

Research on Marketing Strategy of Lipstick Products Endorsed by Male Celebrities on Chinese New Media Platforms

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Abstract: The Internet's development has transformed society by making communication more efficient than ever before and creating disruptive and significant changes to the marketing model. Based on the observation that Chinese male celebrities have been frequently appearing in lipstick endorsement activities, this study provides a qualitative analysis of consumer feedback on Chinese male celebrity endorsement of lipstick on social media platforms. By observing the commercials of Guerlain's lipstick on Weibo and RED, consumers generally recognize the story and meaning constructed by the brand and its spokesperson. Results show that male celebrity's attraction and stories are significantly impacting the purchase intent. These findings contribute to the literature on celebrity endorsements, charismatic influence, and gender stereotypes

Keywords: Social Media, Cosmetics, Lipstick, Marketing Strategy, Celebrity Endorsement.

1. Introduction

In China, brand marketing strategies can no longer ignore the use of news media since Chinese online media plays a major role in enhancing communication and influence. According to the China New Media Development Report 2020, Chinese Netizens usually use social media as an essential way to obtain news and information about new products using the popular WeChat, Weibo, and TikTok services [1]. Referring to Digital 2022: China, the number of China's social media users have reached 983 million, which is equivalent to 68.0% of China's total population in terms of sheer numbers. Specifically, the scale of China's short video market has expanded rapidly since 2019, and the number of users has reached an astonishing 857 million users [2]. In the next few years, it is predicted that the market opportunities for short videos will continue to increase, making content consumption and advertising revenue drive the further growth of the short video market, whereas the videoization of online information makes them the trend of new media. Since the Chinese user base of social media is large, most Chinese Internet users can quickly receive such promoted information and become affected. One of these include the popular promotion methods of lipstick advertising. In recent years, China's lipstick industry has developed rapidly. According to data, the market size of China's lipstick industry has grown from 6.18 billion to 17.8 billion in the past five years [3]. The rise of this new retail model of e-commerce platform has increased the annual lipsticks consumption frequency in

Chinese consumers since it is the main sales channel of lipsticks. In 1996, Japanese actor Kimura Takuya took over the lipstick advertisement and became the first male actor in history to endorse lipsticks. Before this, advertising of beauty products was usually endorsed by the female stars, so this advertising strategy of the Japanese cosmetics company Kanebo caused a huge sensation at the time. Since the visual contrast of Kimura's lipstick endorsement caused a tremendous response and achieved good results, the phenomenon of male lipstick endorsement began to appear in China and gradually showed signs of becoming mainstream. In this article, products traditionally endorsed by female celebrities, such as lipstick, will be named female-gender-imaged products. Male celebrities' endorsement of female-gender-imaged products is regarded as a cross-gender endorsement [4].

2. Literature Review

A series of recent studies have indicated that running a consumer-celebrity relationship has always been a critical point in marketing because it influences how consumers interpret celebrity images and endorsements to determine whether they will consume a product [5][6][7]. Fan consumers may be affected by idolatry and increase brand loyalty if a celebrity is associated with a brand or product. Idol worshipping is the psychological identification and emotional attachment of fans to their idols, which drives them to willingly buy idol-approved products [6]. In an article studying patterns of celebrity endorsement efforts, the authors examined attitudes and influences toward celebrity endorsers through respondents' assessments of celebrity endorsement campaigns. The authors found that consumers' attitudes toward endorsement campaigns are influenced by the celebrity's level of expertise, brand fit, and perceived celebrity motivation. They also discovered that if the celebrities' motivation to endorse a brand included their recognition of the brand's quality, it can positively impact consumers' perception of the brand [7]. Some of the interesting research results in this context are that even though celebrity endorsements are a common marketing tool, the brand-to-consumer match is more likely to drive consumer purchase intent than celebrity-to-brand congruence [7]. Celebrity selection and endorsement efficiency, while improving perceived brand attitude and commitment, has no significant impact on brand recognition or consumption intentions without the psychology of idol worshipping [8]. In other words, celebrity's personal renown and influence are crucial in the brand endorsement because idolatry psychology is a significant factor affecting consumption intention.

