

The Cultural Construction and Emotional Consumption of the "520" E-commerce Festival

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Abstract. With the rapid development of e-commerce platforms, many ordinary dates have gradually changed into people's shopping festivals. This conceals a profound cultural logic behind it. This research tries to explore the inherent logic of the e-commerce platform's construction of the "520" e-commerce festival and the contradictory feelings of consumers about such e-commerce festivals. This study is based on the "invented tradition" theory and employs two research methods for a combined analysis. The research method uses text analysis to analyze and decode advertising slogans to show how businesses can shape a "sense of ritual" through time limitation and symbolism. At the same time, an online questionnaire survey was conducted among the target audience to find out their recognition of the "520" ritualistic feelings and the emotional pressure they experienced. The study found that commercial capital uses symbols and emotional bindings to rationalize consumption behavior and uses time-limited words to create anxiety. The questionnaire survey shows that although consumers have a strong agreement with the rituals, they also feel the pressure from society and experience emotional anxiety. This study finally pointed out that the "520" consumption festival is an "emotional ritual" built by the business system. Its inherent logic is to connect consumers' emotions to consumption, showing the mechanism of commercial operation of emotions in the digital age.

Keywords: invented tradition, e-commerce festival, consumption pressure, sense of ritual, emotional commodification.

1. Introduction

In the era of digital consumption, e-commerce platforms have gradually become a new field for creating a sense of ceremony. "520" is shaped into a typical case of ritual and "emotional commercialization" because of the Chinese consonant "I love you". "520" has transformed from an ordinary date to a special occasion, when people exchange gifts to express their love to each other. Such a phenomenon seems to be natural, but it contains deep logic, which reveals that the operation mode is of great significance to digital business and complex emotions. This study adopts the "invented traditions" as its theoretical framework to explore the process of shaping consumption rituals. This theory posits that many traditions that seem to emerge naturally are actually intentionally created and promoted. For example, the "520" e-commerce festival is a typical example. It is not a traditional custom, but a ceremony built by modern people. The "invented

tradition" theory provides a theoretical perspective for modern rituals. However, current research mainly focuses on dissecting the underlying logic but lacks case studies for support. Some studies have pointed out that online festival marketing activities have ritual characteristics, and emotion and social money are the key to success [1-3]. Therefore, this study aims to dissect the audience's psychology and analyze the process of the invention ceremony. The core research question is: What is the internal logic of the e-commerce platform to build a "new tradition"? How do consumers feel about the sense of ritual and the trouble they bring? This study employed two research methods: using text analysis to examine the advertising slogans and marketing phrases during the "520" period, and conducting a questionnaire survey to understand the recognition, attitudes, and data on social pressure among the 18 to 30-year-old audience group regarding this ritual. This article first reviews the theory, then clarifies the research method, shows the results of text analysis and questionnaire survey, and finally discusses comprehensively to derive the logic and inevitability of the "520" ceremony.

2. Literature review

In the modern commercial society, one of the most representative cultural phenomena is that commercial forces, represented by e-commerce platforms, are systematically "inventing" new consumption rituals, such as the "520" and "Double Eleven" festivals that have been created. The "invented traditions" theory provides a crucial theoretical perspective for analyzing these seemingly naturally emerging but actually meticulously constructed modern rituals. This study uses this perspective to conduct a more in-depth analysis and discussion of the process of modern consumption rituals being "invented". This is not only an important topic for interpreting cultural phenomena, but also for understanding commercial consumption rituals and human emotional expression. Firstly, some studies have indicated that the marketing of online festivals has shifted from being merely a form of consumption to a widespread atmosphere-building activity, transforming consumption from a simple act of shopping into something that encompasses social interaction, entertainment, and emotional satisfaction, and gradually integrating into consumers' daily lives [4,5]. Moreover, rituals and a sense of ritualism play a significant role in individual behavior, providing theoretical evidence for understanding consumption rituals [6]. It is revealed that consumption behavior builds a connection between consumers and goods or brands by connecting group emotions. However, although these contents about the essence of consumption rituals are worth pondering, they lack specific examples to illustrate and have limitations. Secondly, some studies focusing on specific cases have shown that ritual marketing usually involves tying consumption behavior to specific scenarios, such as "Double Eleven" and "520", for marketing purposes, thereby endowing the consumption behavior with emotional and social significance [7]. These studies are more practice-oriented, analyzing and disassembling specific cases to give marketing inspiration and suggestions, but they lack theoretical foundation and just stay in the empirical stage. Finally, some studies have analyzed the audience's impulsive consumption, common psychology, and the impact of social media on the public by analyzing media communication and audience psychology. They have analyzed that social media stimulates emotions through real-time content and uses various communication means to influence mass consumption decision-making [8]. Such studies have scratched the surface and uncovered the underlying logic, delving into the foundation of "invention" success, but they lack any connection with theories and individual cases. In summary, there have been many rich studies in terms of theory, case, and deep logic, but there is not enough connection between the three. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap. By taking the "traditional theory of invention" as the main framework, it analyzes the case of

the online festival "520". Then, by dissecting the audience's psychology, it systematically analyzes and explores the process of the ritual being "invented", and identifies the internal logic of "creating the festival" as well as the emotional predicaments of people.

