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The Impact of Nostalgia Marketing on Young Consumers' Purchase Intentions on Douyin — A Case Study of White Rabbit Creamy Candy

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Abstract. As short-video platforms like Douyin play an increasingly prominent role as places where post-1995 and post-2000 consumers engage socially, entertain themselves, and consume goods and services, nostalgic emotional marketing has emerged as an essential tool for brands targeting young consumers. However, from a practical point of view, there is not enough consensus in many organizations regarding the relationship between nostalgic feelings and consumer behavior. In this context, it becomes difficult to implement adequate control of the efficiency of marketing activities in connection with the use of nostalgia. However, currently existing scientific works have traditionally focused on either nostalgic marketing or short-video consumer behavior, but not on the relationship between nostalgic feelings and consumer behavior. Considering these gaps in the literature, the present study selects Douyin as the research platform and White Rabbit Creamy Candy as the research subject – one of the national trademarks. Specifically, this study seeks to determine the impact of different content types and algorithmic recommendations on nostalgic feelings of post-1995 and post-2000 consumers and, based on this information, analyze how nostalgia affects consumer behavior.

Keywords: Nostalgia marketing, Short-video platforms, Douyin, White Rabbit Creamy Candy, Purchase intention

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

At present, short-video platforms, like Douyin, have become important places where post-1995 and post-2000 generations get information, relieve stress, have fun, and meet brands. With the constantly evolving recommendation mechanism, brand communications no longer depend only on the information about products; instead, brands gradually focus more on arousing emotions to boost consumer attention and purchasing willingness. Among those efforts, nostalgia marketing has gained traction in short-video content marketing using childhood memories, outdated items, and culturally

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recognizable elements. For instance, with retro packaging design and childhood advertisements, White Rabbit Creamy Candy has attracted considerable young consumer attention on Douyin through creative unboxing. From existing research, emotional responses to some extent contribute to user attention, involvement, and purchasing inclination, which implies the significance of the nostalgic emotion in platform marketing.

Nevertheless, in practice, there still seems to be little knowledge regarding nostalgia emotion and its impact on purchase intentions at the psychological level. Thus, it becomes challenging to effectively control the effect of related marketing activities. Additionally, there is a lack of systematic discussion about the relationship between "platform stimulus-nostalgia emotion-purchase intention" in short videos. Based on this background, this article will investigate platform marketing as the research context, focusing on aspects such as content format and algorithmic recommendation, to analyze how they affect consumers' nostalgia emotion and purchase intention.

1.2. Research purpose and research questions

The short-video platform chosen for this study is Douyin, while the target consumer audience is the young population. This research work aims to focus on the influence of emotional marketing based on nostalgic themes towards the youth demographic. Specifically, this research will focus on how the algorithm recommendation system, the content format, and nostalgia emotion interact with each other. This research work will further discuss the impact that nostalgia emotions have on the intention to buy products or services. It attempts to explore how nostalgia marketing influences the activities of young users in the short videos platform.

In the context of marketing through the short video platform, how would the content format, the algorithm recommendation system, and other forms of social media affect the nostalgia emotion among youth customers? What is the relationship between nostalgia emotion and the intention to purchase? What are the impacts associated with this kind of emotional effect on the short video platform setting, and what are its limitations? This paper attempts to explore such issues and come up with findings to contribute to this field.

1.3. Research significance

Theoretical perspectives have also played an important role in motivating the current research effort as it endeavors to explore the link between the nostalgia emotion and consumer purchase behavior within the domain of short video clips. In terms of practice, by taking Douyin as a research background, it is helpful to understand the effect of brand on the buying behavior of youngsters due to nostalgic videos.

1.4. Literature review

Firstly, in past studies, several scholars have studied the concept of nostalgia and its role in marketing from diverse angles. Firstly, from the psychological angle, nostalgia is considered an emotional experience associated with one's memories that can induce emotional responses by reminiscing [1]. This study can serve as a theoretical base for understanding the formation of nostalgia.

