more third-person effects could be caused. There is a significant positive correlation between negative information and third-person effects (Wu, 2017). In the process of studying advertising types and third-person effects, the 'first-person effect' is also derived and expanded - when the audience is exposed to information that meets social expectations and can cause positive feelings, they tend to think that such information has a greater impact on themselves than what on others (Yu, 2010).

For this study, it tends to overestimate the impact of media communication on others and underestimate the impact of communication content on itself. The effective population targeted by such third-person effects is not the surface audience of the content object, but the third person related to them. For example, the purchaser of children's goods is their parents, and the potential consumer of sugar-free beverage advertising is the third person who gives beverages as gifts to others.

Throughout the research results of this theory, it can be found that scholars are increasingly concerned about the influence of regulatory variables such as advertising purpose, symbolic attributes, product content and consumer attributes on the third person effect. The third person effect research framework proposed by Perloff in the 1990s is widely used in this kind of research. It mainly includes two stages (the audience's cognitive stage of media information effect, the follow-up behavior stage), four groups of elements (media information characteristics and other intermediary variables, intermediary process, 'third person' effect cognition, 'third person' effect follow-up behavior), etc.

3. Methods

3.1 Text analysis

Advertising text analysis is able to analyze the structure and ideographic mechanism of advertising text for specific products, which could also examine the form, meaning and function of the text from the micro to the macro level, so as to achieve the corresponding research purpose. Generally, text analysis mainly includes three aspects: lexical analysis, syntactic problems related to the reproduction of process and environment, rhetorical strategy analysis that expresses opinions or implicitly emphasizes specific meanings, which is also a relatively complete text analysis framework at present. Experts said: 'Sugar-free beverages refer to sugars that do not contain

sucrose or starch hydrolysis, such as glucose and maltose. Generally, sweeteners such as sugar alcohols and oligosaccharides that do not increase blood glucose concentration are used as sugar substitutes. Sugar-free beverage advertising has gradually emerged in the advertising field with the iteration of product development and the emergence of new brands. As a product of the concept of healthy life, sugar-free beverage advertising is an important way for products to communicate with consumers, while its significance and value cannot be underestimated.

This paper will draw on Burke's new rhetoric theory, that is, identity theory, while it could conduct specific advertising text analysis through the three identification strategies ' sympathy identification, opposition identification and misidentification ' in identity theory (Burke, Kenneth & 1950). The advertising text of sugar-free beverage advertising is refined, how the brand achieves the purpose of communication and unifies with the psychology of consumers through persuasion and identification is objectively and deeply analyzed at different levels, that is, the mechanism of communication between the brand and consumers is analyzed and summarized.

3.2 Literature research

Literature research is a commonly used social science research method. Academic circles generally define literature research as research conducted by collecting and analyzing literature materials according to certain purposes. This paper mainly analyzes the literature content of sugar-free beverages and advertisements, and discusses the development status, research results and personal findings of beverage advertisements, especially sugar-free beverage advertisements, through intensive reading of models and classic literature, thus forming the basis of this application.

Through the retrieval of CNKI database, this study found that the research on key words such as sugar-free beverage, sugar-free beverage advertising, beverage advertising and related topics mainly showed the following characteristics : First, relevant research has been published in the academic circles since the 1990 s. Since 2018, the related research has grown rapidly, and the attention to this issue has still risen in recent years. The main topics of related research are around ' sugar-free beverage ', ' food and beverage ', ' xylitol ', ' sugar-free ', ' advertising creative design ', ' advertising design ' and other topics. Some studies have focused on the nutritional characteristics of sugar-free beverage advertising. At the same time, some studies have started with the dissemination of advertising, emphasizing the impact of beverage tastes, health awareness and other issues on the audience's purchase of related products. Second, as far as China's Chinese core journal database is concerned, the number of related studies is still small, and few studies focus on the communication effect of sugar-free beverage advertisements. This study uses the literature research method to realize the collation of the relevant research status, while it understands the shortcomings of the existing research, and from these shortcomings, combs in

detail the topics that may have research value, and focuses on the implementation in this study.

