

Research on Marketing Communication Strategy of Soft Advertising in Xiaohongshu APP

Ruoxi Zhao^{1*}

¹Chengdu No.7 High School, Chengdu, 610011, China

Abstract. With the rapid development of the Internet, the role and effect of online sales are constantly emerging. In this process, advertising marketing is an indispensable and important part. However, traditional hard advertisements do not show advantages in this online competition, while soft advertisements show irreplaceable marketing advantages. In order to promote the development of soft advertising and provide more efficient advertising methods for more e-commerce companies, this article will take Xiaohongshu as a case to analyze in detail the application strategy, advantages and disadvantages of soft advertising in the platform. Through case analysis, bibliography method and comparative analysis, this passage finds that Xiaohongshu suffers from flooding of brand soft ads, low flow of brand soft ads, KOL's selection risk and serious content homogeneity. In order to solve these problems, Xiaohongshu is supposed to create explosive notes, improve flow, choose the right KOL, strengthen the supervision mechanism and optimize the content of soft ads. Through these studies, it is able to enrich the content of soft advertisements and improve their communication efficiency, promote platform operations, help merchants obtain higher profits, and provide business models for other cases.

* Corresponding author: Roxie.Zhao@calhoun.edu

1 Introduction

1.1 Research background

In recent years, China's e-commerce has developed rapidly. Since the first online transaction was successfully realized in 1998, more and more e-commerce websites and companies have been developed [1-2]. As shown in Figure 1, in recent years, although the growth rate of transactions in China's community e-commerce has declined since reaching its peak in 2017, it has maintained a positive growth trend and has an extremely positive development prospect.

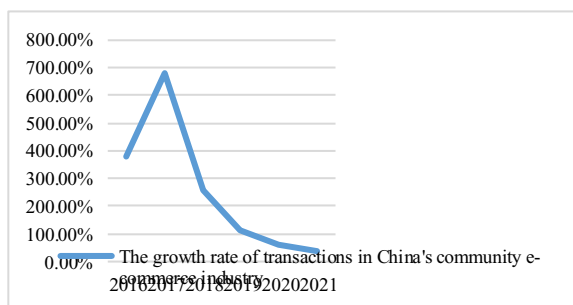


Fig. 1. Transaction scale of Chinese community e-commerce industry (Photo/Picture credit: Original)

The emergence of e-commerce platforms provides users with a space for communication and interaction, enabling users to have an in-depth understanding of product information and actively participate in acquiring information. This development mode quickly attracts many users in the short term and continues to develop. Xiaohongshu is one of the most popular e-commerce platforms for users. In order to make more revenue, a variety of advertisements are shown in every corner, regardless of their content and forms, leading to users not being willing to watch so many direct advertisements and losing their temper on them. Under this circumstance, more companies are trying to use a soft advertisement, which is comparatively more acceptable than those hard advertisements, to leave a deeper impression on users. Under the background of the large user base and strong consumption-ability of users, soft advertisement plays a significant role in affecting users' choices and increasing product sales. This study takes the Xiaohongshu APP as an example, analyzes the effect of soft advertisement in the e-commerce platform, and aims to help the platform spread soft advertisement in a better way and dissemination more efficiently. Additionally, the study also aims to help the spread of advertisement, stimulating consumption in different e-commerce.

1.2 Literature review

There is a lot of research on soft advertising at home and abroad. Huichao Wei has proposed that compared with other advertising types, soft advertisement, like short videos, has higher marketing value, richer content, and form, and also presents a unique form of

communication. These characteristics can disseminate advertisements in a more concealed way, which reduces the audience's boredom with advertisements and makes the spread more effective and efficient [3]. According to Wei Liu, soft advertisements in new media are mainly product placement advertisements. According to the different ad placement platforms, new media ads can be divided into video and game placement ads. The method of video-embedded advertising is the most proficient. In new media video marketing, especially online video media marketing, to achieve the best communication effect, video-embedded advertisements are often combined with multiple implant forms to maximize the creation of multi-dimensional brand content contact points [4].

Soft advertisement is worthy of so much concern because of its astonishing advantages. Xinhua Zhao said that soft internet advertisements, whose price is comparatively lower than hard advertisements, are highly interactive as the information feedback is direct. Additionally, soft advertisements have no advertising characteristics, which means they are not easily intercepted and blocked by applications [5].

