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Research on the Mechanism and Effect of Recommendation Marketing from the Perspective of AIDMA Theory Postprint

Authors: Liu Yakun, Song Yifei

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Abstract

Looking back at the outbreak of the COVID-19 in the past few years, although China's real economy has been hit hard, the online economy has achieved unprecedented development. To some extent, the epidemic has promoted the rapid shift of consumption demand from offline to online. At the same time, with the development of Internet technology, online shopping and social communication have become the normal life of people, and users' consumption habits and preferences have also changed. 70% of the post-1995 consumers are keen on the consumption mode of "being recommended first, purchase goods second". This paper will start from the theory of AIDMA to explore the mechanism and effect of recommendation marketing in the post-epidemic era.

Full Text

Research on the Mechanism and Effect of Recommendation Marketing from the Perspective of AIDMA Theory

Liu Yakun¹, Song Yifei²

¹School of Law, Linyi University, China

²School of International Economics and Trade, Lanzhou Jiaotong University, China

Corresponding Email: 2291927921@qq.com

Abstract

Looking back at the COVID-19 outbreak in recent years, although China's real economy suffered severe setbacks, the online economy achieved unprecedented

development. To some extent, the pandemic accelerated the rapid shift of consumer demand from offline to online channels. Simultaneously, with the advancement of Internet technology, online shopping and social communication have become integral to daily life, fundamentally altering users' consumption habits and preferences. Notably, 70% of consumers born after 1995 are keen on the "recommendation-first, purchase-second" consumption model. This paper examines the mechanism and effect of recommendation marketing in the post-pandemic era through the lens of AIDMA theory.

Keywords: recommendation marketing, AIDMA theory, KOL, online interpersonal communication

1 Introduction

Since the emergence of recommendation marketing in 2019, the proliferation of "recommendation posts" across various platforms has made this marketing approach familiar to users. In the post-pandemic era, even as CCTV has repeatedly criticized the industry's "fake recommendation marketing" chaos, network traffic begins to decline, channel competition intensifies, and consumers gradually become more rational, recommendation marketing should theoretically lose its effectiveness. However, recommendation posting on major platforms continues to rise.

The recommendation marketing method remains not only effective for users but also capable of helping brands convert platform traffic into actual sales. Domestic Internet giants and brands continue to invest heavily in recommendation marketing. Against the backdrop of mobile Internet, marketing systems have begun integrating online and offline channels. Advertisers now collaborate with both KOLs and KOCs (Key Opinion Consumers) to build brand awareness and reputation through recommendation marketing.

We have observed that although Internet users recognize content as advertising, they still watch it to completion, making it as effective as intended. This phenomenon raises important questions: Why does recommendation marketing work despite its transparency and numerous problems? What is the underlying mechanism of recommendation marketing?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Recommendation Marketing Research

Academic research on recommendation marketing has proliferated. Scholars attribute "purchase through recommendation" essentially to consumption imitation, driven by herd effects that prompt public adoption. At a deeper level, the root of imitation is identification. Synthesizing relevant studies, we identify

three primary channels of recommendation marketing: interpersonal relationships, KOLs, and social platform marketing.

2.1.1 KOL Marketing Economics recognizes a concept called “personality economics.” KOLs attract user attention and gradually gain trust by publishing content on social platforms. Based on this trust, users unconsciously imitate KOLs and purchase recommended products, generating strong substitution effects and identification. In *Research on the Influence of KOL Recommendation on Users’ Purchase Intention—Taking XiaoHongshu as an Example*, Chinese scholar Deng Sha notes that in the era of stock competition, a “circulation” has formed among content, KOLs, brands, and platforms, making KOL recommendations increasingly important for marketing and promotion. As industry competition intensifies, major e-commerce platforms continuously improve and innovate according to user needs and market changes, classifying users and producing corresponding content. Users have gradually recognized the importance of KOLs, but lack guidance on how to select and utilize KOL marketing effectively—a gap that current academic research has yet to address.

