

Group Channel: A Study on the Group Motivation of Community Marketing (Postprint)

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Abstract

In the post-epidemic era, propelled by advancements in Internet technology and social media platforms, community marketing has witnessed substantial evolution. Owing to epidemic control measures that necessitated widespread stay-at-home practices, a growing number of enterprises have diversified their sales channels by establishing geographically-localized communities for commercial activities. This paper examines the influence of product, price, promotion, and channel elements on consumers' purchase intention and behavior from the perspective of 4P theory. The findings demonstrate that higher information exchange volumes in community marketing strengthen consumer purchase intention and increase the likelihood of consumption behavior.

Full Text

Preamble

Group Channel: A Study on the Group Motivation of Community Marketing

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Abstract: In the post-epidemic era, community marketing has achieved new development driven by advances in Internet technology and social media platforms. Due to epidemic control requirements, staying at home has become the norm, prompting an increasing number of enterprises to expand their sales channels by establishing geographically-based communities for sales. This paper explores how product, price, promotion, and channel factors influence consumers' purchase intention and behavior from the perspective of 4P theory. The findings

reveal that higher information exchange volume in community marketing correlates with stronger consumer purchase intention and a greater likelihood of consumption behavior.

Keywords: community marketing; group dynamics; product, price, place, promotion

1 Introduction

In the post-epidemic era, enterprise marketing faces new patterns and transformations. Traditional marketing models can no longer meet the demands of economic development, and shifts in marketing channel structures have directed corporate focus toward online platforms. Driven by the digital economy and epidemic control needs, group shopping has become the primary choice for most people shopping from home, with an increasing number of consumers adapting to takeaway-style consumption.

In this context, to cope with reduced offline foot traffic and promote product sales, enterprises frequently establish sales groups based on geographic proximity and conduct activities within these community groups to stimulate purchases among members. We have observed that compared to platforms like Meituan, consumers show greater inclination to purchase directly within these groups when buying goods in their local area. This phenomenon raises important questions: What effects does community marketing produce, and how are these effects achieved?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review of Community Marketing Phenomenon

The phenomenon of community marketing has attracted academic research from multiple perspectives. Foreign scholars Sri Nurani Puspa Dewi and Heppy Milanyani (2017) analyzed customer loyalty among high school students in Bandung City using Telkomsel as a case study, examining community member relationships, influence, need integration and satisfaction, and shared emotional connection. Their research demonstrates that these community marketing variables significantly impact customer loyalty. Another foreign scholar, Rakhi Thakur (2015), analyzed the feasibility of using community marketing to expand markets from the perspective of community networks in service distribution, proposing a conceptual framework and preconditions for achieving business sustainability through community marketing.

Domestic scholars Wang Jiawei and Li Yining (2014) conducted a detailed study on the reconstruction of brand marketing thinking in China's social media era from the perspective of brand community marketing's core logic. Their research shows that the core logic of brand community marketing in the social media era lies in attribute definition, platform tools, activation factors, and Internet thinking. Scholars Wu Guowei and Yang Ling (2015) analyzed the publishing

industry's practices in the community economy environment, identifying three main marketing models for publishing enterprises based on community economy: third-party-operated vertical self-media community marketing models, self-built community marketing models by publishing enterprises, and big-V community marketing models aimed at operation and profit. Although these studies examine community marketing models and internal logic, they overlook how the community environment and group dynamics formed by members within the community influence consumers. Scholar Peng Lan (2022) further explained community economic development, noting that the core, motivation, and operational biases differ across various community economic models.

2.2 Literature Review of Group Dynamics Theory

Kurt Lewin (1890) proposed group dynamics theory in 1939, arguing that the interaction between people's internal needs and their surrounding environment determines their mind and behavior. He defined individual behavior using the concept of "field" and expressed the interaction between individuals and environment with the formula $B=f(P,E)$, indicating that a person's behavior is a function of their personality and environment. This formula shows that when an individual lives in a group, their behavior depends not only on their living space but also on the group's psychological dynamic field (such as interpersonal relationships, group decision-making, public opinion, atmosphere, etc.), and changes with shifting environmental conditions.

Group dynamics theory has attracted considerable scholarly attention both domestically and internationally, yielding numerous research findings. In psychology, Xue En (1928) conducted behavioral comparisons on the theory, supplementing it with forms of group organization. Foreign scholar Lewin (1947) proposed that relationships and interactions among group members constitute the group's dynamic system, with group behavior driven by cohesion, driving forces, and dissipative forces. Foreign scholars Amir Khushk, Zhang Zengtian, Yang Hui, and Cynthia Atamba supplemented this theory with social learning, personality theory, social exchange, social identity, and intragroup conflict through their studies on group cooperation phenomena within enterprises in the management field. Foreign scholars Kelly Lynn Mulvey, Michael Trizzo, and Melanie Killen supplemented the theory through their research on children's cognition of stereotypes in the field of gender cognition.