Secondly, within the scope of consumer behavior research, some researchers indicate that nostalgic emotions can strengthen consumers' emotional attachment to brands and affect their consumption preference to some degree [2]. Hence, it can be argued that nostalgic marketing may

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have some value in practical application in the marketing sphere. Further, taking into account the media context, the emergence of social media platforms has introduced a shift in the process of information exchange and consumption. According to some studies, social media has changed the process of information dissemination, making it more active and participatory for users [3].

Moreover, in terms of content creation and interaction, some researchers argue that social media platforms can help users develop a feeling of participation and immersiveness due to the way the content is created and the interaction takes place [4]. This study provides an essential insight into the relationship between the content of social media and the consumers' behavior.

However, in most of the literature review studies, researchers have considered only one of these aspects of the issue under discussion, such as nostalgic emotions or consumers' buying behaviors in the social media environment [5]. Hence, it is crucial to further analyze relationships among several relevant variables.

1.5. Research methods

This paper mainly employs the analysis of literature and questionnaires, as well as combining data statistical analysis to conduct the research.

On the one hand, through the analysis of existing literature related to the topic of short-video marketing, nostalgic marketing, and consumption behavior, the research foundation and literature basis for this study were determined. On the other hand, data about the exposure to content, emotional reactions, and purchase intentions of young consumers on short video sites were collected using questionnaires. Then, descriptive statistics were performed based on the results obtained from the questionnaires. Correlation analysis may be applied when necessary, according to the data condition.

2. Theoretical foundation and research hypotheses

2.1. Theoretical foundation

This paper mainly applies the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory to analyze the research problem [6]. According to this theory, stimulus variables (Stimulus) that occur in the surrounding environment trigger certain changes in individuals' psychological state (Organism), which then result in certain behavioral reactions (Response). This theory has been extensively used for studying consumer behavior in order to identify how external information can affect their final decisions via certain emotions and cognitive processes.

In the present case of short videos available on the Douyin platform, the algorithmic recommendation and presentation of the content serve as stimulus variables, providing users with the respective information. In turn, the nostalgic emotion experienced by users after exposure to the content can be treated as one of their psychological reactions, whereas purchase intention or action is associated with their behavioral reaction. Thus, S-O-R theory creates a solid foundation for researching how emotional marketing works on consumers via short video content in terms of purchases.

Therefore, considering all aspects discussed above, in this paper, the algorithmic recommendation and content form are to be viewed as stimulus variables, while nostalgia emotion is an emotional variable. As for the outcome variable, it is defined as purchase intention.

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2.2. Research variables

According to the above theory, this paper proceeds to discuss the relevant variables. In order to better analyze the process of nostalgia emotion marketing on Douyin, this paper specifically analyzes from four perspectives: algorithm recommendation, content form, nostalgic emotion, and purchase intention. Algorithm recommendation is the process of content recommendation according to the users' browsing history, preferences, and behaviors, and so forth. The algorithm recommendation would affect the probability of the users being exposed to nostalgic content.

Content form represents the means of presenting content through music, visuals, character, prop, and so forth. The difference in content forms would have a certain degree of effect on users' sense of immersion and emotion. Nostalgic emotions represent the memory and emotion resonance aroused in consumers when they are exposed to certain nostalgic content. Purchase intention represents the results that consumers, under the influence of the above factors, generate interest and willingness in purchasing certain products/services.

2.3. Research hypotheses

H1: Algorithmic recommendations and content formats have a positive impact on nostalgia emotions.

H2: Nostalgia emotions have a positive influence on purchasing decisions.

3. Research design

3.1. Research model construction

Following the Stimulus-Organism-Response model (S-O-R) and considering the special case of nostalgia marketing on short video apps, the current study examines the connections among the variables under investigation. In particular, algorithmic recommendations and content formats are considered as external stimulus variables; the nostalgia emotion variable plays a crucial role within the emotion domain, while the purchasing decision constitutes the dependent variable. The following section outlines the relationships between the mentioned variables.