However, soft advertisements still have many problems in today's new media. As the most important carrier of soft advertisement, short videos are at the bottleneck state of the current development. Xiaohong Wang, Yuanyuan Bao, and Qiang Lv said short video has not yet established a healthy and reasonable content production system, and its positioning is not clear enough, as the phenomenon of content homogeneity is utterly serious [6].

1.3 Research gap

According to the literature review, most scholars at home and abroad have theoretically studied the advantages and commercial value of soft advertising, and the research in this area has gradually become comprehensive. But the theory is different from reality. In real life, different e-commerce platforms have their own unique business positioning that is different from other platforms, which makes the theory unable to be specific to each real case. The main reason for this phenomenon is that each software's users have great differences, resulting in different age levels, genders, and preferences of consumers. Using a unified method to figure out different consumer psychology and carry out accurate soft advertisements is impossible. Through the research of this paper, taking the specific software case of Xiaohongshu as the carrier, it can analyze the characteristics and effects of soft advertisements in Xiaohongshu to achieve the purpose of more efficient placement of soft advertisements and improve their commercial value. This research can also help more merchants efficiently use soft advertising to increase sales so that consumers are able to make more informed product choices.

1.4 Research framework

This article will first determine soft advertising to explore and understand its nature, characteristics, effects, advantages, and disadvantages. Based on the basic concepts, this article will combine the specific case of Xiaohongshu, first determine the research method of soft advertising, and conduct data investigation and case analysis on the basis of the correct method. According to the current situation of the research, analyze the specific situation of the existing Xiaohongshu soft advertisements, explain the existing problems, and finally draw targeted conclusions.

2 Methods

2.1 Survey method

Through different analysis methods, it is easier to get the different influencing factors of the soft advertising case of Xiaohongshu. Based on the comparison of different software, the summarization of previous studies, and the specific analysis based on actual cases, it can summarize the advertising benefits, business models, and other important influencing factors of soft advertising and help the future development of soft advertising. As a result, the soft advertisement can be more attractive to consumers and devote more efficient product promotion for merchants

2.2 Case analysis

The case analysis method is based on an actual case, and the researcher obtains the overall cognition through careful analysis. This article will take Xiaohongshu as the case background, comprehensively analyze the soft advertisement placement of merchants on this software and the effects obtained in the consumer group, and dig deep into potential problems and areas that need to be improved, so as to promote social interaction. The purpose of platform network marketing. As an early community e-commerce platform in China, "Xiaohongshu" has matured and accumulated many users. It is a typical case of the use of soft advertising. The research on soft advertisements in the community e-commerce platform through Xiaohongshu can get effective and representative feedback, which is convenient for in-depth research on the communication effect of soft advertisements in the community e-commerce platform from multiple levels.

2.3 Bibliography method

This article is mainly a literature survey conducted on CNKI and Google Scholar. By retrieving the content of many master's and doctoral theses and journals, it provides basic content materials and theoretical references for the case analysis of the soft advertising situation in Xiaohongshu. At the same time, in order to complete a more comprehensive and detailed case analysis, the literature provides very important

background knowledge for this article. Through the literature research on soft advertisements, hard advertisements, new media, Internet marketing, and other related research, the precious academic materials of predecessors provide various theoretical supports for the analysis of this article and help the case analysis of Xiaohongshu to achieve a more objective and comprehensive analysis effect.

2.4 Comparative analysis

Whether in China or other countries, social media or search engines, there are a surprising number of advertisements on various websites. Xiaohongshu has succeeded greatly in the Chinese market because of so much software. The reason is that it has a unique soft advertising marketing strategy compared to other platforms. By comparing with the advertising strategies of similar types of software, such as TikTok, can help better analyze the elements of the success of the Xiaohongshu case. By comparing and analyzing the differences between consumer groups on different types of software, the positioning in the market, the mainstream output content on the platform, the main media and methods of advertising communication, the differences in target customers and platform business strategies, the advantages and disadvantages of soft advertising and the final good or bad effects can be analyzed more clearly.