3. Methods

This study employed two research methods, namely a questionnaire survey and text analysis. The related research utilized questionnaire survey and cross-analysis methods, which served as a reference for the design of the methods in this study [9,10]. The reason for choosing the text analysis method is that in the e-commerce festival, advertising and propaganda slogans play an important role in the construction process. And the text analysis method can deepen and reveal the rhetoric of commercial marketing. By this method, one can directly analyze how commercial capital ties "love" with "consumption", and what kinds of words are commonly used in advertisements to create pressure and anxiety among the target audience. In existing studies, this method is often used when analyzing advertisements and symbols. From the perspective of producers, collect the same type of advertising slogans and analyze the advertising design methods. Select the advertisements of major shopping platforms in the "520" period in recent years, extract frequently appear keyword words, and analyze their meaning and emotional expression. The reason for choosing the questionnaire survey is that this method can directly obtain data from the target audience. The questionnaire survey and text analysis respectively study from the perspectives of producers and recipients. The questionnaire survey can quantify the degree of audience consumers' identification with the ritual, their perception of social pressure, and their consumption motivations. This method makes the research conclusion not only to interpret the text, but also to be more specific and convincing from the audience's perspective. From the perspective of the audience, the study mainly distributed questionnaires to people aged 18-30. A total of 217 questionnaires were collected, of which 200 were valid questionnaires. The questionnaire platform function was used to screen and remove invalid questionnaires (such as questionnaires with less than 20 seconds of answer time). The respondents mainly came from Jiangxi, Shandong and Guangdong. The average age was 24.5 years old. Among them, female participants accounted for 67% of the total number. The questionnaire included questions about whether the respondents had bought gifts on "520", whether they considered the "520" ritual important, whether they participated in this ritual because they wanted to express love or because everyone around them was doing it, and their feelings about participating in the "feast of the festival". The underlying logic of these problems is not only to study the practices of consumers, but also to collect data to understand why they do so. Is it their voluntary expression or the action they have to do under pressure? This needs to be analyzed by research methods.

4. Results

The analysis of advertising slogans through text analysis reveals the core rhetoric of commercialized "celebrating festivals". Merchants mainly employ two rhetorical strategies. Firstly, it is the emotional binding strategy. In the advertisements, words like "love" and "gift" are frequently used, such as the slogan "520 Gift Season, gifts on top of gifts, let love 'hug' the whole place" or "520 Love in Response to Gifts". It can be observed that words related to consumption frequently appear in the slogans. Most of the slogans link the abstract concept of "love" with the specific consumption of "gift", so that "love" is gradually equality with "consumption" under the influence of e-commerce platforms. Analysis shows that as many as 82% of sample advertisements are directly related to emotion and consumption. Secondly, it is a strategy to create anxiety. The persuasive language used

in promotional slogans mainly consists of two types. The first type is to create a sense of urgency in time to make people have the desire to purchase the goods. In such advertising slogans, phrases like "Only available for one day" and "The original price will be restored soon" are always present, allowing people to clearly feel the passage of time and make purchases. The second type is to add the phrase "Everyone is buying it" to the promotional slogans of the products, creating anxiety among the target audience. According to statistics, 75% of the propaganda slogans have this kind of rhetoric. The data analysis of the questionnaire survey shows that the audience shows a contradictory mentality about the "520" ceremony. The main audience of the complete survey was young consumers aged 18 to 30, and a total of 217 questionnaires were collected, of which 200 were valid documents. It can be seen from the content of the questionnaire that 85.0% of the respondents said that they had consumption behavior on the day of "520", of which 52.5% participated every year, 32.5% of those who participated occasionally, and 15.0% of those who never participated. Regarding the recognition ceremony, 86% of the respondents agreed or somewhat agreed that it is an important ritual to prepare gifts for one's partner or family on "May 20th". Among them, 53.5% expressed "strong agreement", 32.5% expressed "somewhat agreement", 8.5% expressed "somewhat disagreement", and 5.5% expressed "strong disagreement". In terms of social pressure, 83.5% of the respondents felt that participating in this ceremony was due to social pressure, while 16.5% of the respondents believed that this behavior was a voluntary expression of love. Among the 83.5% respondents who chose to be forced by social pressure, when filling in the specific type of social pressure, most of them wrote "Everyone is going through it, so they have followed it" or "I'm afraid that the other party will be disappointed". After collecting the questionnaire data, after analysis, the degree of ritual recognition and the degree of stress perception are positively correlated, that is to say, the more people who agree with the "520" ceremony, the higher the social pressure they feel.

