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Article

Research on the Optimization of Brand Communication Paths and Effectiveness Evaluation under the Online Marketing Environment

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Abstract: With the rapid development of internet technology, online marketing has become a crucial approach for brand communication and value creation. In a complex media environment characterized by fragmentation, interactivity, and personalized consumption, traditional linear communication models are increasingly unable to meet the needs of enterprises seeking sustained brand growth. This paper analyzes the main characteristics of brand communication under the online marketing environment, including multi-platform dissemination, user-generated content, and data-driven targeting. On this basis, it classifies brand communication paths into such categories as official media channels, third-party platforms, social networks, and word-of-mouth diffusion, and constructs an optimized model for brand communication that emphasizes integration, coordination, and feedback loops. Furthermore, the study proposes a multi-dimensional evaluation system to assess communication effectiveness from the perspectives of communication reach, audience engagement, attitude change, conversion behavior, and long-term brand equity. Through theoretical analysis combined with empirical case studies, the research identifies key factors that influence the efficiency of online brand communication and reveals how different paths interact to shape consumer behavior. The findings provide targeted strategic suggestions for enterprises to allocate communication resources more rationally, improve brand influence, and enhance marketing efficiency in the digital environment.

Keywords: online marketing; brand communication; consumer behavior; digital media; marketing strategy

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Significance

In the era of digital transformation, the rapid advancement and widespread application of digital technologies—such as mobile internet, big data, and artificial intelligence—have profoundly reshaped the landscape of corporate marketing and brand communication. At the same time, consumer behavior is undergoing significant shifts: users increasingly rely on social media for information, exhibit fragmented attention, and demand personalized, value-driven interactions. Against this backdrop, brand communication is shifting from the traditional one-way, mass-media-driven model to a more interactive, real-time, and user-centered online marketing model. Online marketing not only significantly expands the breadth and flexibility of brand exposure but also enables brands to interact with consumers more precisely through data insights and customized content. Therefore, how to rationally construct and scientifically optimize online brand communication paths has become a key issue. Effective path construction

directly influences a brand's market competitiveness by enhancing brand influence, cultivating customer loyalty, and improving return on investment [1].

1.2. Research Status at Home and Abroad

Internationally, research on online marketing communication began relatively early and has developed into a comprehensive and systematic body of work. Scholars have examined various dimensions, including the role of social media platforms in brand promotion, mechanisms of consumer engagement, influencer marketing, and the creation of brand communities [2]. Key theoretical frameworks highlight the collaborative construction of brand meaning by firms and consumers, as well as the categorization of platforms and strategic communication practices. In comparison, domestic research on online brand communication started later but has experienced rapid growth in recent years. Studies increasingly emphasize local social media platforms, such as WeChat, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu, along with consumer characteristics specific to the Chinese market. However, challenges persist, including the disconnect between theoretical research and marketing practice, the absence of integrated communication path models tailored to local contexts, and the lack of comprehensive and dynamic evaluation systems to measure communication effectiveness.

1.3. Research Objectives and Content

The primary objective of this study is to explore and address the key challenges in brand communication within the online marketing environment [3]. Specifically, it aims to analyze the new characteristics and influencing factors of brand communication shaped by the digital media landscape and evolving consumer behavior; identify and categorize the types of brand communication paths, distinguishing between direct and indirect routes, and construct an integrated communication path model based on user interaction dynamics; propose targeted strategies for optimizing content, channels, and user engagement mechanisms to enhance the precision and sustainability of brand communication efforts; and develop a scientific, multi-dimensional evaluation system to assess communication effectiveness, validated through real-world case studies of representative brands. By combining theoretical modeling and empirical analysis, this study seeks to provide practical guidance for enterprises to refine their brand communication strategies and achieve improved marketing performance in the digital era.

2. Characteristics of Brand Communication in the Online Marketing Environment

2.1. Changes in the Media Environment of Online Marketing

With the widespread adoption of mobile devices and the rise of new media platforms, brand communication has undergone a significant transformation. Traditionally, brands relied on one-way communication channels like television, radio, and newspapers, which limited their ability to engage with audiences directly. However, the advent of interactive social platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu has shifted the landscape, allowing brands to communicate in a more dynamic and responsive manner. These platforms bring characteristics such as fragmentation, where content is tailored to specific audience segments; immediacy, enabling real-time interaction with consumers; and visualization, where rich multimedia content like images, videos, and live streaming enhances engagement. This shift not only increases the efficiency of information dissemination but also improves the precision with which brands can target and engage specific audiences, offering more personalized and relevant marketing experiences [4].