3.2. Questionnaire design

In terms of the selected brand for this research, White Rabbit Creamy Candy will be chosen. Therefore, the questions asked in the survey should be based on nostalgic short videos of this brand on Douyin. As for the audience of this study, the focus of the survey will lie on the younger generation. Specifically, the survey will look into the opinion of these people concerning the four key factors after watching nostalgic short videos on White Rabbit brand. All the questions regarding the nostalgic content will include only short videos concerning White Rabbit products, such as packaging, advertising, and retro unboxing of the product.

As for the design structure, the first step is to gather information about respondents' basic characteristics and frequency of using short-video platform. These characteristics include age, platforms of short videos used, frequency of using these platforms, and frequency of being exposed to the nostalgic content. From the gathered data, it follows that the majority of the respondents have been born after 1990 and up to 2000. The platform, which respondents frequently use is Douyin. Also, respondents use the short video application several times per day. Moreover, respondents usually or occasionally see nostalgic content. Thus, it is expected that the sample respondents belong

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to the post-1990 and post-2000 generation, which makes this survey relevant and valid. The second part of the survey covers respondents' experience in engaging with White Rabbit short videos. Specifically, this section will cover topics on how respondents come across nostalgic videos on White Rabbit brand, what triggers their childhood memories, how the experience affects purchase intention, and what motivates respondents to watch these videos. More precisely, this section should explore such aspects as the frequency and type of exposure channels, triggering scenes or props, nostalgic emotion triggers, and purchase motivations. Thus, the variables in question may include exposure channels and frequencies, nostalgic content form in terms of old packaging and old advertising, nostalgia emotion via memory and emotion, and purchase intentions with their driving forces.

The core variables are measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Data on purchase intentions and motivators are gathered using single-choice and multiple-choice questions. They are designed very precisely based on the topic of the nostalgic short video clips about White Rabbit. Some examples of the questions include: "This video triggers memories of specific moments in my life when I used to eat White Rabbit Creamy Candy" and "I will buy White Rabbit Creamy Candy because of nostalgic feelings". Overall, the questionnaire items cover the key variables of this study and provide a basis for later data analysis. Furthermore, the reliability of the measurement scales was assessed, and the Cronbach's alpha value turned out to be acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$) [7].

3.3. Data sources and collection

This article focuses on young consumers as its research subjects and collects data through online questionnaires. These questionnaires were primarily distributed to users with experience using short-video platforms, and the samples were primarily drawn from the youth group.

When it comes to data collection, the questionnaires in question were mainly distributed and collected online. It allowed the study to gather data from target respondents more easily. Moreover, after the process was completed, the data obtained were sorted and filtered to make sure that they were generally reliable.

Taking into account all of the above-mentioned information, it may be stated that 85 valid questionnaires have been gathered so far according to the currently existing statistical data. In general, the sample can provide a basic data foundation for the following analysis.

4. Data analysis

4.1. Sample profile analysis

In total, there were 85 effective surveys completed within this research. Among the respondents, a relatively large percentage of the individuals are in their youth age group, i.e., 18 to 24 years old, which generally reflects the purpose of this research since its primary target audience is people born after 1995 and those born after 2000. For frequency of utilization, many users reported that they use Douyin frequently, more than several times a day, and are relatively familiar with the contents of the platform. As for exposure to White Rabbit nostalgia short videos, most respondents reported that they have seen such videos, particularly recommended by Douyin on its homepage. Accordingly, the participants chosen for the study meet the basic criteria of exposure to nostalgia videos about White Rabbit sweets, and their survey responses provide accurate data for future analysis.

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4.2. Correlation analysis

The study employs simple correlation analysis to investigate how nostalgia short videos from White Rabbit affect the purchasing intention of young customers in Douyin.