Domestic scholar Cai Jing (2011) discussed the construction of cooperative learning groups based on group dynamics theory, detailing the functional modes of group dynamics. Scholars Xu Jingjing, Hu Weiping, and Yun Xing combined the actual phenomenon of online collaborative learning in China with group dynamics theory, proposing strategies to enhance group dynamics in online collaborative learning. Scholars Shu Hang and Dorri combined the actual phenomenon of changing traditional classroom teaching forms in China with group dynamics theory, finding that MOOC teaching constitutes a group activity that forms a complex learning interaction network during the teaching process, complet-

ing the entire learning process through group interaction, with teaching results more reflected in the generation of group wisdom. Scholars Xiuping Jin and Zong Chunyan further combined the actual phenomenon of college students' employment in China with group dynamics theory, proposing the construction of college students' employment communities.

However, these studies did not examine group dynamics phenomena from the perspective of 4P theory, thus failing to address questions regarding the group dynamics effects of community marketing.

2.3 Question Raising

Therefore, this paper attempts to answer the following questions from 4P marketing theory: Why does community marketing increase consumers' willingness to purchase? How do product, price, promotion, and channel motivations affect community marketing effectiveness and make it distinctive? What is the social impact of community marketing? What other factors have strengthened the influence of community marketing on consumers' purchase intention?

3 Research Methods

This study employs audience surveys and in-depth interviews to address these research questions.

3.1.1 Hypothesis Establishment

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: The more active community marketing is, the higher the product sales.

H2: The more active group members are in community marketing, the higher the product sales.

To test these hypotheses, this study adopted an audience survey method, sampling the population and administering a questionnaire.

3.1.2 Data Sources

The questionnaire aims to explore how community marketing influences consumers' purchase intention, targeting community marketing audiences as respondents. The questionnaire includes both open-ended and closed-ended questions covering: (1) basic demographic information including age, gender, education, occupation, monthly income, and family structure; (2) independent variable X: degree of information exchange among group members; and (3) dependent variable Y: degree of consumers' purchase intention and purchasing behavior. The questionnaire contains 24 questions, including 13 multiple-choice questions, 3 multiple-select questions, 7 matrix questions, and 1 fill-in-the-blank question. Based on 4P theory, questions address product, price, channel, and promotion

aspects of community marketing to identify key factors influencing consumers' purchase intention.

3.1.3 Selection of Interviewees

This study conducted 30-minute semi-structured depth interviews with 12 respondents who had joined five or more marketing communities. Following the maximum sampling principle of qualitative research methods, when 12 respondents were collected, all interview content was sufficient to answer the research questions, and sample collection was closed. Respondents varied in age, occupation, education level, region, income, and family structure, resulting in low homogeneity.

4 Results

4.1 Description of Sample Characteristics

The questionnaire has been tested and demonstrates good reliability and validity, capable of investigating and reflecting influencing factors of community shopping behavior and attitudes. The questionnaire was distributed through random sampling. During the distribution period, 130 questionnaires were collected, all of which were valid after preliminary verification, meaning 130 respondents participated in the survey.

4.1.1 Statistical Analysis of Respondents' Basic Information

Gender: Among the 130 respondents, 111 were female (85.4%) and 19 were male (14.6%). Female respondents constituted the vast majority.

Age: Because the questionnaire was distributed through Wenjuanxing (an online survey platform) with online answering as the primary method, young people comprised the vast majority of respondents. Specifically, 116 respondents were aged 18-25 (89.2% of the total sample), 9 were aged 26-35 (6.9%), 36-45 years old accounted for 2.3%, and 45 years and above accounted for 1.5%.

Education Level: Among all 130 respondents, undergraduate/junior college students accounted for the largest proportion with 120 people (92.3% of the total sample). Additionally, graduate students accounted for 3.8%, junior high school and below accounted for 1.5%, and senior high school/technical secondary school/technical school accounted for 2.3%. The average education level of the 130 respondents was relatively high.

Occupation and Income Level: Given the investigation of community shopping, this study also examined respondents' occupation and income levels. Among the 130 respondents, 103 were students (79.2%), 16 were office workers (12.3%), and self-employed/contractors/freelancers and unemployed individuals accounted for 3.8% and 4.6% respectively.