2.2. Changes in Consumer Behavior

In the online environment, consumers have transitioned from passive recipients of information to active participants in the communication process [5, 6]. They now engage selectively with content based on personal preferences and interests, shifting from being mere consumers of media to becoming co-creators of content [7, 8]. This transformation is

characterized by self-centeredness, where consumers prioritize content that aligns with their values and needs; interest-driven behavior, where they focus on content that captures their attention and resonates with their passions; and value-driven engagement, where they are more inclined to support brands that reflect their personal values and contribute to causes they care about. Consequently, brand communication must prioritize delivering meaningful and relevant content, emphasizing the user experience and fostering value-driven connections that resonate with individual consumers.

2.3. Multi-Dimensional Interactive Mechanism of Brand Communication

The shift to online marketing has fostered the development of multi-dimensional interactive relationships between brands and consumers [9, 10]. Brands no longer simply broadcast messages; instead, they engage in ongoing, reciprocal interactions with their audience. These interactions include user comments, likes, shares, and even participation in video challenges or community-driven campaigns, where users are encouraged to create and share their own content related to the brand. Through these interactions, consumers not only engage with the brand but also contribute to the creation and spread of brand messaging. By co-creating content and fostering emotional connections, brands can increase user engagement, which in turn amplifies the reach and impact of their marketing efforts. This multi-dimensional interaction not only broadens the scope of brand communication but also deepens the relationship between brands and their audiences, enhancing loyalty and driving long-term engagement.

3. Types and Construction of Brand Communication Paths

3.1. Analysis of Direct and Indirect Paths

In the context of online brand communication, information dissemination occurs through both direct and indirect paths. Direct paths refer to official and controllable channels managed by the brand itself, such as the brand's official website, verified social media accounts (e.g., WeChat official account, Weibo, or brand-operated Douyin pages), and official apps or mini programs. These channels play a fundamental role in delivering accurate, standardized, and authoritative content. They are typically used for announcements, product information, corporate news, and promotional campaigns, ensuring consistency in brand messaging and maintaining brand credibility. However, while these channels are reliable, they may lack the spontaneity and emotional appeal needed to spark widespread user engagement.

In contrast, indirect paths function through third-party or user-driven channels and focus on leveraging trust-based mechanisms. These include influencer or Key Opinion Leader (KOL) recommendations, user-generated content (UGC) such as product reviews and experience sharing, and peer communication within online communities or forums. Indirect paths are characterized by their grassroots nature and emotional authenticity, often seen as more relatable and persuasive by consumers. The core advantage of these paths lies in their ability to build credibility through interpersonal trust and social proof, which enhances message virality and helps brands break through the information noise of the digital environment. Together, direct and indirect paths form a complementary communication ecosystem, improving both reach and engagement efficiency.

3.2. Construction of Brand Communication Path Model

Building upon classic communication theories such as the AIDA model (Attention--Interest--Desire--Action) and the AISAS model (Attention--Interest--Search--Action--Share), this study develops a five-stage communication path model tailored to the dynamics of the social media era: "Attract---Engage---Interact---Share---Convert." The first stage, Attract, focuses on capturing user attention through eye-catching visuals, headlines, and trending topics. In the Engage stage, brands deepen user interest with storytelling, personalized content, and emotional resonance. The Interact stage emphasizes two-way communication, including comment replies, livestream Q&A, and interactive challenges,

to strengthen user participation and foster connection. The fourth stage, Share, reflects the viral potential of content, as users voluntarily disseminate brand-related materials through forwarding, tagging, or remixing. Finally, Convert refers to the transformation of user interest into concrete actions, such as making a purchase, joining a loyalty program, or continuing to advocate for the brand. Notably, the model highlights the strategic role of social media in amplifying user interaction and sharing, and underscores the value of private domain traffic—such as personal WeChat groups or CRM systems—in nurturing sustained conversion and long-term customer value.

