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THE APPLICATION OF NEW MEDIA IN BRAND COMMUNICATION: THE IMPACT OF BRAND'S VISUAL IMAGE ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to investigate whether visual technologies can influence consumer brand purchase intentions by altering the forms of consumer association, attention, and emotion. The research employs traditional quantitative research methods and collected a total of 156 valid questionnaires from Chinese consumers. The study findings indicate that association, attention, and emotion all positively influence consumer purchase intent. These results suggest that brands can enhance their brand communication by investing in visual marketing, thereby winning higher purchase intent from consumers. It confirmed the impact of corporate visual brand communication based on new media forms on Chinese consumers' purchase intentions and established that association, attention, and emotion are the key influencing factors. It enriched the research on brand communication in China and provided a brand communication lean management approach.

Keywords: Visual Image, Digital Marketing, New Media, Brand communication

INTRODUCTION

As internet technology has globally permeated from the realm of education into the business world, consumers are increasingly aware of the blessings it brings. The origins of Internet technology can be traced back to the 1960s, with the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) being the earliest Internet project (Andrews, 2019). Initially, ARPANET was widely used for remote document transmission and information exchange in the field of education, aiming to enhance the quality of education (Livinginter.net, 2019). Over time, astute entrepreneurs recognized its value in disseminating commercial information and made efforts to introduce it to the world of electronic commerce. In 1991, the National Science

Foundation lifted the restrictions that prevented the commercial use of the Internet, officially ushering humanity into the era of electronic commerce (History Cooperative, 2014). Digital marketing has since been proven to enhance consumer attitudes, satisfaction, purchase intent, loyalty, brand premium, and reputation by improving the efficiency of product and brand information dissemination (Adam et al., 2020; Ilyas et al., 2021; Windarsari et al., 2022).

Digital Marketing

In today's world, businesses are increasingly relying on internet technology for marketing purposes. Traditional marketing methods such as newspapers, billboards, and flyers are viewed as outdated by both consumers and businesses alike (Levinson et al., 2021). Internet marketing refers to all marketing efforts that utilize online channels, also known as online marketing or digital marketing (Desai & Vidyapeeth, 2019). In the past, internet marketing and digital marketing were considered interchangeable concepts (Sawicki, 2016). Companies are now considering digital marketing as a crucial means to achieve a dual boost in revenue and competitiveness (Alrawadieh et al., 2021; Panda & Mishra, 2022). Through the investment costs of Internet marketing in recent years, people can easily discover the gratifying changes in Internet marketing. The global digital advertising and marketing market was estimated to be \$531 billion in 2022 and is projected to reach \$15 trillion by 2030, with a compound annual growth rate of 13.9% from 2022 to 2030 (Finance. Yahoo, 2023). This indicates that the world's demand for Internet marketing will continue to increase. Developing marketing strategies in the Internet world has become a necessary trend.

The forms of engagement in digital marketing by businesses have become increasingly diverse. In addition to traditional website marketing, search engine optimization, and pay-per-click advertising, collaborations with e-commerce platforms have become a conventional marketing approach (Agarwal, 2021; Röyskö, 2023; Segismundo, 2023). Following the outbreak of Covid-19, social media marketing primarily through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube has become mainstream (Mason et al., 2021). This is attributed to the increased demand for contactless services and the application of Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 technologies. It allows consumers to engage in interactions with brands, enabling content creation and sharing based on personal preferences, sparking new media forms that are conducive to the development of e-commerce (Mileros et al., 2019). Of course, this new media form of Internet marketing is difficult to define. With the continuous innovation of Internet technology, marketing methods will continue to change to cater to the growing needs of digital technology and consumers. It foreshadows the need for continuous exploration of the changes brought about by digital marketing, especially in the context of evolving consumer digital behaviors and technologies (Varadarajan et al., 2022).