4. Results

4.1 Text analysis results

Sugar-free beverages are mainly divided into three separated categories: sugar-free tea drinks, sugar-free carbonated drinks and sugar-free milk drinks. Their advertising forms are diverse, including video advertising, audio advertising and text advertising (print advertising). The advertising focuses on the characteristics of ' zero calories ' and ' zero sucrose ', highlighting the characteristics of product health and refreshing, and can produce a certain degree of persuasion and attraction to consumers.

In sugar-free beverage advertising, sugar-free tea is more typical. As a kind of important beverage products, in terms of audio and video advertisements, the promotion of sugar-free tea is mainly aimed at the design of advertising words, such as the output of concepts such as ' zero sucrose ' and ' zero calorie '. For example, in the observation of this study, the Oriental leaves of Nongfu Spring (a Chinese brand that began to make sugar-free tea earlier) used ' zero sucrose ' and ' zero calorie ' as the core advertising slogans, which greatly helped enterprises to obtain higher sales. In terms of the design of its competitive products such as SUNTORY oolong tea in print advertisements, this study finds that the word " sugar-free " is more eye-catching in the print advertisements of the bottle body, and it can be inferred that advertising slogans such as sugar-free can promote consumers' purchase behavior. In the study of health communication, persuasion and other communication behaviors are included in the consideration of relevant health communication theories such as planned behavior theory. Persuasion can effectively present the subtle influence of advertising on consumers in planned behavior. In response to the needs of people who lose weight, some sugar-free tea drinks are included in the category of sports nutrition food, which promotes the category to stand out among many beverage products.

Sugar-free carbonated beverages mainly transmit product information through video advertisements. They use dynamic music and rhythmic pictures and combine drinking features to render the picture atmosphere, convey the characteristics of smooth and light products, emphasize that they are sugar-free and can maintain a better taste. At the same time, they persuade consumers and instigate purchases based on health appeals. Genki Forest (a sugar-free beverage enterprise in China) is a hot sugar-free carbonated beverage. It focuses on the slogan of " drink Genki Forest with zero sugar, zero fat and zero card, " designs refreshing and eye-catching product packaging, and print ads use ice, bubbles and other elements to give consumers light psychological hints. Coca-Cola, the leader of the carbonated beverage market, also launched the slogan of " no sugar, good lightness and no burden " for its sugar-free Coke. The designed TVC advertisements all adopt the combination

of dynamic music and sports scenes to stimulate consumers' senses by drinking close-ups. All of these are well permeated by the five senses marketing theory proposed by Martin Lindstrom, using the five senses of human organs to create more contact points, replacing simple information push with three-dimensional sensory experience, so that consumers can get a comprehensive sensory experience and emotional experience to build brand awareness.

Sugar-free milk drinks often add 'xylitol' and other sugar substitutes, and highlight the natural and healthy characteristics of xylitol in print advertisements. Advertisers use wood, green leaves, birch trees and other elements to promote consumers to understand the natural product characteristics of this generation of sugar. This behavior can exactly fit the product strategy emphasized by advertising theorist Jerome McCarthy in his 4P marketing theory. This product strategy theoretically expounds that products need to create unique features to attract consumers' attention. Mengniu's sugar-free yogurt highlights the substitution of xylitol for sugar, and uses green packaging decorated with 'leaf' symbols to highlight the health attributes of the product.

4.2 Literature research results

This study uses tools such as CNKI, Superstar Duxiu and Google Mirror to conduct literature retrieval and screening. It is found that sugar-free beverage advertising has shown a fluctuating growth trend in recent years and has been valued by interdisciplinary research in nutrition, chemistry and communication. Among them, 'sugar-free', 'aspartame' and 'food and beverage industry' are important factors of concern. However, the research on sugar-free beverages based on the perspective of advertising and communication is generally less, and there are still gaps and deficiencies.

In this study, the Superstar Duxiu Book Database was searched, and 'beverage advertising' was used as the main keyword for retrieval. It was found that 4203 Chinese books met the criteria, and after accurate matching, a total of about 247 kinds. In chronological order, most of the research in the past decade, among which Du Xiuling's "creative design of food and beverage advertising" is more representative. The book belongs to advertising research and mainly discusses food and beverage advertising. Among them, sugar-free beverage advertising content is less, the main reason may be related to the year of the book, indicating that sugar-free beverage as a single product, its sales in China around 2012 is not very high.

