

# Research on the Influencing Factors of Wild Consumption Marketing among Internet Users from the Perspective of Social Responsibility (Post-print)

**Authors:** ZHANG Zixuan

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## Abstract

This paper employs audience survey and interview methods to investigate whether corporate brands' fulfillment of social responsibility enhances brand value, the factors influencing audience engagement in wild consumption, and the motivations for wild consumption from a social responsibility perspective. The long-term, spontaneous fulfillment of corporate social responsibility can stimulate consumer purchasing desire and enhance brand value to a certain extent, while consumers' emotional communication has played a significant role in measuring this enhancement effect. From the perspective of corporate social responsibility, this paper examines the phenomenon of audience emotional communication in the online context and investigates the influencing factors of online users' wild consumption marketing from a social responsibility standpoint.

## Full Text

### Preamble

#### Research on Influencing Factors of Viral Consumption Marketing Among Internet Users from a Social Responsibility Perspective

ZHANG Zixuan

Northeast Forestry University, China

*Corresponding author E-mail: zzxjy0816@qq.com*

**Abstract:** This study employs audience surveys and interviews to investigate whether corporate brands' fulfillment of social responsibility enhances brand value, what factors influence audiences to engage in viral consumption, and

the motivations behind such consumption from a social responsibility perspective. The findings indicate that enterprises' long-term, spontaneous fulfillment of social responsibilities can stimulate consumer purchase desire and enhance brand value to a certain extent, with emotional communication among consumers playing a significant role in measuring this enhancement effect. This paper examines the phenomenon of audience emotional communication in the online context from a corporate social responsibility perspective and investigates the influencing factors of viral consumption marketing among internet users.

**Keywords:** Social Responsibility Theory; Viral Consumption; Online Emotional Dissemination

## 1 Introduction

In July 2021, when Henan province suffered catastrophic flooding, domestic sportswear brand Hongxing Erke made a substantial donation to disaster relief efforts despite operating at a loss. This action created a stark contrast that demonstrated the company's courage and strong sense of social responsibility, quickly triggering online public opinion and prompting netizens to spontaneously engage in "viral consumption." In this context, numerous companies followed suit, exemplifying the sense of responsibility among Chinese enterprises.

Currently, viral consumption represents both a vehicle for and collective expression of patriotic sentiment, public welfare commitment, and positive values. This phenomenon is evolving into a long-term consumption trend that may constitute a unique consumption pattern within Chinese cultural contexts. Our observations reveal that internet users' viral consumption of Hongxing Erke is influenced by multiple factors—not merely support for the brand itself, but also an expression of growing national self-confidence and patriotism, as well as high recognition for the value of doing good.

From this perspective, corporate social responsibility proves conducive to enhancing brand value, with the improvement effect closely related to the dissemination of internet users' emotions. This raises several questions: Is the degree to which brands care about public interests correlated with audience motivation for viral consumption? Does audiences' viral consumption increase brand value? What factors influence audiences to make viral purchases?

### 2.1 Literature Review on Viral Consumption Phenomenon

The viral consumption phenomenon has attracted scholarly attention from multiple perspectives. Domestic scholars Wang Fang and Gao Fei (2021) analyzed social media's impact on "viral consumption" across three stages—diffusion, carnival, and fading—in their work "The Impact of Social Media on 'Viral Consumption,'" demonstrating how viral consumption returns to rationality through the joint action of media, businesses, and netizens. Li Huijuan and Yan Lina (2022) examined the viral consumption phenomenon in "Research

on Viral Consumption Phenomena from the Perspective of Interactive Ritual Chains—Taking Topic Discussions of Domestic Brand Weibo as an Example,” constructing an interactive ritual chain model of viral consumption and analyzing how some domestic brands’ viral consumption interactions essentially constitute ceremonies supporting domestic products.

Zhao Meng and Zhang Jianjun (2022) analyzed emotional communication manifestations in “Analysis of Emotional Communication in Internet Events—Taking Hongxing Erke’s ‘Viral Consumption’ as an Example,” elaborating on how emotional communication in this incident represents group behavior and examining the brand itself and primary motivations within the network context, while also offering sober reflections on emotional communication. However, although these studies have investigated emotional communication, social media, and interactive rituals, they have neglected analysis of factors influencing audiences’ viral consumption behavior.

## 2.2 Literature Review on Social Responsibility Theory

Social responsibility theory was first proposed in 1947 by Robert Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, in the report “A Free and Responsible Press,” advocating that mass media bear social responsibility while enjoying freedom. Initially applicable primarily to mainstream media, its scope gradually expanded to encompass the entire mass media sphere. In 1956, Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm systematically expounded the fundamental views of social responsibility theory in their book “Four Theories of the Press,” rendering the theory systematic and complete.