3.3. Analysis of Typical Path Cases

To further illustrate the applicability of the communication path model, representative brand cases are analyzed. One notable example is a domestic beauty brand that rapidly gained market prominence by leveraging a synergistic combination of platforms. Its strategy involves utilizing Xiaohongshu for KOL and user recommendations to stimulate initial interest and social proof; employing Douyin live streams to maintain real-time interaction and product demonstration, thereby fostering deeper user engagement; and cultivating loyal customer groups through WeChat private domain operations, where exclusive content and discounts are offered to drive repeat purchases and referrals. This closed-loop path not only achieves high visibility but also converts engagement into sales with remarkable efficiency.

Another case is a liquor brand known for its emotional storytelling and youth-oriented image. This brand's communication path integrates emotionally resonant copywriting that appeals to nostalgia and individuality, along with content that taps into Chinese liquor culture. Additionally, the brand encourages user co-creation, inviting consumers to participate in packaging design contests and memory-sharing activities. This strategy builds a strong emotional connection with users and fosters a sense of ownership and community, significantly enhancing brand affinity and user loyalty. Both cases exemplify how integrated, multi-platform communication paths—anchored in emotional engagement and user participation—can effectively drive both brand visibility and business outcomes [11, 12].

4. Optimization Strategies for Brand Communication Paths

4.1. Content Strategy Optimization: Precision and Emotional Appeal

In today's digital landscape, effective brand communication relies on delivering the right content to the right audience. By utilizing big data analysis, brands can develop detailed user profiles, enabling highly precise content delivery that aligns with users' behaviors, preferences, and needs. This precision ensures that content is both relevant and timely, increasing its likelihood of resonating with the target audience. Additionally, incorporating emotional marketing strategies—such as storytelling, empathetic messaging, and value-driven narratives—can significantly strengthen the emotional connection between the brand and its audience. Emotional appeal enhances the acceptance of brand messages and amplifies their impact, encouraging deeper engagement with the content. When users feel personally connected to a brand, they are more likely to share the content within their networks, thereby expanding its reach and fostering organic word-of-mouth promotion.

4.2. Channel Selection Optimization: Cross-Platform Collaborative Communication

Effective brand communication requires optimizing the selection of channels to ensure that the message reaches its audience in the most impactful way. Each platform has unique characteristics and user bases, making it essential to develop differentiated content tailored to each platform. For instance, visual-heavy content may perform well on platforms like Instagram or Douyin, while informative, in-depth posts may be better suited for WeChat or LinkedIn. By understanding the distinct dynamics of each channel and the preferences of their users, brands can establish a "centralized content--multi-

platform distribution" structure. This approach enables the brand to maintain consistency in its messaging while optimizing content for each platform's strengths [13, 14]. Cross-platform collaboration further enhances the frequency and sustainability of communication, as brands can leverage multiple touchpoints to reinforce their messages and maintain an ongoing presence in the minds of their audience. This strategy increases the overall effectiveness of brand communication by reaching consumers across various digital spaces.

4.3. Audience Interaction Optimization: Community Operations and User Co-Creation

In the evolving digital landscape, fostering deeper engagement with audiences is essential for building long-term brand loyalty. One effective approach is the establishment of private domain communities, such as brand-specific WeChat groups or interest-based forums, where users can directly interact with the brand and with each other. These communities create a more intimate environment where users feel valued and involved in the brand's journey. Encouraging user participation in product co-creation—whether through feedback on new products, crowdsourcing ideas, or facilitating user-generated content—can significantly enhance engagement by making users feel like active contributors to the brand's success. Additionally, soliciting feedback on brand activities and campaigns provides valuable insights that can inform future strategies. This level of interaction deepens users' emotional connection with the brand, driving loyalty and motivating continued participation. As users engage more frequently within these communities, they stimulate secondary communication dynamics, where they share brand content, invite others to participate, and advocate for the brand within their networks, creating a self-sustaining cycle of engagement and advocacy [15].

5. Building an Evaluation System for Brand Communication Effectiveness

5.1. Dimensions of Communication Effectiveness Evaluation

To comprehensively evaluate the impact of brand communication strategies in the online marketing environment, this study constructs a five-dimensional evaluation system. The first dimension is Communication Coverage, which reflects the breadth of message dissemination and is typically measured through metrics such as page views, exposure rates, and reach across platforms. The second dimension is User Engagement, focusing on the depth of user interaction with brand content, assessed by indicators like the number of comments, likes, shares, and participation in interactive activities such as polls or challenges [16]. The third dimension, Brand Awareness, centers on the degree to which users recognize and recall the brand, with evaluation tools including brand search indices, brand recall tests, and awareness surveys. The fourth dimension, Emotional Affinity, gauges the emotional connection between users and the brand. It involves sentiment analysis, the tracking of emotional tags in user-generated content, and the monitoring of public opinion to understand user attitudes and feelings. Lastly, the Conversion Rate dimension emphasizes the effectiveness of brand communication in driving real-world consumer actions. Key metrics include click-through rates, conversion rates on landing pages, actual purchase behavior, and repurchase frequency, all of which reflect the final step from interest to transaction.

