

How Does VLOG Affect Young Consumers' Purchase Intention?

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, young customers prefer watching video blogs to learn about new products before they make purchasing decisions. Additionally, many brands invite bloggers to promote their products. This study designed an online experiment to examine the impact of sponsorship information and product comparison in video blogs on consumers' purchase intentions. This study found that the product comparison does not affect consumers' attitudes towards the brand and purchase intentions, but sponsorship could bring negative effects. The conclusion will provide references for brand strategy formulation and blogger further development.

Keywords: *video blogs, purchase intention, sponsorship, product comparison*

1. INTRODUCTION

The development and popularization of social media have provided users with free environment. Taking YouTube as an example, users can share life fragments in videos and interact with others. In personal channels, bloggers began to recommend the products they use, such as cosmetics and technology products. The popularity of vlogs is affecting the purchase behavior of young consumers [1], because buying a product is a difficult decision. First, young consumers are easily attracted to new products, and too many choices will make them fall into chaos. Secondly, young consumers are usually college students and other novices, who lacking savings, so they need to make careful purchase decisions. In addition, they don't have enough time to experience products offline, and they can save time by choosing products through the suggestions of vloggers. Therefore, watching the vlogs will help them quickly compare different products and make purchasing decisions with limited time and economic costs.

The purpose of this research is to examine which factors in vlogs influence the purchase intention of young customers. The content designs, the interactive modes, and brands cooperation are all creating unique videos. Through study of these aspects, we can draw conclusions about the consumption behavior of young viewers affected by vlogs. For vloggers, they would better design their video content to attract viewers and increase their

influence on social media. For brands, they would promote targeted products effectively, improving brand awareness and increasing profits. For viewers, they would make better purchase decision while watching vlogs, saving time and money.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Gain Satisfaction in Para-social Interaction

Video blogs are a new type of social activities and communication behaviors that have emerged and been popular in recent years. One of the motivations for people to shoot and watch these various short videos on social platforms is their eagerness to participate in social interaction [2]. Therefore, the communication presented by the Internet may be connected to the user's social life because they are willing to establish a connection on the Internet in this way. From a psychological point of view, a super-social relationship can be formed between vlog viewers and vloggers. Although vlogs are interacting based on the Internet, they are forming virtual communities, realizing para-social interaction (PSI) to a certain extent. Para-social interaction (PSI) is defined as a relationship between spectator and performer, which is similar to face -to-face model. Differently, it is a one-sided and friend-like relationship, and viewers can form PSI by spontaneously watching vlogs.

The creation process and unique characteristics of vlogs are closely related to the formation of PSI [3].

Research has also found that there is a positive correlation between para-social interaction and the purchase intention of the product viewed [4]. However, different types of content will bring different experiences to consumers, thereby affecting their attitudes and behaviors.

Different users choose media platforms for different reasons. As the uses and gratification theory stated, users use media content as a tool to meet their needs. Uses and gratifications theory assumes that media behavior is purposive, goal-directed and motivated; besides, people select media content to satisfy their personal desires [5]. When viewing vlogs and interacting in the comments, users achieve the purpose of obtaining product information and communicating with others. The sense of satisfaction allows users to experience a similar mode to offline interactions, and helps they establish interpersonal relationships with vloggers and other users. Such relationships will let them trust other's views, increasing their willingness to buy products.

Lu, Chang and Chang [6] defined purchase intention as "the willingness of the consumer to buy a product at a particular time or situation". Previous studies have found that perceived source credibility is one of the main factors that can increase the persuasive power of a message, which impacts purchase intention [7]. When a source is perceived as trustworthy and knowledgeable on a certain product or service, the message delivered will become more effective in impacting and changing the audience's attitude and intention [8]. Generally, followers perceive vloggers, as non-traditional celebrities, are more credible than traditional celebrities such as singers and actors [9]. While delivering the information, they are more honest and transparent in [10].

Attitude is an important concept in advertising and marketing research, and it is considered a common index in predicting consumer behavior [11]. Scholars have proposed different definitions of attitude over the past years. Among them, Perloff gives a definition of attitude as "a learned, global evaluation of an object that influences thought and action", he also points out that attitude can shape perceptions, influence judgments, and predict behavior [12].