Today's celebrity endorsement campaigns have evolved from traditional media to social media and play an important role in suggesting a social and emotional connection between users and celebrities. The impact of social media use on celebrity endorsements is based on parasocial relationships, self-disclosure, and celebrity endorsement [9]. A parasocial relationship is a one-sided social relationship in which one of the parties expends emotional energy, interests, and time on the product while the other is completely unaware of the existence of the other and their efforts [10]. The data collected from an online survey of 400 Korean Wave fans in Singapore show that consumers' unilateral interactions with celebrities on social media positively impact celebrity endorsements [9]. Parasocial relationships can be based on fantasy to simulate friendship, romance, or family relations; therefore, manipulating parasocial relationships in advertising strategies can increase the persuasiveness of the promoted product [10]. Hence, social media interaction can affect the parasocial relationship between celebrities and fans through self-disclosure and have a positive impact, thereby strengthening consumers' purchase intention.

In the Chinese market, it has become a common advertising strategy to use male celebrities to endorse products that women usually endorse. The frequency of this phenomenon in cosmetic advertising endorsement campaigns confirms, to some extent, that such endorsements have positive feedback. However, a previous study suggests that compared to women endorsers, the effect of cross-gender endorsements significantly led to study a lower evaluation of the products by female

consumers, which is caused by the threat of gender identity [4]. This result is obtained by recording and analyzing the feedback of female consumers when they see cross-gender endorsement advertisements.

Previous studies have included how celebrity endorsement affects motivation, influence, and factor on consumers. Research on the relationship between celebrity endorsements and brand influence provides many supporting views and evidence. However, there is still a certain lack of research on the phenomenon of male celebrity endorsement of cosmetics, especially on the characteristics and effects of such endorsement advertisements. Although previous studies have shown that using male celebrities to endorse female-gender-image products reduce positive feedback, the main weakness in their study is that they lack attempts to study different categories of promoted products. The same marketing strategy may bring different market feedback for products with other categories, so the results of previous studies on such marketing strategies can not directly define its effectiveness. Referring to comments on social media and sales on e-commerce platforms, it was found that the consumer feedback on lipstick ads endorsed by male celebrities did not show a negative impact, so it is necessary to study this phenomenon in this paper. This paper will study the phenomenon of Chinese male celebrities' endorsement of lipstick advertisements, analyze the advertising techniques and strategies that lead to the successful promotion.

3. Methodology

This paper aims to study the responses and evaluations of Chinese consumers to the endorsement and promotion of cross-gender lipsticks on social media; hence, the research target is mainly consumers using Chinese social media. According to the nature of the research, this paper will use a qualitative research method to analyze the representative lipstick advertising and promotion cases on social media. Through quantitative observations, the research method focuses on the presentation and popularity of cross-gender lipstick endorsement campaigns on mainstream Chinese social media. The observed social media platforms are Weibo and RED, which are the leading communication platforms for cosmetics advertising in China. The campaign case used in this study is a lipstick advertisement in 2019 in which Guerlain hired Chinese male celebrity Yang Yang as the spokesman of their Lipstick Balms. By observing the data and feedback on two social platforms, as well as derivative posts with related entries, Chinese consumers' responses to cross-gender lipstick advertisements can be evaluated intuitively.