5. Discussion

This study, through the methods of text analysis and questionnaire survey, revealed the potential construction mechanism of the "520" e-commerce festival and the psychology of the audience. Through text analysis, it was found that commercial capital generally employs the strategy of emotional binding, equating "love" with "consumption", which is highly consistent with the "consumption of symbols" in the "invented tradition". In the consumer society of this era, commodities are more symbolic, such as emotions, identities, or relationships. The "520" advertisement gives the symbol of love to the goods, and goes deeper, constructing "consumption behavior" as a "proof of love" for others. Advertising uses people's psychology to directly classify consumption behavior as a part of love, rather than behaviors made because of love. This underlying mechanism links the commodity with meaning and spreads rapidly among the younger generation. Merchants also create a lot of anxiety for the target audience. Such strategies can be understood from a psychological perspective. In modern society, individuals often face pressure to conform or to be independent, and the language used in advertisements, such as "limited time" and "missing out", further triggers their fear of "missing out on opportunities". Techniques like "everyone is buying" can stimulate people's anxiety, and people are always afraid that they will be excluded by society. According to the questionnaire survey data, 83.5% of the respondents participated in the ceremony because of social pressure, and most of them came from "worry about partner disappointment" or "everyone has been there". These data confirm that strategies to create anxiety are very effective. The most crucial finding in the questionnaire survey is that the audience group has contradictory feelings. They recognize the importance of consciousness, but generally feel stressed when participating in the awareness activities. This contradiction is precisely what emerges

under the mechanism of this "invented tradition". In the case of "520", the audience group not only needs a fixed day and a set of fixed rituals to express their emotions, but also feels the pressure of being criticized if they do not follow the "520" convention. Such an ambivalence reveals a deeper fact. Although people can realize that "tradition" has been invented, it is still difficult to escape the power of these "traditions". Once these traditions are accepted, the power of shaping them is great. Overall, this study reveals the impact of commercial capital on the daily lives of the audience. It restricts people's ways of expressing emotions and love, and meticulously designs a perfect consumption mechanism. The audience has become aware of this, but it is difficult for them to get out of the contradictory mindset. They do not want to refuse consumption; they just want to have the freedom to choose the way when expressing love.

6. Conclusions

This study takes the "invented tradition" as the theoretical framework. Through text analysis and questionnaire survey, it explores how the e-commerce platform constructs 520 into a ritual of emotional consumption, as well as the feelings and ideas of the audience in the process. The research results indicate that from a business perspective, e-commerce advertisements mainly employ two strategies: "emotional bonding" and "anxiety creation". They incorporate persuasive language into the advertisement slogans, equating "love" with "consumption", and by using phrases such as "limited time" or "missing out", they trigger people's anxiety and fear. Regarding the audience, 86% of the respondents agreed on the significance of the "520" ritual, demonstrating that the constructed sense of ritual has been widely disseminated. At the same time, 83.5% of the respondents said that they felt the pressure of society in the process of participating in the ceremony, which shows that the recognition of the ceremony is positively related to the perception of pressure, revealing the ambivalence of the audience in 520. Therefore, it can be further concluded that "520" is an "invented tradition". It is not a historical custom, but a consumption festival carefully designed and constructed by modern e-commerce platforms through a systematic framework. This mainly exploits the human desire for a sense of ceremony and the fear of going against the trend. This conclusion reveals that in the digital consumption era, people's emotional expression methods are being reshaped by the power of commercial capital, and people's emotions have been exploited and turned into a commercial consumption indicator.

This study provides a lot of valuable references for the future research. It mainly puts the classic theory of "invented tradition" into practical practice and provides theoretical examples for subsequent research. Secondly, the relationship between business and the audience is revealed through text analysis and questionnaire survey, which provides a reference for subsequent studies on the audience. Finally, the analysis of this "520" case provides a foundation for future research on other e-commerce festivals. However, this study still has some limitations. Firstly, future research should focus more on expanding the sample size and examining the participation differences among audiences of different ages, regions, and social classes in the "520" event. Secondly, more cross-platform comparisons can be carried out to study and analyze different e-commerce platforms, such as Taobao, Xiaohongshu, or TikTok, and analyze how they shape the logic of holiday cultural consumption. Finally, similar emotional consumption phenomena in other cultures in East Asia can be explored. Returning to the initial question, how does an ordinary day turn into a "must-shop" festival? People accept such festivals because they need a ritual to express love, and also because they are afraid of being excluded from society. Recognizing this is not to reject consumption, but to consume more consciously, to be able to distinguish whether it is an expression from the heart or a forced behavior.

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