The concept of purchase intention can sometimes be easily confused with consumer attitudes, where attitude can be considered as a summary of evaluations and intentions [13]. Positive purchase intentions sometimes do not necessarily directly lead to consumers' purchase intentions. This research further explores the impact of video content on consumer brand attitudes and shopping intentions.

2.2. The Electronic Word of Mouth and Reasoned Decision

Arndt defined WOM as an oral communication

between two or more persons that focus on a brand, product, or service on a non-commercial basis [14]. Electronic word-of mouth (EWOM) is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" [2]. The positive or negative evaluation of the product in the vlogs will establish corresponding statements about the products, which is called electronic word of mouth (EWOM) [5]. Undoubtedly, on social media platforms, comments will be entirely displayed and spread. EWOM will directly affect customers' attitudes towards products. For a specific product or brand, when most content on social media is positive, the audience will think that it is a popular product and will be interested in it. Correspondingly, when a product has received criticism from vloggers, viewers may ignore the relevant information later, because they subconsciously think the product is not worth buying. Next, based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA), attitude directly affects behavioral intentions [5]. Based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA), a person's behavioral intention depends on his or her attitude and social norms of performing this behavior. Attitude also plays a significant role in predicting consumers' behavior. Belleau, Summers, Xu, and Pinel suggested that respondents' attitude influenced their purchase intention: the more favorable the attitude, the higher the respondents' purchase intention [15]. Consumers compare similar products of different brands in a completely open information environment. After comparison and analysis, a positive attitude will directly lead to purchase intentions. As a result, consumers will make purchasing decisions more rationally.

One study has found that the positive EWOM generated by users on the social networking site Facebook significantly affected the brand attitude and purchase intention of consumer electronic products [16]. Previous research has also concluded that the attractiveness and persuasiveness of vloggers will promote consumer purchase intentions [17], but they have not discussed the influence of content mode on audience attitude. This study will consider the modes of vlog content. Specifically, the content can be a product introduction or a comparison of different products. Product introduction means that the video does not compare similar products, but only describes each product. On the contrary, vloggers may compare similar products of different brands in the video to show the advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that videos containing product comparisons have a positive impact on young consumers' brand attitude and perceived credibility.

2.3. The Impact of Sponsorship Transparency on Interpersonal Trust

Sponsored content can be an effective advertising tool

that can elicit a positive response to advertisers and increase customer interest, product quality, category leadership, and even purchase intention. Additionally, these types of messages are handled differently, so it is complex to determine whether sponsored content is effective [18]. Sponsor transparency can be used as a common indicator here. Sponsor transparency refers to the extent to which sponsor information is disclosed to consumers [7]. Many products in vlogs are public relations products directly sponsored by brands, especially newly listed products. The brands hope to promote their products through videos. Since the sponsor information indicates the commercial purpose behind, it will have a direct impact on the viewing experience and purchase intentions. Specifically, without sponsorship information, viewers will think that the video content is simply sharing the experience after using certain products, and trust vlogger easily. However, if they find information about the sponsor appearing, they will regard the video as an advertisement and do not trust the positive evaluation in the video.

The core of interpersonal trust is professionalism and authenticity [5]. The sponsorship information undermines the authenticity in the eyes of the audience because they believe that there is a benefit relationship between the vloggers and the brands. Only when the influencer uses one-sided information, the brand attitude will be negatively affected, and when the information is two-sided information, the brand attitude will not be negatively affected. Similarly, influential people who post real product recommendations and therefore have no commercial relationship with the brand can do well by mentioning this explicitly. Including a statement that it does not sponsor the post, rather than making it unclear whether its post is sponsored, which may generate a more positive brand response by reducing the visibility and suspicion of the ad [18].

Studies have shown that sponsorship transparency will destroy the trust and relationship [7]. The public content displayed before or at the same time as the sponsored content will prepare the sponsored content and provide sufficient processing time, so the viewer can recognize the content as an advertisement and can be strictly processed. This study will further explore the influence of sponsored vlog on customers and hypothesizes that sponsored content will have a positive impact on young consumers' brand attitude and perceived credibility.

Based on the above conclusions and limitations of existing research, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: The vlog including product comparison will lead to higher perceived credibility relative to the vlog without product comparison.

