



Analysis of “Crazy Thursday” from the Perspective of Meme Theory

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Abstract. With the advantages of low cost and high efficiency, Internet marketing has become the first choice of marketing methods for countless businesses. Online communities and social media promote the public to participate in the imitation, replication, innovation and dissemination of information. Such information dissemination can be explained by meme theory. This paper attempts to explain the communication characteristics of KFC’s “Crazy Thursday” marketing campaign from the perspective of meme theory, explain the communication mechanism of “Crazy Thursday” marketing campaign with the communication mode of meme theory, analyze the psychology of the communication audience at each stage, and provide a reference for such Internet marketing campaign.

Keywords: Meme Theory · Internet Marketing · Crazy Thursday · Crazy Thursday Literature

1 Introduction

Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) is one of the multinational restaurant chains in the United States, and the world’s second largest fast food and largest fried chicken chain. In 1987, KFC’s first Chinese branch was officially opened in the Qianmen area of Beijing, and in November 2000, KFC was the first to exceed the scale of 400 restaurants in China’s catering chain. To date, KFC has opened more than 1,400 restaurants in more than 200 cities across China.

1.1 KFC “Crazy Thursday” Marketing Campaign

“Crazy Thursday” is a regular KFC marketing campaign that regularly launches special offers every Thursday. KFC first proposed “Crazy Thursday” in August 2018. The main products were mostly chicken nuggets, French fries, hamburgers priced at 9.9 yuan. “Crazy Thursday, a single product is nine yuan and nine” was the slogan at the time. At the beginning of the event, KFC also invited Luhan, Wang Yuan and other well-known stars to appear in publicity advertisements, which were concentrated in elevators and express cabinets. However, the effect of the advertisement was not very good, and even some consumers were dissatisfied because the song was “brainwashed” and “too much”.

Until May 2021, there is a “turning point”. The first generation of “Crazy Thursday Literature” copy appeared on the Internet: “Look at your downcast look, do you know what day is today? Today is KFC Crazy Thursday!” Since then, “Crazy Thursday Literature” has begun to develop, and the copywriting has gradually combined with the current hot spots to continuously form new jokes. Even developed to December 31, 2021, KFC will play jokes in its official capacity and hold a live broadcast of “Crazy Thursday Literature” to show the original copywriting of netizens. According to Qichacha, KFC successfully registered the trademark “Crazy Thursday” in January 2022 [1].

In the first half of 2022, a large number of “Crazy Thursday Literature” swept across major social platforms such as WeChat Moments and group chats every week, and now “Crazy Thursday Literature” has evolved into a popular phenomenon.

As of September 2022, there have been 4.141 million discussions and 1.96 billion views under the Weibo topic #KFC Crazy Thursday#, and 107,000 discussions and 350 million views under the topic #Crazy Thursday# [2]; 50,000+ notes related to Crazy Thursday on Xiaohongshu; The Douyin topic #crazy thursday has a total of 430 million views, and #KFC Crazy Thursday has a total of 200 million views [3].

According to the Baidu Index, the search index for the keyword “Crazy Thursday” showed a regular peak pattern every Thursday from March to September 2022, and showed a gradual upward trend, with an overall increase of 390% month-on-month [4].

1.2 Crazy Thursday Literature

KFC “Crazy Thursday” became a hugely successful viral marketing campaign thanks to the massive and rapid spread of “Crazy Thursday literature” on the Internet. “Crazy Thursday Literature” refers to the fancy copywriting of people who want to go to KFC for free every Thursday. Here are some typical “Crazy Thursday Literature” copywriting as examples.

“Hello everyone, I’m Dongfang Qingcang, and I’m traveling in Yunmengze. In order to get the primordial spirit of the Chidi woman, I want to pretend to marry her. And Xiao Lanhua secretly came over to find out! She’s not very happy in the past few days. Come and give me 50 yuan each, I will invite her to eat KFC Crazy Thursday, and when I return to the Cangyan Sea, I will confer upon you the King of the East and West!” (The characters and plots in the copy are from the recent popular TV series “Canglan Jue”).

“We broke up, he doesn’t love me at all, he loves his ex-girlfriend, I’m just a tool for his healing!!! I gave my emotions and my money but I lost everything in the end. It’s Crazy Thursday, so who treats me to eat???”

“I’m the game designer of ‘The Sheep’. I was fired from the company today because I have the passcode for the second level. Everyone is chasing me, and I have nowhere to hide now but to you. Please help. Today is Crazy Thursday, you give me 50 yuan, and I will pass you the secret tips of the second level of ‘The Sheep’” (“The Sheep” is a recent popular mobile game).

We can see that the copywriting of “Crazy Thursday Literature” usually begins with a novel-style plot, such as a suspenseful reasoning story, an extremely dramatic love story, or a combination of current affairs hotspots, and the celebrity gossip is incorporated into it, and the final ending will definitely return to KFC “Crazy Thursday”. The plot of “Crazy Thursday Literature” is dramatic and close to life, attracting people’s curiosity,

and the final super reverse plot makes people laugh and cry. The more irrelevant the story of “Crazy Thursday Literature” is to the context and background, the more bizarre and twisted the plot, the better the final reversal effect. In these stories, people are more likely to choose the protagonist as “I”. Thus, when the copy is sent, people will read patiently because of their relationship to each other, only to realize that the story has nothing to do with “me” until the end.

French sociologist Talde believes that all human behavior is imitation, imitation is innate [5]. In KFC’s marketing campaign, “Crazy Thursday Literature” became a powerful Internet meme, causing people to imitate and recreate it, forming a large-scale viral spread.

