



The Role of Fandom Communities in Viral Advertising Diffusion on Social Media Platforms

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Abstract. With the development of social media, the advertising diffusion's way changes from the brand one-way output to the multi node diffusion mode achieved by Platform interaction and content reproduction. As a highly organized group with high emotional mobilization ability, fandom fans have multiple identities of viral advertising, including consumer, communicator and content creator. This study, based on Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Weibo, develops a hypothetical cross-platform dissemination model and uses the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to examine how fan communities shape advertising diffusion. The analysis suggests that organized behavior on Weibo can quickly trigger public attention, while on Douyin, secondary creation interacts with algorithmic mechanisms to facilitate content diffusion. On Xiaohongshu, more in-depth User-Generated Content (UGC) tends to strengthen public praise and support conversion. At the same time, excessive organized behavior may undermine perceived authenticity, and idol-related controversies can lead to brand backlash. This study provides a theoretical reference for understanding the cross-platform dissemination role of fandom fans in viral advertising, as well as for brand marketing strategy design.

Keywords: Fandom fans, Viral advertising, User-Generated Content (UGC), Cross-platform dissemination, Elaboration Likelihood Model

1 Introduction

With the arrival of the digital media era, information that the public once found hard to access has become part of people's daily lives. Advertising diffusion has changed markedly in both its primary actors and dissemination paths, while user engagement has risen sharply. People are no longer merely recipients of ads; They increasingly act as communicators. Advertising is no longer a one-way output, but a form of multi-node diffusion. A growing number of ads, supported by topic prominence, high content sharing volume, and strong playback volume, have gradually become viral advertising. In an era characterized by the widespread participation of individuals in media production, brands often aim for solid advertising outcomes while keeping cost lower and publicity higher, and User-Generated Content (UGC) has become a necessary method in practice. Fandom fans, as a distinctive users' group that is highly organized and strong in emotional mobilization capacity as well as content production capacity, are becoming an important force in accelerating the rapid spread of advertising content.

The dissemination of viral advertising tends to rely on users' spontaneous participation, content sharing, and content reproduction. Due to their high level of emotional engagement, fandom fans often act from their own emotion. This tendency means that, in star endorsements, fandom fans commonly take on multiple roles at once, including consumers, communicators, and content creators. Under the guidance of big fans and even official fan organizations, they engage in coordinated commenting, data-driven engagement practices, content-sharing tasks, and secondary creation to spontaneously accelerate the cross-platform spread of brand content. The three major platforms represented by Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Weibo constitute a typical "content publishing—algorithmic recommendation—public opinion diffusion" chain, providing a good structural basis for content dissemination and a good environment for the fan communities to carry out spontaneous or semi spontaneous marketing. However, when discussing virtual advertising and UGC, the existing studies mostly focus on the general user behavior, pay insufficient attention to "fans", a unique group with highly organized and emotional mobility ability, and lack of systematic academic discussion on the behavior boundary, cross platform synergy effect of fans and its specific mechanism in virtual advertising [1]. This study Based on Xiaohongshu, Douyin and Weibo, this study will explore the special roles and propagation path of fandom fans in viral advertising, analyze their potential negative effects or boundary conditions.

2 Theoretical Background of Viral Advertising and UGC

Virtual advertising is generally defined by scholars as an advertising model that relies on users' active communication to achieve exponential diffusion. Its core feature is that the attraction of content can stimulate users' willingness to share and spread rapidly through social networks [2]. Specifically, viral advertising usually has the following characteristics:

- (1) The content has significant emotional or social value, capable of arousing users' interest and resonance [3].
- (2) Users are willing to join in, comment on, or engage in secondary creation, and convert the original content into new form content for secondary dissemination [4].
- (3) Depended on social relationship chain, the content can share in different platform(s), reach more group(s), and realize the continuous diffusion of content in a wider group.

2.1 User-Generated Content in Viral Advertising Diffusion

In this process, User-Generated Content (UGC) plays a key role. Prior studies suggest that UGC is often considered more authentic and credible than the official content of the brand in user perception. Make users more persuasive when recommending, product seeking, or gossiping [5]. For fans, their emotional investment in idols has further enhanced the dissemination of UGC. Fans not only share content based on their interests and personal experiences but also, under the guidance of influential fans or organizations, form a stable and efficient dissemination force through coordinated commenting, content sharing, and secondary creation. This allows brands to gain high

exposure and trigger widespread discussion across multiple platforms in a short period [6]. In summary, the combination of viral advertising and UGC not only demonstrates the importance of content appeal and user emotional engagement but also provides a theoretical basis for studying the multiple identities and cross-platform roles of fandom fans in advertising communication.