In the search process of Google Academic Database (Google Mirror), using 'zero sugar' and 'soft drinks' as keywords, it was found that about 1670 valid literatures have been retrieved since 2022. Most of them used physical and chemical methods to study the nutrition or chemistry of beverage ingredients, and a small number of studies focused on the soft drink industry at the economic or management level. These studies take the beverage industry as the research object, use qualitative or quantitative research methods to refine some regular understandings existing in the beverage industry and find several important conclusions. First, the consumption of

sugary beverages increases the risk of obesity in children and adults (Luger et al, 2017), while excessive intake of sugar is also a risk factor for the development of chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which is valued by experts in the field of public health, and some countries have introduced soft drinks industry taxes or policies prohibiting the promotion of sugary soft drinks to try to reduce the sugar content in sugary beverages. In addition, the intervention policy represented by the consumption tax on sugary drinks helps to reduce the intake of added sugar by residents (Zhai et al., 2022). In addition, the development and promotion of sugar-free beverages is also an important means to encourage healthy eating.

After sorting out the results of literature retrieval, this study draws the advertising methods and publicity strategies of sugar-free products of influential brands in the field of sugar-free beverages, and finds some regular understanding of the sugar-free beverage industry and important conclusions that are helpful to this study. The advertising of sugar-free beverages mostly borrows the concepts of xylitol sugar-free type to publicize their own characteristics, and attaches importance to consumers' sensory experience and emotional experience. From the perspective of the third-person effect, we can see that such advertising may face excessive publicity problems at the level of publicity. These problems need to be solved in further research. In view of the existing research deficiencies mentioned above, this study also supplements and explains from the perspective of communication and advertising, trying to make attribution based on existing phenomena and communication theories.

5. Discussion

5.1 The 'audience-centered theory' of sugar-free beverage advertising communication'

In the tradition of advertising research, the value of "audience-centered theory" is prominent. Since Harold Lasswell founded the 5W model, the relationship between audience and communicator has long been the focus of communication research. The autonomy, creativity and sharing of the audience make it the real logical starting point of advertising communication (Chen & Shu, 2013). In the study of this link, the communication mode of sugar-free beverage advertising can clearly see the central position occupied by the audience. For example, the analysis of sugar-free cola in this paper finds that sugar-free cola attaches importance to the audience's sense of participation in the process of communication, and transfers part of the content production right of bottle cover advertising to the audience themselves, such as publishing on social media platforms. The service that can customize the plane advertisement of cola bottles helps the sugar-free beverage to be more deeply embedded in daily life. In addition, as far as the observation of this study in the short video platform is concerned, the spread of sugar-free beverage advertising attaches great importance to the audience-centered communication

model, that is, it attaches importance to the interaction with the audience and devotes more energy to highlighting the audience's attention. In the process of analysis, this study mainly focuses on qualitative methods. In the future, after mastering the quantitative analysis model, it will also combine qualitative and quantitative analysis methods to visualize the impact of sugar-free beverage advertising on the audience and the dissemination effect.

5.2 Sugar-free beverage advertising in the influence of 'third-person effect'

As a classical theory in the field of communication, the third person effect emphasizes the interaction between the communicator and the audience in the process of communication, especially highlights the behavior choice of the audience in the third person effect is mainly based on the influence of the third person. In the communication activities of sugar-free beverage advertisements, we can see that the phenomena related to the third-person effect mainly include that the audience will be more empowered. As a key theory put forward by Professor Davidson of Columbia University, the third-person effect helps to judge the influence of advertising in the mass communication environment. It is well known that sugar-free beverage advertising has gradually become a social trend, that is, advertising has produced a general perception in the process of communication, that is, to promote the audience to think that the information of the mass media, especially persuasive information and negative information, may not have a great impact on me or you, but it will have an immeasurable impact on others. Attribution theory and optimistic bias are important psychological support for the third person effect, that is, the cognitive inertia caused by self-defense, self-protection, maintenance of self-esteem and other motives (Zeng & Xiong, 2012). This perception stereotype will promote people to think that the influence of mass communication information on others is greater than that on themselves, so they can make a response related to the third person in their behavior. Individuals will make wrong predictions about the behavior that may occur after others receive information, thus affecting their own behavior. In the process of sugar-free beverage advertising communication, manipulation strategies such as 'making a feint to the east and attacking in the west' and 'relieving the state of Zhao by besieging the state of Wei', which are similar to ancient military tactics, have actually verified the third-person effect in practice. The persuasive communication model, the effective population of its communication positioning is not the surface audience as the content object, but the third person related to it. The third-person effect hypothesis is embodied in the audience faced by persuasion communication, which has a greater impact on others than on themselves. For example, in the advertising communication process of sugar-free beverages, the audience often ignores the possible negative effects of sugar-free beverages themselves due to their fear of sucrose, such as whether the health of sugar substitutes is better than sucrose. The main factor in the cognition of the