New Media

New media broadly refers to products and services that deliver information or entertainment through computer or internet-based means, as opposed to traditional methods such as television and newspapers (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Often, people associate new media with information interaction. New media mean the exchange of information in the digital world, with forms of engagement shifting from traditional one-way information transmission from businesses to consumers to two-way communication between businesses and consumers, as well as peer-to-peer information sharing among consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Common new media platforms include websites, social media, email, blogs, virtual reality, augmented reality, and streaming (Study Smarter, 2023). This means that consumers have

broken free from a constraint. In the past, they could not easily share the product and brand-related information they possessed with internet users, but that is no longer a challenge. Azize (2012) describes it as a shift from one-way communication to two-way communication. Compared to traditional media, the ever evolving and advancing new media places a greater emphasis on the transmission of information and the delivery of visual content, contributing to rapid brand dissemination (Wang & Zhang, 2020).

New media is no longer confined to text-based books and magazines; it is now more focused on blogs, social media, streaming, and even more cutting-edge technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality (Cote, 2020). Rich visual information eliminates the need for the process of understanding and analyzing textual information, providing a more intuitive presentation of objective visual data, making it a digital communication form that aligns with today's demands (Leaver et al., 2020). Additionally, new media breaks down the barriers of time and space (Lievrouw, 2023). Therefore, new media is no longer just about absorbing information from the Internet. A wide range of channels help consumers establish rules for information feedback, information creation and acceptance screening. Consumers can search for brands and products of interest from around the world at any time and from any location with internet access.

The value of new media in brand communication has been proven. Ellitan and Pradana (2022) who examined the establishment of consumer trust and its role in fostering brand loyalty from a brand communication perspective, highlighting how a substantial amount of new media content about a specific brand can continuously help consumers build trust in that brand, ultimately turning them into advocates for the brand and maintaining a close relationship with it. Hesse et al. (2021) found that brands can express empathy to consumers and gain their favor by sharing content related to COVID-19 protective measures on their websites or social media platforms. Furthermore, social media has become a primary channel for luxury brands to enhance their brand communication, delivering increased brand loyalty, recognition, and perceived quality, especially among the millennial generation (Zollo et al., 2020). Gómez-Rico et al. (2023) have suggested that brand communication and brand image influence consumer preferences. Therefore, new media is a valuable perspective for enterprises to survive and develop in the increasingly fierce Red Ocean market.

The development trends of new media are shifting from traditional textual information to visual information. However, there is still a need for further exploration of the benefits of visual information in corporate brand communication, particularly concerning its impact on Chinese consumer behavior. In the past five years, more research has been conducted with a singular focus on visual information in aspects such as output quality (informative content, entertaining content, dynamic effects, visual aesthetics, richness of background narrative), consumer engagement (consumer interaction, consumer comments, consumer purchasing, behavioral intent), promotional effectiveness (remunerative content), and emotions (self-brand connection, emotional changes) (Lim & Childs, 2020; Kusumasondjaja, 2020; Kujur & Singh, 2020; Hur et al., 2020). There is limited research that comprehensively combines consumer association, attention, and emotion. Additionally, due to China's internet restrictions, the language used on social media, cultural expressions, and the types of social media platforms used differ significantly from other countries. As a result, independent research on brand communication in China is needed to identify the effectiveness of brand communication, especially in terms of consumer purchase intentions within this specific demographic.

The objective of this study is to identify the impact of visual imagery in brand communication on consumer purchase intent. To provide a specific perspective on visual imagery, this research

introduces Dehuan and Siluo (2013) ISMAS multi-dimensional interaction model. This model suggests that in the context of new media, brand communication should encompass five perspectives: Interest, Search, Mouth, Action, and Share. Video content should stimulate consumer interest, prompting them to actively search for related brands and engage in comments and purchasing activities. Ultimately, they can become brand ambassadors for the company, sharing the brand's digital content. This model asserts that in a consumer-centric business environment, consumers have the power of choice and decision-making (Dehuan & Siluo, 2013). Consumers evaluate what is worth their attention based on the distinctiveness of advertisements and alter their individual purchase intention based on unique attributes such as Consumer Associations, Consumer Attention, and Consumers Emotions. In line with this, this study seeks to clarify the influence of Consumer Associations, Consumer Attention, and Consumers Emotions in the context of visual information transmission on consumer usage intent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Communication

Brand communication refers to how a brand leverages its unique attributes to distinguish itself from competitors and become known to consumers and potential customers (Voorveld, 2019). Brand familiarity contributes to consumers spontaneously forming long-term and stable relationships with organizations, as people's behavioral habits often lean towards repurchasing rather than trying something new (Madhavaram et al., 2005). In fact, the sales of any product or service can be achieved through the dissemination of competitive differentiation, with marketing being the key to making people aware of brand distinctiveness (Gómez-Rico et al., 2023). After all, it is complex and cumbersome for individuals to assess brands and products personally to establish a sense of differentiation, and people may not necessarily be willing to spend a significant amount of time and effort searching for information about different brands and comparing their distinctiveness. Therefore, brand communication is an effective method, especially beneficial for introducing new products and services to the market (Schultz et al., 2013).