4. Results

Research has shown that when cross-gender endorsement strategies are used in lipstick campaigns, they do not exhibit the negative effects reported in previous studies. After horizontal comparison, it was found that the number of clicks and comments on cross-gender lipstick endorsement campaigns were higher than that of some female celebrity endorsement advertisements on Weibo. In 2021, when Guerlain promoted the KissKiss Bee Glow lip balm series in China, they looked for Yang Yang, a well-known Chinese actor with a fan base of 58.93 million (data as of 2022). The officially announced post of this endorsement information received 3298 comments and 39,000 likes. In 2022, Chinese actress Tianai Zhang was officially announced by Guerlain as a brand ambassador to promote the foundation and shade 214 of the Rouge G lipstick collection and received 1,675 comments and 4,102 likes. Through direct comparison of data, it can be found that male celebrities are not more powerless than female celebrities in bringing popularity and attention when they promote lipstick on social media.

In the commercial of Yang Yang's endorsement of lipstick, Yang Yang emphasizes the meaning of love represented by lipstick, which makes him indirectly portrayed as the image of the consumer's

"boyfriend". The commercial garnered 760,000 shares, 160,000 comments, and 59,000 likes, but many of the comments were about Yang Yang's performance or endorsement of what the commercial conveyed, rather than focusing on the product itself. Quoting two of the highly-liked comments: "Can you kiss me if I buy this lipstick?", and "Good morning, Little Prince of Guerlain! "Both of these comments received over a 1000 likes each; thus, the observation shows that viewers agreed with these two comments and that consumers do monetarily recognize the image and message created by the brand. Nevertheless, users only express their desire for consumption in the comments; whether they actually consume the product is not discernible from the social media posts.

As shown in observations that consumers pay more attention to the spokesperson, since Guerlain's marketing strategy emphasizes Yang Yang rather than the product to a great extent. Unlike typical female celebrity endorsements for lipsticks, Yang Yang did not wear the lipstick color he promoted, which means that what he showed was the meaning of the lipstick rather than its function and performance. It is worth noting that the 775 and 940 shade numbers are "kiss me" and "it's you" in Chinese homonyms, which shows that Guerlain endows romantic messages to promote lipsticks. To be more specific, Guerlain did not highlight the original names of the two lipsticks in the promotion process but emphasized "Yang Yang shades", which indicates that they believe that Yang Yang's personal charm and influence are enough to generate considerable sales and feedback for their main promotional products. Searching for the entry "Yang Yang Colors" on Weibo and RED will reveal numerous related posts and shares, reflecting the high level of discussion that the event sparked at the time. Looking back at the posts about Guerlain lipsticks in the past two years, it can be found that "Yang Yang shades" have been taken as a Valentine's Day gift by many consumers.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate a positive response to Guerlain's cross-gender endorsement lipstick commercials on Chinese social platforms, challenging prior research findings that male celebrities are ineffective in endorsing female-gender-imaged products. Guerlain's strategy is intended to create a connection of "warmth" between the spokesperson and the consumer, as warmth in advertising is defined as the emotionally designed physiological arousal that arises through the direct or indirect experience of love, family, or friendship relationships [11]. The intensity of the warmth delivered depends partly on how the audiences sympathize with the commercial's content [11]. In the commercial of Yang Yang's endorsement of lipstick, Yang Yang emphasized the meaning of love represented by lipstick and was indirectly shaped into the image of the consumer's "boyfriend". Strategically, it can be interpreted that Guerlain tried to arouse audiences by establishing a warm emotional connection. Such a marketing strategy of creating stories and images effectively strengthens the image and style of brands and products, but it relies heavily on story delivery. In this case, the story of Yang Yang's advertising has created a romantic image and atmosphere, which is undoubtedly effective and not inconsistent. Plan from the perspective of brand, the meaning conveyed by the celebrity and the product to the public needs to have a certain congruence; in other words, the meaning conveyed by the celebrity can be understood as the meaning of the product [12]. In this case, Yang Yang's role as a "boyfriend" of the consumers in Guerlain's commercial is consistent with the romantic meaning given to the promoted lipsticks. As a medium of the product concept, Yang Yang transferred the meaning that the brand aimed to express. His fit with the meaning of the product laid the foundation for the success of his endorsement campaign. Lipstick in this ad is no longer just a cosmetic but a symbol of romance. Consumers can agree with this advertisement because they tend to look for meaningful products in the physical world to express their tastes, preferences, and values [12]. Consumers need to receive and recognize the similarity between the celebrity and the product before they are ready to accept the meaning expressed by the celebrity and present in the product [12]. Through observation, it can be seen from the many comments below the promotion post that

consumers did recognize Yang Yang's charm and the meaning of the products "sold" by him, which is not an easy matter. If Yang Yang could not convincingly "play" the role of a "good boyfriend" in the commercial, this commercial would not be influential.