2.2 Characteristics of Fandom Fans in Advertising Diffusion

Compared with general users, fandom fans show three main differences:

(1) Strong emotional bond: ns have a strong emotional identification with their idols, they are willing to expand the dissemination of idols' activities and related brand content [7].

(2) Organization and standardization: Most star fan groups have special organizations, namely fan community hubs, for maintenance, which are divided into data groups, promotion groups, anti-defamation groups, etc. Key fans assign tasks based on recent events, such as coordinated commenting, encouraging secondary creation, or purchasing products.

(3) High-frequency content reproduction capacity: Fans are good at producing edited video clips, product reviews, comparison charts, and product seeding content. Fan community hubs will recruit artists, editors, and copywriters, enabling a steady stream of high-quality content for an idol and related campaigns.

3 Elaboration Likelihood Model and Fan Community

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) believes that when individuals receive advertising information, they will choose different persuasion paths according to their own motivation, participation and information processing ability: central route and peripheral route [8]. Central route relies on the in-depth processing and logical analysis of information by individuals, which usually occurs when users pay high attention to products. While the peripheral route relies on emotional, social and celebrity endorsement cues. Users do not need to invest a lot of cognitive efforts to complete the judgment.

In viral advertising, the peripheral route is more critical. Users are often passively exposed to advertising, lack of in-depth attention, and are more vulnerable to emotional infection, social identity or group preference and other clues [9]. In viral advertising scenarios, users typically encounter advertising content incidentally and do not engage in central-route processing. As a result, peripheral cues exert greater persuasive influence.

Fans just provide a lot of such peripheral stimuli: their collective image sharing, actively coordinated commenting, unified script and high-density interaction constitute the universal cues that ordinary users can quickly capture when browsing. These behaviors make it possible for ordinary users to make lightweight cognitive judgments because of psychological shortcuts such as "everyone is using" and "idol endorsement" without performing a central route in-depth analysis of the advertising content, so as to improve the persuasiveness of the advertising.

In addition, fan communities behavior is an emotion driven mechanism to produce content. The mood seems to fluctuate, but it stems from the long-term emotional commitment to idols, which enables fans to continuously output the content of erchuang, product reviews, image sharing and coordinated commenting in a long period of time. The resulting universal cues have high intensity and wide coverage, significantly enhancing the probability of advertising in the system's algorithmic recommendation and continuous exposure, and promoting the rapid spread across platforms [10].

Therefore, from an ELM perspective, the role of fandom fans in viral advertising is not only reflected in the quantity of interactions, but also in providing diverse and stable peripheral cues, thereby reducing the cognitive cost for ordinary users and enhancing the persuasiveness of the advertisement.

For example the collaboration between luxury brand Chopard and aespa, Chopard itself is relatively niche. However, because aespa displayed its products in the event, fans actively shared clothing, drying sheets and experience content through social platforms, forming high-density peripheral cues. This not only allows fans to understand and buy products themselves, but also attracts a large number of passers-by users' attention and orders, to a certain extent increasing the brand's awareness and purchase conversion rate among target groups and potential consumers.

4 Behavior Cross-Platform Dissemination

This study aims to build theoretical models rather than empirical tests, it uses hypothetical cross platform framework for deduction.

The dissemination of advertising by fans is usually carried out in stages, from Weibo's fan community hubs to the public domain such as Douyin for algorithm diffusion, and finally to the deeper and more authentic product viewing on xiaohongshu's private domain platform. Weibo is more like a driving force in the propagation path, Douyin acts as an accelerator, and xiaohongshu is the final precipitator. If Weibo is stimulated again by public opinion, the reflow of trending topics will start this path again and become a complete circular path (see Figure 1).

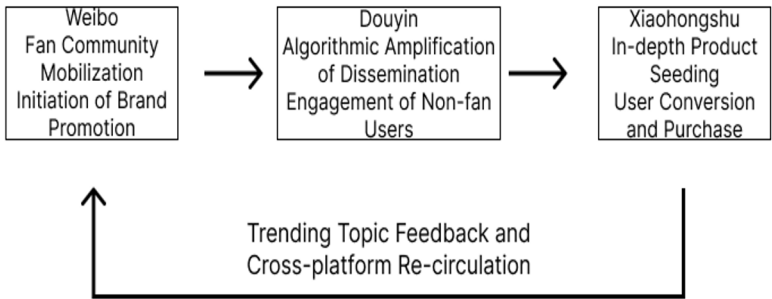


Fig 1. Fan-driven circular diffusion model of viral advertising (Picture credit: Original).