The benefits of brand communication go beyond this. Luxton et al. (2015) found that brand communication typically takes the form of a combination of traditional and new media, enhancing a company's competitive advantage. One-way communication includes television, radio, and print, while two-way communication encompasses social media, blogs, virtual reality technology, and more (Azize 2012). Brand communication facilitates unobstructed communication between consumers and brands. Batra and Keller (2016) found that brand communication in social media enables cross-distance communication and two-way communication between consumers and businesses. Furthermore, positive corporate social responsibility performance is often communicated to consumers through brand communication strategies, sparking awareness of a company's commitment to social responsibility and increasing consumer recognition of the company (Nan & Heo, 2007). Schultz et al. (2013) argue that this social interaction is a manifestation of two-way communication between consumers and brands. Of course, for brands, the core objective of brand communication is to influence consumer purchase intention and behaviour.

Visual imagery and brand Communication

In the realm of new media, the enrichment of visual information is becoming an effective tool for brand communication. For instance, platforms like Instagram and Tik Tok, which impact corporate brand communication by enhancing the dissemination of visual information and the degree of information visualization (Datta & Kaushik, 2019; Maehle et al., 2022). Visual information presents the maximum contextualization of brand products and brand stories to the audience, with its comprehensiveness, entertainment value, and the sustained visual impact of promotional content, all contributing to the growth of consumer engagement (Kujur & Singh, 2020). Visual content, compared to traditional text and static images, excels in terms of expressiveness. For example, Kusumasondjaja (2020) found that social media enables businesses to showcase dynamic aesthetic images that are expressive, garnering more likes and comments from consumers. One reasonable explanation points to human tendencies to supplement their understanding with visual information from the experiences of others. Visual content provides a level of clarity that text descriptions often struggle to match, thereby promoting a vivid self-perception (Russmann & Svensson, 2017). Another advantage of visual information is its ability to enhance brand recall. As Nishadha (2023) aptly notes, people tend to remember only 10% of what they hear and 20% of what they read, but they can recall a remarkable 80% of what they see.

People possess keen visual perception, often deliberately or incidentally identifying various components of scenes within their field of vision, such as shapes, colors, movements, and even the brightness of the environment, they reflect on and recording the observed content in their brains (Schunk, 2012). Spontaneous and common human behaviors aid consumers in recognizing the characteristics of brands or products, setting them apart from a broad audience. This foreshadows that consumers' visual perception can serve as a significant tool in the field of marketing (Sample, 2020). Specifically, visual cues on the internet help consumers form associations that make them aware that the brand or product depicted in an image may be popular and high-performing, enhancing their attention to online reputation, trust in brands and products, and positively influencing their purchase intent (Filiari et al., 2021). Visual information in new media satisfies consumers' psychological needs. Those chasing luxury goods desire people to see the products they own on social media, offering them an opportunity to showcase their personal collections, greatly satisfying their vanity (Jin & Ryu, 2020).

Theoretical Model and Hypothesis Development

The ISMAS multi-dimensional interaction model proposes that within the realm of new media, brand communication should embrace five key dimensions: Interest, Search, Mouth, Action, and Share (Dehaun, 2013). Video content ought to ignite consumer curiosity, inciting them to proactively seek out associated brands, actively participate in discussions, and initiate purchasing actions. Ultimately, this can transform them into brand advocates for the company, eagerly disseminating the brand's digital content (Yu, 2022). Overall, it covers three levels of consumer feedback, behavioral level, instinctual level, and reflective level. As early as many years ago, the study by Norman and Ortony (2006) delineates three dimensions, behavioral level, instinctual level, and reflective level. According to their findings, individuals often unconsciously take notice of adeptly crafted advertisements from particular brands. When exposed to these same or analogous ads across various media platforms, there is a progressive shift in their emotional responses. Over time, this shift can lead to either an increased

inclination to purchase or actual purchasing behavior. The study categorized it into three perspectives including association, attention, and emotion.