Because the study involves the influence of community marketing on members'

product purchases, respondents' income was also investigated. Considering the presence of student groups among respondents, income sources were not limited. The survey revealed that 87 respondents had monthly incomes between 1,000-3,000 yuan (66.9% of all respondents), 19 earned below 1,000 yuan (14.6%), 3,000-5,000 yuan accounted for 11.5%, and 5,000-10,000 yuan accounted for 6.2%. The average monthly income of survey participants was 2,411.5 yuan.

Living Conditions: Because community products are diverse, and previous research indicates that consumers may purchase products for family members living together in the community with product categories varying by living situation, this study also investigated respondents' living conditions. Among them, 58 respondents lived with parents and children across two generations (44.6% of the total sample), 51 lived alone or shared rentals (39.2%), three or more generations living together accounted for 12.3%, and couples living together accounted for 3.8%. Respondents in this study primarily lived in "parents and children across two generations" and "alone/shared rental" arrangements.

4.1.2 Statistical Analysis of Respondents' Shopping Community Behavior Data In addition to basic demographic information, this study investigated respondents' behavior in shopping communities, including how they joined shopping communities, browsing frequency, speaking frequency, and shopping frequency.

Reaching the Shopping Community: To understand how users' shopping intentions and behaviors are influenced by community marketing, we first examined how users reach shopping communities. Among four joining methods—group invitation, marketing advertisements, social circle exposure, and welfare attraction—group invitation accounted for the largest proportion with 46 respondents (35.4% of the total sample), followed by welfare attraction with 35 respondents (26.9%). Marketing advertising accounted for a similar proportion at 25.4%, while 12.3% reached communities through social circles. Currently, users access shopping communities through multiple channels, primarily through invitations. Therefore, community operators need to reach users more accurately and attract them through welfare activities.

Shopping Community Interaction Analysis: Regarding community usage, the largest group (63.8% of all samples) reported "less frequent, occasionally clicking to take a look," while "more frequent, checking every day" accounted for 13.8%. Overall, respondents' average usage frequency of shopping communities was not very high. In community marketing, user interaction within communities is also important. This study investigated respondents' speaking interactions in shopping communities, finding that 72.3% "rarely speak" in communities, and 15.4% "speak every month."

Shopping Community Consumption Analysis: The ultimate goal of shopping community marketing is to attract more users to make purchases. This study investigated respondents' consumption in shopping communities, reveal-

ing that 62.3% rarely spend in communities, while 35.4% spend once or twice a week. The average consumption frequency of respondents in shopping communities is low, indicating low stickiness. Based on consumption frequency surveys, this study further investigated consumption levels. When spending in shopping communities, the largest proportion (49.2%) spent 50 yuan or less per transaction, while 38.5% spent more than 50 yuan up to 100 yuan. In this study, consumers spent relatively small amounts per transaction in shopping communities, preferring low-priced, practical goods.

Shopping Community Consumption Experience Analysis: The ultimate goal of shopping community marketing is to sell goods. Unlike offline stores and professional e-commerce platforms such as Taobao and JD.com, shopping communities are smaller and have faced skepticism due to lack of unified third-party management and related negative societal reports. Concerns include the authenticity of community activities, product quality, and consumer safety. This study further investigated consumers' consumption experiences in shopping communities.

Regarding the authenticity and attractiveness of community activities, the study examined which shopping community marketing activities are most attractive. Discounts, flash sales, group buying, and full reduction promotions were the most popular, with 73.1% of respondents preferring discount activities. This indicates that consumers in shopping communities favor direct and intuitive price reduction activities. Product quality assurance, after-sales service, and discount strength are the four aspects consumers value most, with after-sales service guarantee accounting for 60% of importance.

In recent years, negative reports about shopping communities have affected some consumers' impressions. Without third-party supervision and quick complaint handling, shopping communities themselves need to improve consumer experience promptly. Among the 130 respondents, shopping experiences involved problems such as "goods not matching photos, poor quality," "limited product variety, lacking desired items," "untimely and inadequate after-sales service," "unreliable fresh food quality," "poor attitude of self-pickup staff and haphazard product stacking," and "cases of mistaken or missing items." "Uncomfortable community marketing routines" accounted for 58.5%, indicating that shopping community marketing activities failed to meet consumer expectations. Product quality has not reached standards of other platforms, and after-sales service is untimely and inadequate. Community operations rely on weak connections in interpersonal communication, where word-of-mouth and community communication and sharing should receive higher attention.