5 Framework Platform Functional Differences and Fan Community Behavior

Platform Functional Differences and the Matching Logic of Fan Community Behavior

(1) Weibo: Organized Engine of Public Opinion Mobilization

Typical behaviors of fandom fans on Weibo include: unified and coordinated commenting, concentrated content sharing, boosting the popularity of fan community hub topics, organizing "Against-anti" campaigns, and emotional mobilization.

Research Hypothesis:

H1: The organized communication behavior on Weibo can significantly determine the initial intensity of brand public opinion events.

(2) Douyin: Algorithm-Driven Viral Content Relay Station

The behavior of fan communities in Douyin is mainly manifested as: large-scale mixed shear, contralateral type, secondary innovation with stem; Using topic tags to improve the capture probability of the algorithm; Promote videos into the collection with content sharing interaction

Research Hypothesis:

H2: There is a synergistic effect between the high-frequency second innovation of fan communities and Douyin algorithm, which can significantly improve the propagation speed of brand content.

(3) Xiaohongshu: Trust-Enhanced Deep Product Seeding Platform

Fans on Xiaohongshu further create "professionalized UGC": outputting product usage experiences as consumers, enhancing credibility with "product seeding-style language," and using likes, content sharing, and comments to make content go viral.

Research Hypothesis:

H3: In-depth UGC of fan communities in xiaohongshu can significantly improve the credibility of the brand's word-of-mouth and the ultimate willingness to transform.

Based on the characteristics of the three platforms, this study proposes that fan-driven viral dissemination consists of three elements:

Emotional triggering (Weibo): high emotional density and rapid fan mobilization;

Algorithmic diffusion (Douyin): secondary creations entering system recommendations and becoming viral;

Reputation solidification (Xiaohongshu): deep product seeding following users' active search behavior.

The three forms a cycle of mutual reinforcement, which makes the brand content spread rapidly in the short term, and precipitates into a stable evaluation system that consumers can search in the middle and later stages. For example, seventeen became the spokesperson of bibigo (CJ) in 2025. First, big fans issued a notice in Weibo to organize fans to make data and warm up; After the official release, it will be spread on Douyin to expand the scope of communication and let more passers-by know; And then publish a shopping experience post focusing on products on xiaohongshu to attract passers-by to place orders and generate income for the brand, forming a virtuous circle.

However, while organized fan participation can attract casual users and promote advertising diffusion, excessive coordination may weaken perceived authenticity. Uniform commenting scripts and highly homogeneous positive reviews may trigger resistance and distrust among non-fan audiences.

Although the organization of fan communities can attract passers-by users to a certain extent and further promote the dissemination of advertising, excessive organization may weaken the authenticity. When passers-by users see the same coordinated commenting script and unified favorable comments, they are prone to generate resistance and enhance the degree of distrust; At the same time, fan communities' behavior may also lead to the risk of backfire. For example, the Zheng Shuang incident, a large number of brands were cut in an emergency, advertising materials were completely removed from the shelves, platforms were banned + public opinion was rectified, and fan communities' organizations were named and standardized; In addition, the differences in the attributes of different platforms may lead to content distortion, and the degree of dissemination and discussion may increase, but the actual purchasing power is not high. For example, during the period when Jang Won-young spoke for innisfree, the degree of topic and reputation increased significantly, but according to the financial report, the number of brand stores closed overseas increased significantly, and the peak performance decreased by about 50%.

Therefore, while endorsements and fan community-driven communication can bring short-term exposure and sales increases, long-term brand success still depends on multiple factors such as product strength, channel adaptability, and market environment. It also requires careful management of fan community participation. Currently, academic research on the systematic exploration of fandom fans and advertising communication is still limited, presenting a broad research prospect.

6 Conclusion

Fandom fans are communication participants, content creators, and important consumers in viral advertising. They accelerate advertising dissemination and increase discussion through coordinated commenting, secondary creation, and data-driven methods, forming a cross-platform cyclical effect: Weibo triggers emotions and public opinion, Douyin promotes algorithmic diffusion, and Xiaohongshu achieves in-depth product seeding and reputation consolidation. A healthy cycle will bring good benefits to the brand.

However, excessive organization of fan community behavior may weaken advertising authenticity, idol controversies may lead to brand backlash, and different platform attributes may lead to content distortion. Therefore, when brands utilize the power of fan communities for viral marketing, they should systematically understand fan behavior, control the communication pace, and combine it with product strength and market strategies to achieve long-term stable growth in brand communication effectiveness and commercial value.

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