Domestic scholars Li Mingde and Zhang Yuan (2017) analyzed the logical relationship between media social responsibility, social functions, and social benefits, discussing both macro-level considerations and micro-level structures of media social responsibility from a developmental perspective while deeply constructing media social responsibility consciousness. Qiu Chaoyi (2013) explored the continuation of “social responsibility theory” in the new media environment through examining practical dilemmas and theoretical extensions of the theory in the online new media era, calling for the “professional spirit” of objective and fair media. Chen Lingjing and Hu Xuan (2022) noted in “Corporate Social Responsibility, Online Emotional Communication and Brand Value: A Case Study Based on Hongxing Erke” that domestic brands should actively practice social responsibility, channel positive online emotions, and avoid deliberate marketing to promote the long-term practice and genuine rise of domestic brands.

However, these studies do not examine audience emotional communication phenomena in the online context from a corporate social responsibility perspective, and therefore fail to address questions regarding influencing factors of viral consumption marketing among online users from a social responsibility standpoint.

## 2.3 Research Questions

By reviewing previous scholarship, we find numerous studies addressing social responsibility theory, viral consumption, and emotional communication as separate research objects, but none that examine these three elements as key interconnected components. Consequently, no existing literature answers questions about influencing factors of viral consumption marketing among internet users from the perspective of social responsibility theory. The author contends that the phenomenon-level event wherein domestic brand Hongxing Erke donated its entire resources to aid Henan flood victims triggered an upsurge in online public opinion, behind which lies rigorous logic and a mechanism of action. Investigating whether corporate fulfillment of social responsibility enhances brand value, the role of online emotions as mediating and catalyzing factors in this communication path, and the outcomes of viral consumption holds significant importance.

Therefore, this article proceeds from social responsibility theory and emotional communication to address the following questions: Why does corporate fulfillment of social responsibility benefit brand value enhancement? Under what factors will audiences engage in viral consumption? Will audience characteristics such as age, gender, education level, and income level affect viral consumption motivation?

### 3.1.1 Hypothesis Development

Based on the above questions, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: The greater the brand's concern for public interests, the higher the audience's enthusiasm for viral consumption.

H2: The faster the brand demonstrates concern for public interests, the higher the audience's enthusiasm for viral consumption.

H3: Younger age is associated with greater inclination toward viral consumption.

H4: Lower education level is associated with greater inclination toward viral consumption.

H5: Higher income level is associated with greater inclination toward viral consumption.

H6: Compared to women, men are more inclined toward viral consumption.

H7: Longer Weibo usage time is associated with greater inclination toward viral consumption.

To test these hypotheses, this study employs questionnaire surveys (audience survey method) for population sampling.

### 3.1.2 Sampling Method

This hypothesis corresponds to the study of ordinary social class groups. We first conduct representative sampling of this group, selecting diverse popula-

tions including university students, enterprise/company employees, and public institution workers as the research population. Second, we compile the overall sampling frame using the 20-level advertising major of Northeast Forestry University. Third, we perform stratified multilevel sampling of the sampling frame with a 95% confidence interval and 3% sampling error, selecting 50 students as a sample. If access is denied, we proceed to the next student in sequence.

The survey's data collection, collation, and analysis were completed on May 4, 2023. The questionnaire combines open-ended and closed questions, covering: (1) basic information confirmation including age, gender, occupation, and education; (2) dimensional reduction statements for the independent variable of viral consumption enthusiasm; and (3) dimensional reduction statements for dependent variables affecting audience factors. The questionnaire contains 20 questions, including 15 multiple-choice questions, 1 multiple-answer question, and 4 matrix questions, administered through a combination of online and offline methods via WeChat Moments, Questionnaire Star sample library, and offline distribution.

### 3.2.1 Interview Protocol Development

The interview comprises three main sections. The first section covers respondents' basic information including gender, age, occupation, education, and income. The second section translates research questions into interview questions, examining their shopping methods for non-essential items, views on viral consumption, and factors considered when shopping. The third section involves preparation for potential in-depth probing.

### 3.2.2 Interview Participant Selection

This study conducted 5 to 40-minute semi-structured in-depth interviews with five participants holding diverse views on viral consumption. Interviews began on April 12, 2023, and concluded on April 29, 2023. Respondents initially included university students, enterprise employees, teachers, and workers, with additional samples collected through questionnaires.

Following the principle of maximum variation sampling in qualitative research, sample collection concluded when the fifth respondent provided sufficient content to answer the research questions. Respondents varied in age, occupation, education level, region, and income, with low homogenization. Interviews were conducted via telephone, WeChat text, or one-on-one face-to-face formats. Interview results were compiled into verbatim transcripts totaling 3,764 words. Respondent basic information is shown in Table 1 .

### 4.1.1 Sample Characteristics

A total of 366 valid questionnaires were collected, with over 50% of samples being female and 43.99% male. From an age distribution perspective, 40% of

the audience is aged 18-30 (including 30), and 30% are aged 30-40 (including 40). From an education distribution perspective, undergraduate and junior college audiences each accounted for 30%. Regarding income levels, audiences earning 3,000-6,000 yuan accounted for 30%, while those earning below 3,000 yuan and above 6,000 yuan each accounted for 20%.

#### 4.1.2 Structural Analysis Results

Reliability analysis of the scale yielded the following results: using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient to analyze the reliability of the audience viral consumption enthusiasm scale, the coefficient was 0.895, indicating good reliability and validity. The reliability coefficient for the audience viral consumption willingness scale was 0.890, also demonstrating good reliability and validity.