health of sugar-free beverages is that the audience believes that their ability to judge is much higher than the impact of sugar-free beverages on other audiences, and the producers of sugar-free beverages and the communicators of sugar-free beverage advertisements use this third-person effect to obtain huge profits.

5.3 Sugar-free is health : Sugar panic in consumerism culture

Sugar-free is not zero sugar or sugar-free. More sugar-free beverages replace sucrose as the main sweetener by replacing sugar. The main reason why sugar-free is considered sweet and healthy is that the audience has such a dilemma at the cognitive level. That is to say, sugar-free beverages are healthier than sugar-containing beverages. As a product of communication, this cognition is further self-reinforcing in the psychological environment with the participation of third-person effects, which in turn affects consumers' purchase behavior. Most of the existing related studies focus on the sugar-free beverage advertising itself, focusing on advertising content, advertising community, advertising economy, and labor of advertising audiences. In contrast, the comparative analysis of sugar-free and sugar-containing beverages is relatively weak. Most of the literature is from the perspective of biology, chemistry, and nutrition. It is believed that the development of sugar substitutes is a concept and commodity created for profit. Exploring the relationship between sugar substitutes and sugar-free beverage advertisements will help us focus on the social impact of sugar-free beverage advertisements from the perspective of communication. Or explore the direct impact of sugar-free beverage advertising on social fashion from the perspective of symbols and media. In fact, the forms of food additives today are very diverse. It is difficult to simply attribute sugar-free beverages to a nutritious food or a food superior to sugary beverages. This article starts with the text analysis of the content and form of sugar-free beverage advertisements, and tries to understand and define it from a relatively macro perspective of consumption transformation and media evolution.

6. Conclusion

As a new concept, sugar-free beverage takes representative for a food fashion processed by nutrition. As a model or relatively positive symbol, its advertising communication in social media has gradually transformed sugar-free beverage into a neutral or even fashionable health product. This cognition or reality has a direct impact on the audience. With the deepening influence of the national strategy of advocating national health in China since the new century, thanks to the high attention of Western society to food health and the highly mature food inspection system, the emergence of sugar-free beverage advertisements has profoundly affected the mainland of China from industry to audience. With the gradual retreat of food fashion or trend, and the awakening of the domestic entertainment industry market, sugar-free beverage advertisements are rapidly

disseminated in the mass media, and advertising slogans such as zero sugar and zero card are naturally sought after by audiences or fans as objects of consumerism. Before sugar-free beverage advertising became fashionable, Chinese society's attitude towards sucrose was complex. In the early years of material scarcity, the sugar substitutes of sucrose were mainly represented by sweet inorganic salts such as saccharin (saccharin sodium). Such sugar substitutes were considered to be harmful to health. After the reform and opening up, the emergence of a large number of sucrose made people begin to pursue different types of sugar products such as ancient brown sugar and imported sugar. In recent years, as weight loss has become a fashion, some mass media have pointed out that one of the root causes of obesity is the excessive use of sucrose. Since then, the sugar scare or the resurgence of sugar substitutes has become a food fad affecting Chinese society. From this perspective, this paper makes a detailed analysis of sugar-free beverage advertisements by means of text analysis and literature research methods, in order to help people understand the specific connotation and practice of sugar-free beverage advertisements in China.

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