2 Meme Theory

The concept of “meme” originated in Richard Dawkins’ book “The Selfish Gene” published in 1976. Dawkins believes that in a biological sense, genes can reproduce and evolve continuously through self-replication. Similar to this, there is such a replicator with functions of replication and reproduction in the process of inheritance and evolution of human culture. Dawkins named these replicators memes [6].

2.1 Internet Memes

With the evolution of the times and the further in-depth research, scholars’ conceptual elaboration of memes is also constantly improving. British scholar Susan Blackmore further expanded the concept of memes on the basis of Dawkins: “As long as the meaning can be transmitted through imitation, it is a meme” [7]. With the advent of the Internet era, the meme theory has further evolved to digital, and the concept of Internet meme was born. Scholar Marta Dynel describes an internet meme as “any man-made message that appears on the internet and is imitated, translated and rapidly disseminated by a large number of participants, resulting in countless derivatives” [8].

3 The Generation of “Crazy Thursday Literature” from the Perspective of Meme Theory

Heylighen Francis proposed that the dissemination process of memes can be divided into four phases, namely “assimilation”, “retention”, “expression” and “dissemination”. This article will use Heiligen’s theory to explain the mode of dissemination of “Crazy Thursday Literature” [9].

3.1 The Assimilation Phase of the “Crazy Thursday Literature” Meme

The first step for Internet memes to be imitated and copied is assimilation. In the initial dissemination, the plot that is true, funny or full of dramatic conflict can often attract the attention of the host of the Internet meme. Hosts generally accept the cultural fragments they come into contact with according to their own cultural level and cognitive level.

Oriented to the base of the marketing audience, in order to achieve a broad assimilation effect, the meme is required to have a wide range of cognizability.

The powerful “Crazy Thursday Literature” memes with high popularity all share the common denominator of easy-to-understand plots such as “emotional entanglement”, “debt disputes” or celebrity gossip, film and television episodes, etc. These do not set too high a threshold for the audience’s cultural level and cognitive level, and they will understand immediately after reading. Taking the first-person “I” as the narrative perspective makes it easier for readers to bring the plot into their own lives and achieve a good assimilation effect.

3.2 The Retention Phase of the “Crazy Thursday Literature” Meme

After the meme is cognized and assimilated by the host, when it repeatedly stimulates the same area of the host’s brain, it will be continuously strengthened and deepened. This is the retention of the meme. In order to form the effect of repeated stimulation, the meme itself is required to have memorability.

The “established routine” of “Crazy Thursday Literature” remains deeply in every reader’s consciousness, that is “super reversal”. No matter what the background of the story is, no matter how the plot develops, it will eventually return to KFC “Crazy Thursday”. As mentioned in the previous example, “Come and give me 50 yuan each, I will invite her to eat KFC Crazy Thursday”, “It’s Crazy Thursday, so who treats me to eat???”.

The essence of the reversal is to create suspense by forming an accident, the purpose is to increase the drama of the plot and cause a psychological impact to the viewers at the moment of the reversal. This psychological impact is the key to leaving a memory point. Constantly accepting the repeated stimulation brought by the reversal, the “Crazy Thursday Literature” logically occupies a place in the cognition of the audience, and arouses the desire for dissemination.

3.3 The Expression Phase of the “Crazy Thursday Literature” Meme

Although the original meme maintains the heritability of its language ontology structure during the reproduction process, the semantics of the meme cannot remain in a constant state during the propagation, but is constantly expressed and mutated [10].

In the dissemination of memes, the host spontaneously transforms from the audience to the producer, and re-creates and extends the meme. This process is the expression stage of the meme. Memes themselves need to have space for innovation and extension in order to be expressed smoothly.

The host is constantly receiving the stimulation from the super reversal of “Crazy Thursday Literature”, which is also guiding the expression of desire to bring stimulation to more people. Since “Crazy Thursday Literature” is only based on a similar form, not limited to specific content, and can be applied to various contexts, the creators have great autonomy in the process of dissemination. The social background and cognitive level of each individual host are different, so that as the information receiving end, the decoding methods of information are also various. When re-creating on the basis of the information received and decoded by individuals, due to various individual differences

and the influencing factors of various contexts, the “Crazy Thursday Literature” meme has more room for mutation.

3.4 The Dissemination Phase of the “Crazy Thursday Literature” Meme

After imitation and copying, memes finally enter the stage of diffusion, which is the last link in the complete meme dissemination mechanism. The speed and efficiency of the Internet have created the necessary conditions for the large-scale copying and dissemination of Internet memes in a short period of time. Under these conveniences, the social attributes of memes can be more easily exerted.

“Crazy Thursday” has become a periodic collective action for people who like to create and spread “Crazy Thursday literature”. In the communication between Internet communities, they also established a sense of identity between them. “Crazy Thursday Literature” has become an effective social tool to bring people closer to a certain extent. Netizens found resonance and recognition when they pressed the forward and send buttons again and again.

4 Conclusions

“Crazy Thursday Literature” became a powerful meme, widely copied, recreated and spread. The content of “Crazy Thursday Literature” is easy to understand and close to life, so it has wide cognizability; the super reversal of the plot leaves a deep memory point for the audience; the unified structure and unlimited content make “Crazy Thursday Literature” innovatable and extensible; Periodic group activities promote collective identity, showing the strong social attributes of “Crazy Thursday Literature”. The “Crazy Thursday Literature” meme meets the above conditions, and is also supported by the conditions of Internet technology and communication and creation platforms, and is widely assimilated, deeply retained, actively expressed, and effectively disseminated by the host.

Meme theory provides an explanation for the success of the “Crazy Thursday” marketing campaign, as well as a reference for similar types of Internet marketing campaigns. Internet memes have a huge scale of dissemination. Businesses can use Internet meme dissemination to achieve low-cost, high-yield marketing results. At the same time, we should also control the direction of communication, actively guide netizens, and create a healthy online marketing environment.

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