As shown in Figure 1 above, the total percentage of people who answered 'definitely buy' and 'probably buy' is 27.1%, while that of 'occasionally buy,' 'rarely buy,' and 'never buy' is 72.9%. Therefore, even though nostalgia emotions can stimulate customers to develop purchase intentions, their response rate is low, and many of them remain skeptical about buying.

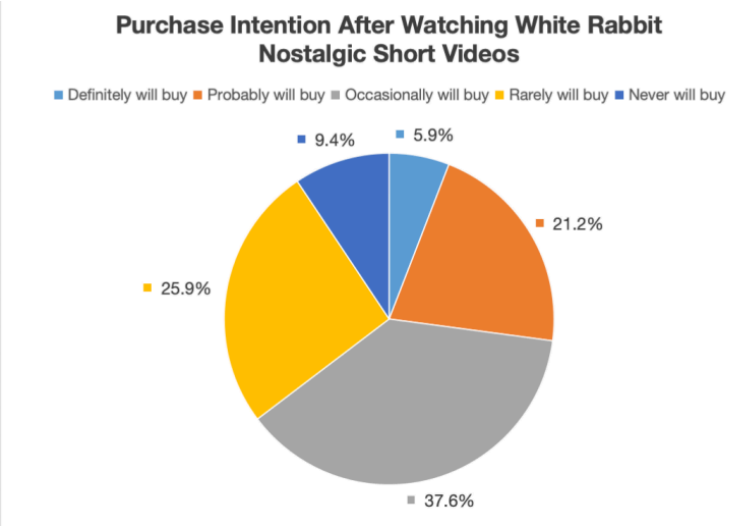


Figure 1. Purchase intention after watching white rabbit nostalgic short videos

These results are based on descriptive statistics and do not imply statistical significance.

Figure 2 shows the critical considerations that influence consumer buying behavior. In terms of the listed considerations, "practicality of product" (45.9%) and "nostalgia emotions" (44.7%) are two most common considerations, whereas "conformity consumption" (14.1%) and "sentiment of brand" (24.7%) have less mentions than others. As presented, the results above have been obtained on the basis of descriptive statistics and imply that emotions and product factors can have considerable significance for consumers' purchase decisions.

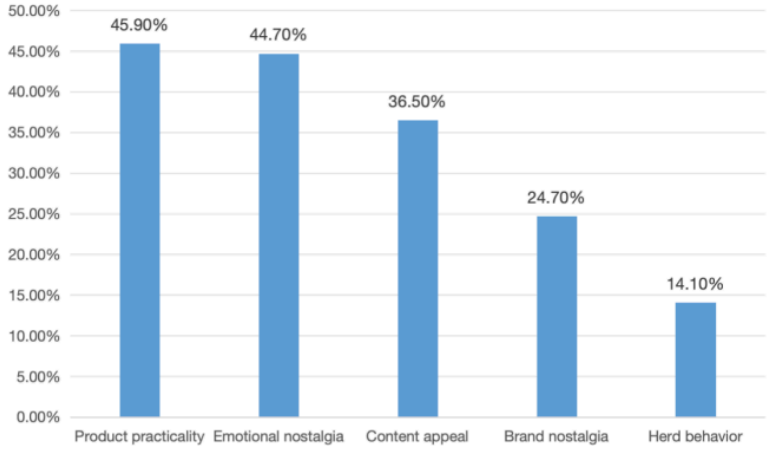


Figure 2. Key drivers of white rabbit purchase intentions triggered by nostalgic emotions

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These results are based on descriptive statistics and do not imply statistical significance.

In an attempt to discover the linkage between the two variables resulted in a correlation analysis of nostalgia emotion and purchase intention using Pearson Correlation Analysis method (N = 85). The results indicated that there is a positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.05$).