5.2. Data-Driven Evaluation Tools and Methods

To ensure the accuracy and objectivity of evaluating communication effectiveness, this study integrates various data sources and analytical tools to establish a comprehensive data-driven assessment framework. Public opinion monitoring platforms are utilized to capture sentiment trends and real-time public feedback, enabling brands to respond swiftly to user attitudes and manage potential crises. Social media data platforms provide detailed user behavior data, including content reach, interaction volumes, and engagement trajectories, offering valuable insights into content performance across different user groups and time periods. Additionally, tools are employed to track user

behavior on brand websites, including traffic sources, click paths, and conversion events. By synthesizing data from these diverse tools, brands can conduct multi-dimensional analyses and implement dynamic evaluations that adapt over time. This approach not only ensures timely performance tracking but also supports the continuous optimization of communication strategies based on real-time feedback [17, 18].

5.3. Case Empirical and Evaluation Model Validation

To verify the practicality and applicability of the proposed evaluation model, a case study was conducted on a Chinese skincare brand that operates a robust marketing presence on Xiaohongshu (RED). Over a three-month observation period from January to March 2024, the brand's communication performance was systematically tracked using the five-dimensional evaluation system [17]. During this period, the brand launched a new product line—the Floral Dew Hydrating Series—and leveraged Xiaohongshu's influencer ecosystem to disseminate promotional content. The results revealed a notable 38% increase in communication coverage, as measured by total post views and reach, which grew from 8.2 million to 11.3 million views across the platform. User engagement also improved markedly. The number of comments and likes per post doubled, with average interactions per influencer post rising from 1,500 to over 3,100. Additionally, brand awareness was significantly enhanced: Xiaohongshu's search index for the brand rose by 26%, and the brand was mentioned in over 4,000 new user-generated posts, many of which featured hashtags such as SpringSkincare and NewYearNewSkin. Emotional affinity was also positively impacted. A sentiment analysis of 500 user comments showed that 73% of sentiments were positive, compared to 59% in the previous quarter. Users frequently described the new product line as "lightweight," "refreshing," and "perfect for sensitive skin," suggesting an improvement in emotional resonance and consumer perception. Most importantly, conversion performance saw a tangible boost. According to click-through and sales data from the brand's linked Xiaohongshu mini-store, the conversion rate increased by 12.4%, driven by targeted in-app promotions and influencer call-to-actions. These findings confirm the model's effectiveness in capturing the multi-faceted outcomes of online brand communication and its practical value in guiding real-time strategic adjustments for improved marketing performance.

6. Conclusion

In the increasingly complex and dynamic online marketing environment, brand communication has transcended the traditional paradigm of one-way content dissemination. It has evolved into a multifaceted and iterative process that integrates content creation, platform selection, and user interaction. Brands must shift from merely broadcasting messages to actively engaging with users in personalized, scenario-based, and value-driven ways. This transformation requires the strategic optimization of communication pathways, emphasizing three core aspects: precision in content delivery, cross-platform synergy, and the deepening of user participation. By tailoring content to specific audience segments, coordinating efforts across diverse platforms, and fostering user co-creation and emotional connection, enterprises can establish more effective and sustainable communication bridges with consumers. Additionally, the development of a scientific and systematic evaluation framework for communication effectiveness has become increasingly critical. Such a framework enables enterprises to monitor the status and impact of brand communication in real time through data analytics, providing a basis for dynamic strategy adjustments and performance optimization. It also facilitates the measurement of both quantitative indicators, such as reach, engagement, and conversion, and qualitative dimensions, such as brand sentiment and emotional resonance. Looking ahead, future research can explore the integration of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, and blockchain, into the domain of brand communication. These technologies offer significant potential to enhance content interactivity, personalization, and immersion, providing innovative tools for shaping

brand narratives and consumer experiences. Their application is anticipated to enrich theoretical models of brand communication while driving practical advancements, injecting new vitality into the evolving landscape of digital marketing.

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