3 Result

3.1 Business models

One of Xiaohongshu's key business models is "growing grass". It gradually gained popularity in conversations about beauty and gastronomy. The "grass planters" can influence the "grass planters" to make better decisions by sharing their online experiences with scrumptious food or wholesome cosmetic products. Additionally, this kind of Amway behavior has attracted a lot of traffic, admirers, and sponsorship from brand owners for the "planting grass" [7]. Sponsoring the "grass planters" enables the brand owners to share their products with a specific audience, increasing their exposure and promoting sales of their products. Brand merchants fiercely advertise the "Growing Grass" marketing strategy on key e-commerce platforms based on the successful promotion and marketing of "Growing Grass" and the substantial number of active users. Major new media platforms like Douyin, Kuaishou, and Xiaohongshu have drawn diverse "grass planting experts" to settle in and compete to invite high-quality content creators against the backdrop of the booming commercial marketing of "grass planting." Brand merchants are fiercely advertising the "Growing Grass" marketing strategy on important e-commerce platforms based on the successful promotion and marketing of "Growing Grass" and the considerable number of active users of such platforms.

The other major mode of Xiaohongshu is UGC (User Generated Content). Users can write their product reviews, life stories, travel tips, and other content on Xiaohongshu for free, minimizing the commercial atmosphere. Xiaohongshu offers numerous UGC expression options. Users can “mark life” and find answers to their questions in Xiaohongshu, bringing the platform closer to them. By gathering and analyzing user likes, comments, and favorites and offering personalized functions, the system suggests intriguing material and related items for users, increasing user retention and encouraging user consumption [8].

In addition to “growing grass” and UGC, KOL is one of Xiaohongshu’s strategies. A key opinion leader, or KOL, in marketing this idea is expanded to include: a person with higher product knowledge and stronger influence over a particular group’s purchase habits. The Xiaohongshu APP is a sharing community built in UGC, providing users with real-time information and experience in overseas shopping [9]. According to research from the China Advertising Association, the average percentage of inactive KOL followers on the overall network will be 60.5% in 2020, meaning that the average level of activity among KOL fans will be 39.5%. More than 60% of Xiaohongshu KOL fans are active, substantially higher than the industry average (63.63%). KOL uses direct communication with users and the market as a new marketing strategy [10]. KOL may precisely understand the market’s trend environment and communicate and receive the actual demands of users.

3.2 Problems identification

Although the development of Xiaohongshu has been relatively good in recent years, the number of users has increased, the number of merchants has increased, and sales have increased, but there are still some development problems in soft advertising. For merchants, there are obvious problems in the way and content of soft advertisements; for platforms, the regulation and management of advertisements at a macro level are not very comprehensive.

3.2.1 Flooding of brand soft advertisement

Following companies’ relocation to Xiaohongshu, numerous brand enterprises started to issue numerous associated brand notes. Although many notes can result in high brand awareness for users, it lets people develop a sense of confidence in it. However, excessive corporate notes will unavoidably result in excessive promotion, eventually making people grow visually and aesthetically weary. Publishing a lot of product promotion notes quickly will cause brand firms to receive a warning from the official Xiaohongshu and limit the flow of notes. Furthermore, the high-frequency delivery of daily notes is reported to come at a significant cost and require much effort and time.

3.2.2 Low flow of brand soft advertisement

The traffic of notes is particularly essential since notes with high traffic and exposure can draw customers and encourage consumption, whereas corporate brand notes typically struggle with low traffic. After examination, the following factors of soft advertisements notes are probably to blame: account flow limitation, weak title keywords, and unattractive photos.

3.2.3 KOL’s selection risk

While KOL can significantly improve soft marketing communication, there are also risks. The following two dangers could apply to the KOL selection. The first is that the collaborative KOL could harm the brand reputation owing to negative content, which would reduce or even reverse the communication effect. The second is that advertisers are overly focused on traffic. Blindly seeking out high-traffic KOLs for marketing activities that do not match the brand, are unfamiliar with the brand space, and are not professionals may not have the desired promotion effect or encourage KOL fans to make purchases. Soft advertising cannot fulfill its marketing objective.

3.2.4 Weak regulations

The management and supervision of hard advertising in China are currently largely finished. The nation’s advertising law primarily regulates the promotion of hard advertising, while soft advertising’s crucial aspects are omitted. Soft advertisements are more covert and deceitful than strong advertisements. They begin with real-world issues, spark discussions, and shape public opinion. Due to fake sales, false publicity, and advertising chaos, Xiaohongshu was pulled from the Android app store on July 29 and the Appstore on August 3. Even if it eventually started up again, there are still a lot of bogus advertisements on Xiaohongshu’s soft adverts, and the platform’s lax review has also encouraged the spread of these false advertisements. Additionally, unscrupulous users exploit this to disseminate negative information, creating an unfavorable environment for Xiaohongshu.