H2: The vlog including product comparison will lead

to more positive brand attitude relative to the vlog without product comparison.

H3: The vlog without sponsored content will lead to higher perceived credibility relative to the vlog including sponsored content.

H4: The vlog without sponsored content will lead to more positive brand attitude relative to the vlog including sponsored content

H5: Perceived credibility will positively correlate with customers' purchase intention.

H6: Brand attitude will positively correlate with customers' purchase intention.

3. METHOD

3.1. Study Design

A 2(sponsored content: present vs. absent) * 2 (product comparison: present vs. absent) between-subjects online experiment was designed to test the proffered hypotheses and research questions. The study consisted of one section, including a short video and following survey. Each participant was randomly assigned to a condition, watched the video, and then completed the subsequent survey.

3.2. Participants

This research adopted purposive sampling method, the survey was published in the COM SONA system, and samples were taken from the students at Boston University. A total of 87 valid responses were recruited. Participants were randomly divided into one condition, condition one with 21 persons, condition two with 23 persons, condition three with 22 persons, and condition four with 21 persons. Among them, most of the participants were college students aged 18-24. There were more female participants than male participants, mainly Asians and whites.

3.3. Stimulus

Four videos about Huawei smartphone were selected to manipulate the independent variables (product comparison & sponsored content). Each video was about 10 minutes. Product comparison was about two different Huawei smartphones. Sponsored content was labelled at the bottom of the screen.

3.4. Procedure

At the beginning of the experiment, participants were asked to read and sign the consent form. Then they were randomly assigned to a condition and watched a short video about ten minutes. After watching, they were asked to complete a three-part self-reported question, ranging

from strongly disagree to strongly agree to evaluate the listed statements. Finally, they filled in some demographic information.

3.5. Measures

Product comparison refers to the comparison of similar properties of similar products, which reflects the advantages and disadvantages of these products [16]. In this study, it was manipulated by two videos. The first one was a vlog which introduce Huawei Mate 40 Pro plus without comparison with others. The second one is a vlog which compare Huawei Mate 40 Pro and Huawei P40 Pro.

Sponsored content mean clear sponsor information appears in the video content or video description [18]. In this study, it was manipulated by two videos. The first one was a vlog which introduce Huawei Mate 40 Pro and sponsored by Huawei. The second one was a vlog which introduce Huawei Mate 40 Pro without sponsor.

Perceived credibility was one of the main factors that can increase the persuasive power of a message, which impacts purchase intention [7]. When a source is perceived as trustworthy and knowledgeable on a certain product or service, the message delivered will become more effective in impacting and changing the audience's attitude and intention [8]. In this study, it was measured by 5-point Likert Scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree) with some items (Cronbach's alpha =.945) like: "The content of this vlog is attractive." "The content of this vlog is credible."

Brand attitude is a learned evaluation of the brand that influences customers' thought and action and can predict behavior [8]. In this study, it was measured by 5-point Likert Scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree) with some items (Cronbach's alpha =.965) like: "I think this brand (Huawei) is a trusted brand." "I would recommend this vlog to others who are interested in this brand (Huawei)."

Purchase intention means the likelihood of consumers buying products in the future [6]. The stronger the purchase intention is, the higher the possibility of the purchase behavior will be. According to Wang [5], it was measured by 5-point Likert Scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree) with some items (Cronbach's alpha = .963) like: "I would recommend this vlog to others who study this smartphone." "I will consider this smartphone in my next purchase."

4. RESULTS

To test the hypotheses, the researcher run two factorial ANOVA tests and two linear regressions to analysis the collected. First, the factorial ANOVA was used to test H1-H4.

The first hypothesis predicted that the vlog including product comparison will lead to higher perceived credibility relative to the vlog without product comparison. It was not supported. There was no significant main effect for the product comparison on the perceived credibility, $F(1, 83) = 17.846$, $p > .05$. For the condition with product comparison, $M = 3.79$, $SE = .95$ and for the condition without product comparison, $M = 2.63$, $SE = 1.053$.