2.1.2 Interpersonal Marketing Recommendations from acquaintances stem from long-term trust accumulation and recognition of character and taste. According to surveys, comments from friends and family directly influence 81% of consumers’ purchasing decisions. In this process, consumers are unconsciously attracted by highly entertaining, infectious, and emotionally saturated promotional information, which can trigger them to transition from online viewing to offline experience. Building acquaintance reputation requires creating excellent, personalized “user experiences.” As Chinese scholar Li Chao states in *The Phenomenon of Chinese Acquaintance Marketing from the Perspective of Relationship Marketing*: “As a new marketing form, relationship marketing emphasizes connections, particularly the acquaintance society formed over thousands of years in China. Through analyzing relationship marketing, we find that acquaintance selling is a special form of relationship marketing. We can form, consolidate, and develop contact circles through acquaintance sales, enhancing the intensity of relationship marketing. Similarly, the phenomenon of price discrimination in acquaintance marketing can be addressed through relationship marketing guidelines. Reputation and competition complement and develop together. Therefore, companies should excel at acquaintance marketing to gain reputation and enhance competitiveness.”

2.1.3 Social Platform Marketing The strong diffusion within communities stems from group belonging. Users pursue specific identities within particular circles, sharing consumption preferences and trust. Brands promote and recommend products on platforms like Xiaohongshu, Douyin, or WeChat groups, continuously increasing community activity and improving user loyalty through operations, cultivating seed users via community building. In *Analysis of Social Platform Evaluation Advertising Marketing Strategy—Taking Sina Weibo as*

an Example, Chinese scholar Yang Xiaojie notes that interactive marketing emphasizes that marketing subjects and consumers seize mutual interests through interactive communication, accurately grasping the timing and motivation of communication to achieve marketing objectives. Evaluation advertisements are released in two main situations: first, when KOLs publish evaluations upon invitation, and second, when bloggers solicit fan needs before conducting evaluations. The former aligns with the “Zhongcao Anli” phenomenon (product seeding) that has emerged on social platforms in recent years—sharing and recommending product advantages to stimulate others’ purchase desire, targeting the “itch point” of consumption. To enhance interaction, bloggers also set up lotteries and other benefits for reposting and commenting to attract fans, achieving fission dissemination.

2.1.4 Literature Summary The three research directions above primarily focus on specific channels. Currently, no scholars have examined recommendation marketing from a holistic marketing process perspective. Therefore, this study investigates how recommendation marketing functions throughout the entire process from platform to user using the ISMAS framework.

2.2 AIDMA Theory and the Traditional Media Era

2.2.1 AIDMA in Traditional Media In the age of traditional mass communication, television programs frequently featured advertisements paired with catchy slogans. Even when product impressions were shallow, these memorable slogans would unconsciously resurface when consumers faced similar product choices. In that era of information asymmetry, advertisements disseminated product information through various media, impressing consumers with slogans or spokespersons to guide consumer psychology and stimulate purchasing behavior.

This psychological and behavioral process gave rise to the classic marketing theory that became the norm: the AIDMA marketing law proposed by American advertising scientist E. S. Lewis in 1898. The law posits that consumers experience five psychological stages from initial contact with marketing information to purchase behavior: Attention, Interest, Desire, Memory, and Action.

In *The New Law of Advertising Communication: From AIDMA, AISAS to ISMAS*, Professors Liu Dehuan and Chen Siluo write that AIDMA effectively reflects marketing relationships in traditional media environments. Mass media—television, radio, newspapers, and magazines—provided abundant news, entertainment, and consumption information. After unified editing, this information was rapidly transmitted to millions of households. However, as information recipients, people lacked convenient and unimpeded feedback channels. This necessitated obtaining needed consumption information through these channels while simultaneously reducing rich personalized opinions and demands to simplified binary choices of “seeing or not seeing,” “listening or not listening.”

This centralized communication technology created the AIDMA response pattern to marketing messages, forming a “media”-centered marketing strategy with “attention” as the primary task. This strategy featured strong content stimulation, wide dissemination, and frequent repetition—hence companies like Qin Chi and Procter & Gamble were willing to “drive a Santana into CCTV” daily. Marketing effects were translated into media metrics like “circulation” and “audience rating,” while consumers’ rich personalized opinions and needs were simplified to “buy, not buy, or have to buy,” leading to Ford’s famous statement: “Whatever car you want, we only have black.” AIDMA law concerns entirely seller-led marketing, where business owners use mass media in a rhythmic, step-by-step process to guide audience psychology—from triggering attention, generating interest and desire, to creating product memory, ultimately inspiring purchase. Before the Internet transformed lifestyles, AIDMA principles guided effective advertising creativity and marketing planning.