Correlation analysis examined relationships among three influencing factors: corporate brand concern for social welfare, audience viral consumption enthusiasm, and audience viral consumption influencing factors, using Pearson correlation coefficients to express relationship strength. Results show that the speed of corporate brand concern for social welfare, audience viral consumption enthusiasm, and audience Weibo usage time all demonstrate significant positive correlations, with coefficients of 0.201 and 0.342 respectively, supporting hypotheses H2 and H7.

#### 4.2 Brand Concern for Public Interests Can Stimulate Audience Viral Consumption

Through in-depth interviews examining factors influencing audiences' "viral consumption" behavioral tendencies, we found respondents to be more rational than expected, lacking intention for "viral consumption" toward their favorite brands. However, they generally viewed "viral consumption" as a manifestation of positive patriotic sentiment. If a brand demonstrates strong attention to environmental protection and social responsibility in its manufacturing and operations, it may stimulate audience spending, though not necessarily increased spending. Audiences generally do not reflect their values through viral consumption. Interviewee responses regarding corporate concern for public interests and audience enthusiasm support our thinking:

"Viral consumption is a manifestation of the patriotic sentiment and individual responsibility of young people, driven and influenced by online communities, and generally does not last too long, mainly due to the limited popularity of topics or events." (S1)

"If a favorite brand implements relatively significant cause-related marketing initiatives, efficient implementation of social responsibility will further strengthen brand loyalty, but it will not lead to excessive viral consumption without actual demand, avoiding waste." (S2)

### 4.3 Speed of Brand Concern for Public Interests Enhances Audience Viral Consumption

When consumers perceive a brand as caring about public interests, they trust the brand more and are willing to purchase its products, implying consumer identification with the brand and an expression of their own national sentiment. The reason Hongxing Erke regained public attention and became the “pride of domestic products” lies not only in its low-key disaster relief despite financial difficulties, highlighting the brand’s strong sense of social responsibility and touching netizens’ national feelings, but more importantly, in Hongxing Erke’s years-long commitment to injecting its own strength into social public welfare undertakings as a conscientious Chinese enterprise.

### 4.4 Weibo Usage Duration Is Directly Proportional to Viral Consumption Behavior

As an information exchange platform, corporate marketing on Weibo is subjective. On one hand, community is the core module of Weibo, where users can obtain product information; on the other hand, companies can learn detailed consumer status from community sections. Corporate brand-related information on Weibo, including forwarded comment data and soft advertising, not only enables brands to gain significant attention, increase user purchase desire, and gain user trust in products and enterprises, but also drives product sales and, more importantly, promotes enterprise development.

Hongxing Erke’s disaster relief triggered emotional elevation among netizens that spread through social circles, greatly improving brand reputation and recognition, with online emotions playing an important role in the process of corporate social responsibility enhancing brand value—the best empowerment of brand value. Enterprises should pay attention to online emotional insights, correctly guide public opinion based on marketing that transmits positive energy values, and lay a solid foundation for subsequent enterprise development.

According to the definition of Rs, we can construct the fuzzy relation matrix, as shown in Table 1.

## 5 Discussion

In summary, this study theorizes the phenomenon of internet users’ viral consumption through audience research and interviews, addressing whether corporate social responsibility enhances brand value, what factors influence audiences to engage in viral consumption, and whether audience demographics affect viral consumption motivation. Findings indicate that faster brand concern for public interests increases audience viral consumption enthusiasm (H2), and longer Weibo usage increases inclination toward viral consumption (H7). However, higher brand concern for public interests (H1), younger age (H3), lower education level (H4), higher income (H5), and gender (H6) were not supported.

This primarily stems from audiences generally viewing “viral consumption” as a manifestation of positive patriotic sentiment, while remaining more rational and uncertain about consumption willingness.

## 6 Conclusion

This study proposes that corporate social responsibility enhances brand value, with improvement effects closely related to the dissemination of internet users’ emotions, reflecting the long-term consumption trend of viral consumption. It also provides new ideas for corporate brands to achieve social responsibility within modern China’s sustainable strategic context.

However, excessive viral consumption and corporate viral marketing may lead to negative impacts including resource waste and imbalance, contrary to China’s sustainable development concept—warranting vigilance and reflection. This study also found that network users’ viral consumption of corporate brands is influenced by many factors; perhaps consumer demand for goods is not particularly strong, but when dominated by spontaneous or deliberately guided emotions and intensive trend offensives, the emotions driving public “viral consumption” become a consumption carnival in the online world. Yet when public emotions subside, the drawbacks of “viral consumption” become prominent. Brands cannot rely on consumer enthusiasm to support long-term revenue; if product quality fails to meet consumer expectations, marketing will only accelerate elimination.

However, due to small sample size and diversified consumption intentions, both audience interviews and questionnaire surveys in this study cannot summarize characteristics of specific groups or provide definitive classifications, presenting numerous limitations. Future research on influencing factors of viral consumption marketing among network users should pay greater attention to brand characteristics across different industries, emerging phenomena in national and social contexts, and expand research and practice regarding corporate brands in environmental, social, and corporate governance.

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