H1: Attention exerts a significantly positive influence on the purchase intention of consumers.
H2: Association exhibits a significant and positive effect on the consumers' purchase intention.
H3: Sentiment demonstrates a significantly positive effect on the purchase intention of consumers.

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research was the sole methodology employed in this study. Advertising, as a marketing model, is well-suited for garnering consensus results from consumers through a large sample size and a diverse range of research methods. Quantitative research derives conclusions through the analysis of rich data, offering the capacity to validate phenomena or correlations (Watson, 2015). The study adopted an electronic questionnaire format, which allowed for respondents from various locations. The determination of the sample size in this study primarily relied on the scale proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). According to Krejcie and Morgan's guidelines, when the target group exceeds 100,000 individuals, the recommended sample size should be greater than 385. In this study, a sample size of 386 was chosen. Finally, the study received only 180 questionnaires. Excluding some questionnaires with low completeness and questionnaires with short filling time, the number of questionnaires used for data analysis was 156.

A Self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) was employed for this study. It allows respondents to complete the questionnaire independently without researcher intervention (Jenkins & Dillman, 1995). This kind of questionnaire reduces the occurrence of subjective guidance problems caused by researcher intervention (Leon et al., 2022). Respondents could access and complete the questionnaire via various devices such as mobile phones and computers. In contrast to a standard SAQ, this study's SAQ incorporated images of three mineral water bottles, including the "Illustration" series by Nongfu Mountain Spring, the Half-bottle water plan by American Life Water Company, and the "BLK" Blackwater series. The inspiration comes from the information comparison of visual pictures in Norman and Ortony (2006). Additionally, the questionnaires for association, attention, emotion, and purchase intention were adapted from Ali et al. (2020), Rózsa et al. (2022), and He and Qu (2018) respectively (Table 1).

Table 1
Measurement instrument

Variables	Item	Source
Association	3	Ali et al. (2020)
Attention	3	Rózsa et al. (2022)
Emotion	2	He and Qu (2018)
Purchase Intention	3	He and Qu (2018)

This was done to examine the impact mechanism of visual imagery on brand communication. This study allowed participants to answer questions related to the factors of association, attention, and emotion based on the images they observed. Each respondent was required to fill out the questionnaire only once, and they had the option to request data deletion at any time. Following the proposal of Zyphur and Pierides (2017), this study adhered to the ethical review guidelines. The researchers ensured that every participant volunteered willingly, and they were

not subjected to any form of coercion. Prior to questionnaire distribution, it underwent an ethics review team's approval process and was distributed upon meeting the distribution standards.

Influenced by cultural differences, the questionnaire was designed in a bilingual format, incorporating both Chinese and English. In China, the population proficient in English communication stands at less than 1% (Song, 2023). Researchers must take into account the potential impact of language on the questionnaire's outcomes. The process of back translation, typically employed when dealing with two distinct language texts (Brislin & Freimanis, 2001), allows one participant to translate the English questionnaire into Chinese, followed by another participant retranslating it back into English. Ultimately, questionnaires that convey the same semantic meaning in English are considered effective, while those exhibiting semantic differences undergo iterative refinement until semantic consistency is achieved. Statistical analysis included reliability analysis, KMO test, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis.

RESULTS

Table 2

<i>Demographic Information</i>			
Statistic		Sample Size	%
Gender	Male	35	22.4
	Female	121	77.6
Age	Under the Age of 18,	2	1.3
	18 to 25 Years Old	138	88.5
	26 to 30 Years Old	2	1.3
	31-40 Years Old	5	3.2
	41-60 Years Old	4	2.6
Record of Formal Schooling	High School and Below	43	27.6
	Undergraduate Course	104	66.3
	Master's and Above	9	5.9
Income	5000 the Following	133	85.3
	5000-10000	8	5.1
	10000-20000	5	3.2
	More than 20000	10	6.4