2.2.2 Literature Review and Research Questions The above summary shows that scholars have proposed AIDMA theory and studied the recommendation economy from perspectives of KOL, interpersonal marketing, and social platform marketing. However, no scholars have analyzed the current situation, leaving unanswered why recommendation marketing remains effective today. Therefore, this paper applies AIDMA theory to address two key questions: Is recommendation marketing effective? What is its mechanism of action?

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Hypotheses

- A) The more frequently a blogger interacts with users, the more interested users become in the product.
- B) The more well-known the blogger, the more interested users become in the product.
- C) The more professional the recommendation content, the more interested users become in the product.

3.2 Dimension Reduction

- A) Recommendation marketing can demonstrate authentic product usage experiences.
- B) Recommendation marketing can satisfy users’ online social needs (e.g., replying to comments).
- C) Recommendation marketing can provide professional information directly, reducing users’ decision-making costs.

- D) Recommendation marketing can promote trust transformation (transferring users' trust in the blogger to the product manufacturer).

3.3 Psychological Explanation

Before purchasing, consumers typically progress through stages of attention, interest, desire, memory, and action. However, recommendation marketing skips the attention and interest stages, directly capturing attention through narrative plots that create empathy. This leaves a lasting brand memory and lays the foundation for purchase actions.

3.4 In-Depth Interview Method

The interview protocol comprises three parts. The first part covers basic respondent information, including gender, age, occupation, and daily consumption habits. The second part addresses the dimension reduction of research questions, with prepared questions focusing on recommendation video content professionalism, blogger popularity, and blogger-user interaction. The third part explores deeper issues.

For participant selection, this study primarily employs convenience sampling from non-probability sampling methods, supplemented by snowball sampling based on information saturation principles. The author selected interview subjects across different age ranges, social occupations, and living regions to ensure diversity. Interviews were conducted through face-to-face and telephone methods. First-level coding was performed during interviews, with decisions to continue interviewing new subjects based on whether first-level coding reached saturation, ultimately determining the required number of interviewees.

This study conducted 15-minute in-depth interviews with 30 respondents aged 18-45 from January 2023 to mid-February 2023. Initial interviewees included college students, teachers, and other professionals. Additional samples were collected from society, encompassing various professional types to comprehensively understand diverse perspectives. Following qualitative research principles of maximum sampling, the collected content sufficiently answered research questions by the 20th respondent, at which point sampling concluded. Respondents varied in age, location, and upbringing, resulting in low homogeneity.

Beyond one-on-one face-to-face interviews, the author also randomly contacted interested individuals online for telephone or online interviews, with contents recorded or screenshotted. Interview results were transcribed verbatim, producing over 10,000 words of transcript processed by the author. Respondent basic information is shown in Table 1 : Respondent Profile Table.

4 Research Findings and Discussion

Through in-depth interviews exploring which dimensions of recommendation marketing affect user interest levels, we found that blogger visibility, interaction frequency, and content professionalism all influence users. Regarding specific aspects affecting user interest in the recommendation mechanism, interviewee responses confirmed our hypotheses: “I think the reason a blogger maintains so many fans and long-term popularity is that their recommended products offer good value; otherwise, they would have been unfollowed long ago.” “Although XXX has many fans, they always interact in the comment section and occasionally send gifts to fans—they’re very down-to-earth, which I like.” “I’m more likely to trust professional review bloggers who have PhDs in biology and understand different ingredient effects than a regular blogger recommending a product.”

4.1 Interaction Frequency Between Bloggers and Users is Directly Proportional to User Interest in Products

With social and mobile Internet development, “everyone has a microphone” has become reality, making user comments to bloggers essentially demands for interaction. In an in-depth interview, respondent Xiaolin stated: “When I receive a notification that a blogger I follow is updating on [a social platform], I immediately check and quickly comment to grab the ‘sofa’ [first comment], because I really hope my favorite blogger can ‘fanpai’ [reply] to me.” Most interviewees expressed similar desires to interact with favorite bloggers in comment sections.