To further investigate factors affecting final purchase intention and behavior regarding shopping community content, this study examined the relationship between purchase intention and behavior (dependent variables) and four independent variables: product situation, community service quality, internal daily information exchange and interaction, and community marketing activities. Statistical analysis revealed that purchase intention and final purchasing behav-

ior in shopping communities show strong correlation with community service quality and product situation, moderate correlation with community marketing activities, but slight negative correlation with daily information exchange and interaction within the community. This suggests that shopping community marketing should focus more on product quality and after-sales service, emphasizing trust and praise from consumers, reducing procedural and mechanical marketing language, adding more humanized and personalized communication, and increasing direct marketing activities to better facilitate community development.

4.2 Description of Interview Results

Interview results show that respondents began spending money in communities after the COVID-19 pandemic. Some consumers purchased necessities in communities during epidemic control periods, while consumers who did not experience such controls chose community purchases because goods could be delivered more quickly. Geographic characteristics represent the natural advantage of community marketing. When conducting in-depth interviews on how information exchange degree, activity frequency, and product characteristics influence consumers' purchase intention and behavior, and asking whether consumers actively seek and join communities, we found that friends' feedback or community feedback, product categories, and discount strength primarily determine purchase intention. Respondents were willing to actively join communities when friends recommended them and when product discounts were needed. Interviewees' answers corroborate our thoughts on whether group motivation promotes purchase intention.

4.2.1 Product Marketing Effect of Community Interview responses included: "Sometimes it's preferred to buy in the community because it's a familiar product." "I often buy fruits, cakes, and similar items in the community because delivery is fast—the water from the previous day is taken away when I pass by the pickup point the next day. Except for fruits, I rarely buy anything else." "It depends on the product type and urgency. For fresh fruit or urgently needed products, the community is chosen." Interviews revealed that most consumers hope communities can provide products with safety, quality assurance, and after-sales guarantees, but most respondents have purchased low-priced fresh products in communities, which have natural geographical advantages in community marketing.

4.2.2 Price Marketing Effect of Community Interview responses included: "I'm happy to spend money in the store, and sometimes promotions in the group are even cheaper than Meituan." "When there are many activities, I'm certainly more willing to buy things in the community. It's best to send coupons every day so you can see them whenever you want to buy something." Interviews found that under group dynamic effects, consumers who spend longer time shopping in communities develop more positive attitudes toward

related products, perceiving community prices as almost the most favorable. Faced with preferential and discount information in communities, consumers will purchase as long as the product price is within their payment range and the product is confirmed useful.

4.2.3 Group Power Marketing Effect of Community Interview responses included: “It’s really easier to arouse my interest in products when I see other people’s orders, especially when friends give feedback on products they bought.” “I rarely share in the community, generally sharing links with friends, because I think the product quality is okay and the price is right, and friends may have relevant needs, so I recommend products I’ve used.” “I recently joined a nail group. People in the group often discuss styles and share all kinds of evaluations. It feels very real. If merchants don’t bully customers, I’m happy to go to the store for consumption.” “After-sales attitude greatly affects whether I want to buy. I joined a cake group where someone said the cake was crushed. Actually, the loss wasn’t significant, but the merchant directly offered it for free. How wonderful! Naturally, I might not buy if there are bad reviews.”

These responses reveal that consumers can obtain information faster in relatively active group chats and are more likely to exhibit consumption behavior, while in inactive groups, they tend to adopt a wait-and-see attitude due to limited information obtained. The group motivation of community marketing helps communities achieve fission. For consumers, having a good consumption experience in communities leads them to further invite relatives and friends to join. Secondly, consumers themselves actively seek invitations, allowing community scale to continuously expand.

When individuals integrate into group situations and interact effectively with other group members, group motivation forms. Communities transmit symbols to groups through ritual communication, and group members interpret symbols through observation and participate in sharing cultural significance. In communities, product categories and prices, community feedback, and consumer experience evaluations all significantly influence consumers’ purchase intention.

5 Summary and Reflection

This study conducted 4P theoretical research on community marketing phenomena through audience surveys and in-depth interviews, attempting to answer how community marketing affects consumers’ purchasing intention and behavior from the perspective of group dynamics. The research finds that higher information exchange volume in community marketing correlates with stronger consumer purchase intention and greater likelihood of consumption behavior.

This study proposes the group dynamic effect of community marketing, embodying the development of group dynamic phenomena in online communities while providing a new channel for brand marketing through community marketing in

the context of modern China's network marketing environment. However, it is worth noting that this study also found that non-standard community marketing phenomena bring negative effects such as proliferation of unregulated products and difficulty in consumer rights protection, which warrant vigilance and reflection. Nevertheless, factors influencing consumers' purchase intention in this study remain insufficiently explored. Future research in the community field may need to pay greater attention to the influence of products and content within communities.

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