The second hypothesis predicted that the vlog including product comparison will lead to more positive brand attitude relative to the vlog without including product comparison. It was not supported. There was no significant main effect for the product comparison on the brand attitude, $F(1, 83) = 28.08$, $p > .05$. For the condition with product comparison, $M = 3.57$, $SE = 1.15$ and for the condition without product comparison, $M = 2.09$, $SE = .99$.

The third hypothesis predicted that the vlog without sponsored content will lead to higher perceived credibility relative to the vlog including sponsored content. It was supported. There was a significant main effect for sponsored content on perceived credibility, $F(1, 83) = 17.846$, $p < .05$. For the condition with sponsored content, $M = 4.23$, $SE = .486$ and for the condition without sponsored content, $M = 2.67$, $SE = 1.01$.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that the vlog without sponsored content will lead to more positive brand attitude relative to the vlog including sponsored content. It was not supported. There was a significant main effect for sponsored content on brand attitude, $F(1, 83) = 28.08$, $p > .05$. For the condition with sponsored content, $M = 3.83$, $SE = .79$ and for the condition without sponsored content, $M = 1.87$, $SE = .85$.

Then, two linear regressions were run to test the H5 and H6. The fifth hypothesis predicted that perceived credibility will positively correlate with customers' purchase intention. It was supported ($F(1,85) = 166.54$, $p < .05$). There was a significant main effect of the perceived credibility on customers' purchase intention. Customers with higher perceived credibility showed higher purchase intention.

The sixth hypothesis predicted that brand attitude will positively correlate with customers' purchase intention. It was supported ($F(1,85) = 668.49$, $p < .05$). There was a significant main effect of the brand attitude on customers' purchase intention. Customers with more positive brand attitude showed higher purchase intention.

5. DISCUSSION

This study found that the product comparison does not affect consumers' attitudes towards the brand and purchase intentions, but sponsorship may bring negative

effects. When they see that the product in the video is sponsored by the brand, they may think that the description is not credible. In contrast, the products that vloggers bought and recommend are representing their true thoughts, and viewers are more likely to trust them. At the theoretical level, the findings of this study support the impact of previous studies on sponsorship transparency and extend the existing findings to the field of video blogs. However, this study did not reach an ideal conclusion about product comparison, which may be due to limited samples and incomplete experimental design.

For practical contribution, brands and vloggers can refer to these conclusions when recommending products, which not only enhances the audience's viewing experience, but also promotes their purchase intentions.

There are some limitations of this study which may influence the validity. For the internal validity, first, many participants are sensitive when filling out the questionnaire. The description of the questionnaire and the order of the questions may lead the participants to make some purposeful responses. Second, the study randomly assigned each participant to a condition that each one would watch one of four videos. However, the choice of these four videos may affect the results of the experiment.

Although the content is all about Huawei smartphones, and the duration and structure are similar, the four videos still have many confusing differences. For the external validity, on the one hand, the participants in this study are limited. First, the questionnaire was mainly distributed to Boston University students through the COM SONA system, which resulted in monotonous participants. Although the researcher expect that the sample is young consumers, it would be better if they could cover more participants with different professional, educational, and cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, the stimulus selected for this study are four vlogs about Huawei smartphone. Although smartphones are electronic devices commonly used by modern young people, they may have different needs and interests in purchasing products. Some consumers may not have the need to buy or the interest to know about smartphones. For these people, the content of the vlogs will not have an obvious persuasive effect. Therefore, in the experiment design, more widely applicable products can be considered as the stimulus. Thus, the research conclusions cannot be directly generalized to other types of products, resulting in low external validity.

6. CONCLUSION

Although product comparison does not affect consumers' attitudes towards the brand and purchase intentions, sponsorship could bring negative effects. For the directions for future directions, first, in order to draw conclusions that can be extended to a wider range, future

research can select other products rather than digital products. Different product may lead to broader conclusion on customers with other purchase interests. Second, considering the differences in cultural backgrounds, researchers can study consumer behavior of different countries, which may vary due to different economic developments and popular cultural trends. For countries with different levels of economic development, consumers will also have different attitudes when watching video blogs of product recommendations due to their different income and consumption outlook. Finally, there is distinct different between the purchase intention and purchase decision. Sometimes, purchase intention cannot be directly translated into practical purchase behavior. Thus, research can consider measuring actual purchase decision in the future study with other method, such as observation.

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