Exploring why interviewees enjoyed blogger interaction revealed consistent themes: “I mainly want to express my ideas. When many people reply to me and even the blogger agrees, I feel ‘seen,’ as if I’ve found resonance.” “After all, he’s my favorite blogger—I’m a fan. When he replies, I feel closer to him. Maybe he’ll remember me if I comment more.” “The main commenters are old acquaintances—it feels like my extended family online. Commenting is like making a ‘joke’ with my sister [the blogger].”

From these responses, we identify three reasons for user interaction through the lens of interaction ritual chains. First, most users participate in comments hoping for blogger interaction due to a strong “sense of presence” and “elimination of distance.” Emile Durkheim and Randall Collins proposed that bodily co-presence in the same space is necessary for interactive ritual formation. However, Internet technology enables people across different regions to overcome temporal and spatial barriers, achieving virtual presence through media to communicate and interact, bringing them closer together.

Second, building on the “virtual presence” foundation of comment sections, frequent user-blogger interaction gradually generates emotions. “The first time I got a reply, I was very surprised—I didn’t expect the blogger to respond to someone who didn’t even follow them. Later, I discovered they frequently interact with fans. I gradually got used to commenting. Now I feel it’s more like chat-

ting than just expressing thoughts, which is quite fulfilling.” Clearly, emotional satisfaction from blogger interaction motivates frequent commenting. Through long-term user interaction, bloggers continuously output “symbols” recognized by both parties, forming group symbols and value recognition that generate lasting emotional energy. This promotes users to “love me, love my dog,” increasing product interest and encouraging active, enthusiastic participation in subsequent interactions.

Finally, people develop new identities through emotional transmission in interactive rituals. In Collins’ interaction ritual chain theory, mutual focus and emotional connection constitute the core mechanism of interactive ritual function. People receive temporary emotional stimulation from events or matters of common concern, obtaining high levels of mutual focus and emotional connection through constant reinforcement via rhythmic feedback. This strengthens group identity within the ceremony and provides emotional energy to participants. User identity comprises two aspects: self-identity and collective identity. In these interviews, respondents focused primarily on self-identity, reflected in feeling “familiar” with bloggers or considering themselves part of the community through commenting. When user emotions toward bloggers elevate to identification, users automatically adopt a hero consciousness. Consequently, when bloggers conduct recommendation marketing, users proactively support bloggers based on emotion and trust, even helping spread, publicize, and recommend products.

4.2 Blogger Popularity is Directly Proportional to User Interest in Products

Interviews with 20 respondents revealed that nearly all agreed: “When bloggers are more popular, their recommended products are more trusted and more likely to be purchased.” During interviews, the author showed two groups of respondents videos of different bloggers recommending the same product. Group A watched an unknown blogger’s recommendation, while Group B watched well-known blogger Li Jiaqi’s recommendation for the same product. After viewing, 100% of Group A respondents considered the product “unnecessary to buy,” “not interesting,” or “somewhat interesting but not necessary.” In contrast, 75% of Group B respondents felt “recommended,” stating “Li Jiaqi’s recommendation is definitely right” and “the product is worth trying.”

Based on these different responses, the author designed follow-up questions. For Group A (unknown blogger), 80% of respondents explained: “I don’t follow this blogger and lack relevant information, so I should adopt a wait-and-see attitude toward their recommendations.” “I can’t tell whether their recommendation is an advertisement or genuinely useful. I don’t trust small bloggers.” However, 20% offered alternative perspectives: “I don’t think this is an advertisement—after all, they have no fans. Bloggers in this early stage are still accumulating followers and should recommend genuinely good products.” “It looks quite reliable; no brand would probably approach such a small blogger for promotion.”

For Group B (well-known blogger), 60% considered purchasing after watching: “Although I haven’t used it, I think I can give it a try.” “It doesn’t look like it will be disappointing.” “So many people have ordered it; it seems to really work.” “I don’t need this yet, but it looks good. I’ll add it to my cart.” “The discount is substantial—I’m thrilled it’s so much cheaper.”