Moreover, due to the enormous influence displayed by male celebrities, brands have to take image risks, as negative celebrity information can be highly detrimental to advertising campaigns due to the collapse of source credibility [13]. The source credibility model of endorsements is composed of celebrity credibility, celebrity expertise, and celebrity appeal [13]. In Yang Yang's commercial, it meets the demand of celebrity endorsement for credibility and attractiveness of celebrities but lacks the professional knowledge of the product. From this standpoint, Guerlain's cross-gender endorsement advertising can be considered that most of it depends on the image and influence of the celebrity itself; since Yang Yang does not wear the lipstick colors he endorses, he lacks the fitting with the product and expertise level. Regardless of how risky it is to find a male celebrity to endorse cosmetic products, the fact that the brand is still applying this endorsement strategy demonstrates that the influence of the successfully chosen spokesperson is sufficient to encourage consumers to pay for the products they endorse. In a word, from the two facts that there are many positive comments on social media platforms and brands still use cross-gender lipstick endorsement strategy, it could be assumed that this advertising strategy have brought good feedback to the brand.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to study the marketing strategies adopted by Chinese male celebrities to endorse lipstick products and their impact on consumers' purchase intentions. It was found that the attractiveness of male celebrities and their compatibility with the stories conveyed by advertisements have a significant positive impact on purchase intention. Cross-gender endorsements have not shown negative feedback on social media platforms than traditional female celebrity lipstick endorsements, which challenges previous research findings on the negative effects of cross-gender endorsements. The success of Yang Yang's case of lipstick promotion on social media shows the unimportance of gender in lipstick endorsement campaigns, while they have adopted very different approaches to their marketing strategies. Yang Yang's lipstick advertisements portrayed him as a consumer's lover and gave the product a romantic meaning, making his image fit with the product's implication. From a practical point of view, this finding provides a reference for the advertising strategy of cosmetics, breaks the traditional stereotype of women's endorsement of cosmetics, and reflects that the advertising field will present more possibilities with the development of social media. However, certain limitations were present in this study because it mainly investigated China's social media and lipstick market, but different research countries or regions may lead to different results. There are also shortcomings in the comparison of this paper; To compare the endorsement effect horizontally with the brand, only one female lipstick spokesperson discussed in this paper with a lower fan base that was only one-third of Yang Yang's. Therefore, the findings of this research cannot define whether the endorsement of male celebrities is generally better than the effect of female celebrities' endorsements. To be more specific, If Guerlain looks for a female celebrity with similar fan numbers and influence as Yang Yang, whether she will bring a better endorsement effect is unknown and difficult to measure because the function of the product itself and the expressiveness of the celebrity are all variables. In addition, the brand and advertising cases used in the study are relatively simple, and the effect of lipstick endorsement advertising of other male celebrities or brands has not been observed with the development of new media technology, the interaction between celebrities and fans will also create more ways that allow more possibilities for product marketing. However, the dependence of product promotion on celebrity effects may strengthen the voice of celebrities and make brands take risks, making it challenging to balance the relationship between brands, celebrities, and consumers. Additionally, cosmetic brands may be more likely to cooperate with male

spokespersons than female spokespersons, which has already been found in the Chinese cosmetics advertising market for the past two years. To study this issue, future research could investigate consumer attitudes toward cross-gender lipstick endorsements through in-depth interviews.

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