3.2.5 Serious content homogeneity

With the rapid development of self-media platforms, many brands and merchants have chosen to settle in Xiaohongshu. The attractiveness of soft advertising content is mainly reflected in copywriting, pictures, and videos. For better sales results, on the surface, more exquisite and innovative note-making is the first point to attract users because the cover and title should make users interested in notes and increase the number of clicks. Secondly, the notes’ content must directly address consumers’ pain points. High-quality copywriting plays an irreplaceable role because, through text introduction, merchants can roughly introduce the functions, characteristics, and advantages of products to users, encouraging consumption.

However, a large number of soft advertisements have led to the content of many notes being similar or even approaching the same, and the editing of short videos is getting rougher and rougher. A large number of similar content leads to homogeneity, causing consumers' aesthetic fatigue, making users feel bored or disgusted and resistant, and ultimately leading to unsatisfactory sales results.

4 Discussion

4.1 Create explosive notes to reduce flooding of notes

When creating notes, brands need to create content with topical attention. Brand marketers can track hot search lists, hot word analysis, track traffic hotspots, choose suitable topics and creative directions, and increase the probability of popular articles. Creators can also refer to the note analysis and related comment analysis of successful cases to gain inspiration and create high-quality content that can resonate with users emotionally and promote social communication. In addition to these two methods, creators can search for experts in related fields to dig out and deconstruct ingenious notes. This method can help the brand create creative notes and personalized expressions to leave a deep impression on users.

By creating explosive notes, the brand can stand out from many competitors so as to achieve the purpose of increasing user attention and enhancing brand exposure. And most importantly, the hot style notes focus on quality rather than quantity. Reducing the proliferation of notes and showing the advantages and characteristics of one's own brand with less and more refined content will be the key to reducing users' aesthetic fatigue.

4.2 Strengthen the graphic content and improve the flow of notes

High-quality note content is the key to determining traffic. Therefore, creators can only continuously increase traffic by carefully crafting note content.

Notes are generally divided into main images, titles, and text. Therefore, in order to create high-quality content, we must start from these three aspects. First is the main image. The main picture is the first visual impression left to the user, and it is the most direct and conspicuous embodiment of the note content.

A good main picture can instantly catch the user's attention, attract the user's attention, and then click the note to "plant grass". The quality of the main picture can be improved by using diversified design elements, pictures with strong contrast and contrast, photos of high-value models and spokespersons, and pictures that combine eye-catching and concise pictures with text. Next is the title. The title is a high-level text summary of the content, generally no more than 22 words. The point of the title is to highlight the theme in one sentence so that users can quickly know the article's content. Enhancing the attractiveness of the title can

arouse users' curiosity by setting suspense; it can include popular and important keywords to increase the chance of search exposure; it can also appropriately add modal particles and modal symbols. And finally, the content. Content is the foundation of note-taking. Without high-quality content, even with exquisite pictures and eye-catching titles, it is impossible to retain users fundamentally. The characteristics of a good note are first that the number of words is moderate and the level is clear; there is no repetitive and complicated problem, which is conducive to users' reading; Product tutorials, multi-brand cosmetics reviews, and some dry goods about outfits, etc.; notes can use emoticons skillfully, and emoticons can be used as a paragraph-level segmentation or as a partial text replacement. The note style is lively and lively, making fans like its atmosphere.

4.3 Choose the right KOL

The key indicators of KOL are professionalism, product intake, popularity, and interactivity [11]. In fact, KOL can provide enormous value for platforms or businesses and is more convincing than traditional advertising. In order to supply users with high-quality content, increase traffic, and encourage user participation, the platform must introduce and promote more KOLs. This will satisfy users on the platform, build trust, and drive traffic for community e-commerce. However, not all KOLs are able to benefit the company in terms of desired publicity and sales. The personal style of the KOL, the platform's content output type, the audience of fans, and the total number of fans all play a major role in whether or not a KOL suits the brand. In light of its brand positioning, target market, and sales objectives, the brand should perform research and analysis before selecting a KOL. To play a good and effective role in promoting the brand, KOLs with brand attributes aggressively seek out KOLs who are consistent with brand products and can reflect brand value.