4.3. Brief summary

As analyzed above, there are several major conclusions that can be derived from the data. Firstly, the presence of nostalgic cues in Douyin short videos, including settings, background music, and classic objects, is correlated positively with the purchasing intent of young consumers. Stronger nostalgic feelings are associated with higher purchase intention among young consumers. Secondly, emotional nostalgia and practicality of the product are the two major determinants of the consumers' decision-making process. Herd behavior exerts minimal influence on consumers' decision-making process, while plain brand nostalgia plays a negligible role compared to emotional resonance.

5. Problems and recommendations

5.1. Problems

Nevertheless, despite the fact that emotional marketing on Douyin based on nostalgia shows some impact on young consumers' purchase intentions, a number of serious problems should be mentioned.

The first problem concerns herd consumption, which takes place quite often. Considering, for example, the case of nostalgic promotion of White Rabbit on Douyin, due to the algorithmic recommendations used in this social network, the popular videos tend to be multiplied. When seeing a lot of nostalgic videos getting a lot of attention, consumers can adopt the mentality of the herd – that is, follow the others' choice. This kind of consumer behavior is associated with imitation rather than rational decision-making. Thus, herd-driven consumer behavior does not have an emotional component in its background. The orders may be placed under the pressure of popularity, but when the popularity goes away, the incentive for buying decreases, and consumers no longer purchase goods.

The second problem relates to the sustainability of nostalgia marketing campaigns. The attention of Douyin users is quite fragmented and volatile; therefore, a nostalgic video can reach millions of people in a very short period of time. However, the popularity of a video can quickly go away within days, and a new trend will replace it. White Rabbit is experiencing such issues too – their video can gain traction soon after release, and then its attention level decreases. Yet, the success of nostalgia marketing is tightly linked to a particular social context. Once the context changes, sustaining the emotional component becomes challenging. The one-shot explosive communication is not enough, and if the emotional connection with consumers cannot be maintained constantly, transformation into brand loyalty is hardly possible. Therefore, the effectiveness is not durable, and the repurchase rate is low.

Lastly, the sentiment about a brand is hardly able to drive consumers. Emotional nostalgia and practical usefulness of products serve as primary driving factors for making purchases, whereas dependence only on the brand's history or childhood memories cannot ensure consistent buying behavior. Even such iconic brands as White Rabbit face these challenges. In this regard, nostalgia marketing sometimes faces the problem of "high views but low conversion". Because of the lack of

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production capabilities and marketing strategies aimed at developing the brand's image, sales are not in parallel with video traffic. Overreliance on nostalgic feelings might even limit the brand's ability to innovate and improve its products since many consumers will insist on old versions.

5.2. Recommendations for enterprises

Considering the difficulties stated above, the following recommendations can be proposed.

First of all, there is a necessity to enrich the content of the nostalgic experience. Instead of staying on the elementary level of nostalgic packaging or advertising, brands should seek stories capable of making users have more connections with the brand. The studies on the distribution of content in the online environment demonstrate that emotionally engaging content tends to be distributed faster [8]. Therefore, it is essential for brand manufacturers to consider the profundity of the emotions when creating such videos. For instance, brands may create a series of short videos showcasing nostalgia brands such as White Rabbit in Douyin. Some of the topics that may arise during discussions are the childhood stories and experiences of buying the particular product. This will create a more profound emotion of nostalgia rather than trend-hopping contents by the crowd.

Secondly, it is also necessary to modify the format of short videos to find the optimal combination of an emotional factor and the practical advantage. Namely, brands could provide the suggestions about the ways in which the mentioned nostalgic products can be used in modern circumstances. For instance, brands could associate the classic products, such as White Rabbit candies, with such aspects as baking and wearing clothes. Considering the role of the level of nostalgia on consumers' preferences, it is vital to create the correlation between the elements of nostalgia and consumption [9]. Namely, apart from evoking nostalgia in the consumer base, it is necessary to propose the goods satisfying the consumer's requirements. Thus, in addition to the nostalgic element of goods, the practicality of goods could serve as another motivator and prevent possible returns associated with herd behavior.