The surveyed respondents exhibited relatively lower overall income levels, which align with the current income landscape in China. Compared to developed countries, China's overall income level remains comparatively low, with a global ranking of 71 in terms of per capita GDP (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023). The data results (Table 2) revealed that the majority of respondents fell within the 18-25 age range (88.5%), with a higher representation of female respondents (77.5%) and a significant portion holding undergraduate degrees (66.3%). As China continues to implement educational reforms, the number of young individuals holding undergraduate degrees has surpassed those with lower educational qualifications (China Education and Population Report, 2023). Among the various explanations for the higher representation of female respondents, a plausible factor is their greater interest in participating in shopping surveys. Some studies have found that Chinese female consumers demonstrate a higher willingness to engage in online shopping and make purchases more frequently than their male counterparts (Wang & Lee, 2019).

Table 3

The Reliability Test and Validity Test

Variables	KMO	Bartlett's Sphericity Test Sig.	Cronbach Coefficient	Alpha	Overall Alpha Coefficient	Cronbach Coefficient
Association			0.870			
Attention			0.923		0.960	
Emotion	0.932	.000	0.886			
Purchase Intention			0.937		0.937	

The dataset exhibits high reliability and suitability (Table 3). The KMO (0.932 > 0.8) indicates that the dataset is highly suitable for factor analysis or principal component analysis. Cronbach's alpha (0.960 > 0.9) indicates very high internal consistency.

Table 4

The Correlation and regression results of each dimension of visual effect on purchase intention

Variables	Correlation	Coefficient	P	Result
Association→Purchase Intention	0.863	0.205	0.015	Support
Attention→Purchase Intention	0.813	0.513	0.000	Support
Emotion→Purchase Intention	0.824	0.286	0.025	Support

The results of the correlation analysis indicate that, during the process of consumer engagement with new media, association, attention, and emotion all have a positive and significant impact on purchase intention (Table 4). Regression analysis further reveals that attention exerts the most substantial influence on consumer purchase intent.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with previous conclusions, indicating that new media excels in the dimensions of Association, Attention, and Emotion, positively influencing consumer purchase intention. The motivational impact of new media marketing has been observed in several studies. For instance, in the case of live-streaming-based social media, a host can sell 15,000 lipsticks in just 5 minutes (Teh, 2021), and amass 37 million followers and millions of dollars in order sales within a short month (Yu and Hu, 2020). Hosts in live e-commerce engage consumers' attention through various entertaining activities, such as playing video games, real-time food or beverage tasting, and showcasing clothing and cosmetics. They sustain consumer attention by intensifying interaction, which triggers emotional changes (Hou et al., 2019). New media creates visual and communication settings that lead to emotional shifts in users, including pleasure, excitement, admiration, and emotional trust. These changes stimulate consumers' intent to search and purchase (Meng et al., 2021). As consumers encounter product and brand advertisements through various channels, their brand associations and brand awareness strengthen continuously, ultimately enhancing purchase intent (Susilowati & Sari, 2020).

LIMITATIONS

This study has limitations in terms of data collection and the number of variables. The study primarily focused on participants in the age group of 18-25, comprising 88.5% of the sample. The study's generalizability to other age groups is limited, as it may not adequately describe the factors influencing purchase intention in populations outside this age range. Additionally, male participants accounted for only 22.4% of the sample, which could potentially impact the assessment of factors influencing male purchase intent due to the predominance of female data. In future research, it would be beneficial to adjust the sample composition to ensure a more balanced representation of different demographic groups. Furthermore, the study examined a limited set of variables. In future research, it would be advantageous to incorporate additional perspectives, such as brand search behavior, brand trust, brand visual experience, brand engagement, and brand awareness, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing purchase intention.

CONCLUSION

When faced with today's rapidly evolving economic environment, companies are faced with a serious problem of homogenization, especially with the influence of new media. In order to improve the consumer experience and meet customer needs, we need to change our perspective and consider how to provide solutions that are innovative, interactive, and memorable from the consumer's point of view. One of the key issues is to reframe the brand's visual identity and design to better communicate the brand's values. Design can have a profound impact on consumers, so it is important for companies to focus on new ways of communicating their visual identity and keep up with the trends in order to gain a greater competitive advantage in the marketplace.

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