Blogger popularity represents a comprehensive reflection of individual ability, achievement, and reputation. When the author continued probing, “If the same discount is offered, will you buy from this well-known blogger or choose a less popular one?” 90% of respondents chose the well-known blogger: “Well-known bloggers have greater bargaining power and more resources, which helps avoid risks for us consumers.” “Achieving such high reputation proves their product selection quality is definitely good, and bloggers will cherish their reputation. The probability of buying a bad product in this case is quite low.” “Big bloggers like this likely have professional teams behind them, which must be more secure.” The remaining 10% indicated they could purchase from either.

Additionally, higher blogger popularity correlates with larger fan bases. Consequently, influenced by herd mentality and low-level influence, consumers develop greater trust in bloggers and their recommended products. This demonstrates that blogger popularity affects purchasing tendency and confidence while influencing consumer feelings about products in multiple aspects. The more popular the blogger, the more trustworthy users perceive them to be, and the more likely users are to purchase. Therefore, blogger popularity is directly proportional to user interest in products.

4.3 Professionalism of Recommendation Content is Directly Proportional to User Interest in Products

In recent years, social platforms, content platforms, and short video media have developed rapidly. Every user serves as a network node, absorbing information from all directions, encoding and outputting, and further releasing new influences. In this fragmented era, users urgently need concise, effective information and pay particular attention to content quality when browsing platforms. On one hand, while Internet information search costs are low, network information is too miscellaneous, and some users have low media literacy, making it difficult to distinguish effective information. As one respondent noted: “Every time I search for a product on a platform, some bloggers say it’s good while others say it’s bad, leaving me uncertain whether to buy.” Such users need bloggers to simplify complex information, reducing their burden of identifying truth from falsehood. When bloggers explain knowledge at a high level, users tend to believe the information has high credibility and are more willing to follow the blogger’s advice to purchase recommended products.

On the other hand, as contemporary consumers gradually become more rational and specialized, they pay special attention to professional content such as ingredients before purchasing. When a product is endorsed by a well-known expert

or the blogger's content is highly professional, users develop greater trust. Respondent B stated: "When I'm unsure whether a product I intend to buy meets my needs, or when I struggle to choose between different brands in the same category, I search for expert evaluation videos. These experts are doctors in the field and explain product ingredients. I find this very authentic, so I generally place orders directly."

Bloggers provide professional explanations and effective product evaluations, offering appropriate purchase suggestions based on different consumer needs. They directly provide consumers with effective professional product information, greatly reducing the time cost and experience of searching for target products while improving user concentration and browsing experience. In summary, the authenticity, professionalism, and detail of content displayed by bloggers directly affect audience product perception. When recommendation content is more professional, users can more easily make purchase decisions.

5 Summary and Reflection

5.1 Recommendation Marketing Can Meet User Needs

The fundamental reason for the enduring popularity of recommendation marketing is its ability to meet Internet users' needs across multiple dimensions. In the network environment dominated by social and content platforms, the Internet not only changes user consumption behavior patterns but also encourages brands to focus on user needs as the core of marketing. This study applied AIDMA theoretical research through in-depth interviews to address two questions: "Why is recommendation marketing effective?" and "What is its operating mechanism?" By sorting and analyzing interview records, this paper verifies hypotheses across three dimensions: blogger popularity, blogger-user interaction frequency, and content professionalism.

However, this study also found that despite increased platform management constraints, fake marketing phenomena persist in recommendation marketing. Some brands fail to develop reasonable marketing strategy planning, relying instead on large-scale short-term platform promotion. Purchasing traffic makes products "famous overnight," but fails to retain real consumers after the traffic surge. Excessive marketing and product inconsistencies with publicity even cause negative impacts such as declining word-of-mouth and consumer trust—issues that warrant vigilance and reflection.

5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

First, because this study employs the in-depth interview method with a limited number of participants, some group bias may exist in the results. Second, this study only examines three dimensional hypotheses to explore why recommendation marketing mechanisms work from the AIDMA theoretical perspective, ignoring other influencing factors. There is no specific discussion of field investigations or special situations across different industries and fields. Therefore,

future research in brand marketing and advertising should pay greater attention to how industry-specific phenomena influence recommendation marketing.

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