Thirdly, it is important to introduce the algorithmic recommendations for obtaining precision of positioning of nostalgic brands and conducting constant work with the brand. On one hand, in order to position the brand in a nostalgic manner, brands need to produce different forms of content associated with the audience's age and interests, while enhancing the accuracy of content recommendation on the basis of time tests and small-scale interactions. On the other hand, considering that the influence of the proposed positioning method on brand equity is dependent on external and internal conditions, it is vital to focus not only on the historic value of the brand but also combine it with ongoing activities and innovations [10]. At the same time, it is necessary to improve production and operations system of the brand. For example, White Rabbit should coordinate its logistics infrastructure to cope with nostalgic flow.

6. Research reflections and future prospects

6.1. Research limitations

Although this study has produced some useful findings, it still has several limitations. The first limitation of the research is connected with the limited sample size. Indeed, only 85 participants completed the questionnaire, while most of them were in the age group 18-24 years old. Moreover, the research covered only a particular group of young consumers but did not extend to the whole target audience. As a result, it can be concluded that the lack of representativeness of the sample will

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prevent researchers from making an appropriate reflection of all consumption characteristics of the young consumers' behavior.

The second limitation can be related to the limited scope of the research. It is worth mentioning that the research covers only one specific short video channel and one nostalgic brand – the White Rabbit Creamy Candy. Thus, researchers did not include other short video platforms and other nostalgic goods, e.g., everyday products or classical literature pieces.

The third disadvantage can refer to research methods. In this paper, researchers mainly applied a survey questionnaire and basic correlation analysis. However, no more sophisticated statistical analyses of relationships between algorithmic recommendations, content form, nostalgia emotion, and purchase intentions have been performed.

6.2. Future research directions

As far as the above-mentioned limitations are concerned, the research in the future may benefit from improvements in the following directions.

Firstly, expand the sample size of the study. This can be done by increasing the channels through which questionnaires are distributed, as well as expanding the age groups of participants and their geographical distribution. Thus, the findings will be more representative and reliable.

Secondly, broaden the scope of research. For instance, future research can be conducted not only on multiple platforms that offer short videos but also on other nostalgic brands and products for comparison. Furthermore, according to the review articles on nostalgic marketing, it is advised to pay closer attention to different contexts of consumption and types of products [11]. Thus, researchers can explore how nostalgic marketing works in different contexts and product categories and draw more realistic conclusions.

Thirdly, improve the methodological framework. In future research, structural equation modeling, experiments, and follow-up surveys can be used to measure the interrelationships between the variables. Moreover, when conducting structural equation modeling, researchers should consider the recommendations for the presentation of results [12]. An effective tool in exploring nostalgic marketing is conducting in-depth interviews and analysis of comments to identify triggering factors.

7. Conclusion

This paper takes Douyin as the research background and analyzes the effects of nostalgia marketing on the purchasing behaviors of young consumers and the practical significance and drawbacks of nostalgia marketing. By means of literature review, questionnaire investigation, and case study, this paper selects the nostalgia marketing strategy of White Rabbit Creamy Candy as a typical case and analyzes the communication features and consumer behavior theory behind nostalgia marketing on Douyin. The research shows that nostalgic emotional marketing is likely to arouse young consumers' nostalgia for childhood experiences and initially trigger their purchase intentions. Nevertheless, nostalgia marketing also suffers from practical issues, including obvious herd consumption behaviors, weak sustainability of marketing popularity, and difficult transformation of brand sentiments into purchasing behaviors. Besides, excessive imitation of nostalgia elements, lack of in-depth content creation, and insufficient innovation of products are the factors leading to the decline of marketing conversion rates. The research contributes to the relevant studies about nostalgia marketing on short-video apps and offers some implications for nostalgia food brands and conventional brands conducting marketing campaigns on Douyin. Future studies may consider

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expanding the product categories and exploring different nostalgia marketing strategies across various industries.

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