4.4 Strengthen the supervision mechanism

Xiaohongshu is a large-scale social platform open to all users; all users can see the published notes. In addition, each user has the right to publish notes to the public, and it is particularly important to strengthen the review and supervision of content. In order to avoid various unnecessary problems and incorrect guidance of public opinion, Xiaohongshu's background staff should conduct a strict review of user content before publishing it so as to ensure the quality of soft advertisements from the source and reduce the appearance of false advertisements. Similarly, the Internet and market supervision departments should also issue detailed rules related to soft advertising to manage the content release of soft advertising and realize multi-party supervision. Of course, the ideal situation is for the government to come forward and promulgate management regulations similar to hard advertisements.

4.5 Optimize the content of soft advertisements

In order to avoid homogeneous content, merchants need to innovate the content of notes to create differentiated content. Specific measures can be shooting more interesting videos, publishing more beautiful pictures, editing to make it easier for users to understand, and in the text the creator wants to express. Through these methods, users will be more easily attracted, and the brand will have more fundamental motivation for sustainable development.

5 Conclusion

Through analysis, the advantages of Xiaohongshu's soft advertising are extremely obvious. Soft advertisements can help merchants to disseminate information better and allow more users to access product content, thereby increasing profits. At the same time, the platform also benefits from this process, laying a solid foundation for future development. As a typical industry representative, Xiaohongshu has risen rapidly because of its unique business model. It also proves that it recognizes market value, grasps market opportunities, and chooses suitable and innovative products. The marketing model is the right direction for the development of social e-commerce.

There is no doubt that Xiaohongshu is a platform with utterly optimistic development prospects, but through the above content, the problems exposed also need to be resolved urgently. Whether it is external market supervision, internal review and operating rules of the platform, or the content quality of the notes of a large group of merchants, these are unavoidable problems in the development of Xiaohongshu. Through creating explosive notes, strengthening context, choosing the right KOL, enhancing the supervision mechanism, and improving the flow of notes,

This article mainly studies the market status of soft advertising by analyzing the case of Xiaohongshu, aiming to help Xiaohongshu break through the bottlenecks and difficulties encountered in its current development, gain a competitive advantage in the fierce market competition, and provide constructive suggestions for future development. At the same time, the conclusions and suggestions drawn in this article can also inspire other same-type platforms which also take advantage of soft ads and contribute to the spread of soft ads and the development of e-commerce.

However, this paper mainly researches by reviewing and summarizing the existing literature. Most of the data comes from the survey results of existing studies, and no specific population research and statistical analysis have been carried out, so there is a lack of experimental data support. In the future, other researchers can conduct research on Xiaohongshu user groups by distributing questionnaires and using the knowledge of mathematics and statistics to obtain data and conduct further research.

References

1. Chen Chen, *The Present Situation, Problems and Policy Suggestions of China's E-Commerce Development*, *China Business Theory* **20**, 62-64 (2021)
2. Xinya Wang, *Research on the effect of soft advertising on community e-commerce platform* (2021), <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202102&filename=1021069538.nh>
3. Huichao Wei, *Research on the spread of short video soft advertisements in Douyin APP* (2019), <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202001&filename=1020012412.nh>
4. Wei Liu, *Research on New Media Advertising Forms*, *Today's Massmedia* **02**, 103-104 (2013)
5. Xinhua Zhao, *The "Soft" Power that Penetrates and Intercepts—A Preliminary Study on Internet Soft Advertisements*, *Business Conditions (Economic Research in Education)* **02**, 69-70 (2007)
6. Xiaohong Wang, Yuanyuan Bao, Qiang Lv, *Development Status and Trend Observation of Mobile Short Video*, *Chinese Editorials* **03**, 7-12 (2015)
7. Zhongmei Li, Min Huang, *Research on the countermeasures of "grass planting" content marketing under the background of new media*, *Market Modernization* **21**, 1-3 (2022)
8. Wenyan Li, Huansen Zhang, *Analysis of the development status of social e-commerce "Xiaohongshu"*, *Marketing World* **20**, 32-34 (2020)
9. Lu Han, Pang Xiao, *The "Growing Grass Secrets" of Xiaohongshu*, *21st Century Business Review* **08**, 80-81 (2015)
10. Yunqing Li, *Research on marketing communication strategy of interactive social e-commerce APP soft advertisement*, *Voice and Screen World* **21**, 94-96 (2022)
11. Sha Deng, *Research on the Influence of KOL "Growing Grass" on Users' Purchase Intention* (2022), <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202301&filename=1022514288.nh>