

# Research on the Influence of "Funeral Culture" Expression on Advertising Effect: Based on the Adjustment Function of Brand Positioning

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**Abstract:** At present, "funeral culture" with the theme of "decadence, anxiety and helplessness" is widely spread in social media, and many businesses have seized the hotspot to take advantage of the marketing trend. This study investigates the practice of "funeral culture" advertising, combines the literature on "funeral culture" and brand positioning, constructs a model based on relevant theories, and proposes a research hypothesis to explain the relationship between "funeral culture" advertising expressions and brand positioning. The research hypothesis is intended to explain the interaction between "funeral culture" advertising expressions and brand positioning, as well as the mediating role of social identity. The study is intended to enrich the research in this field and to provide some guidance for the marketing practice of "funeral culture".

**Keywords:** "Funeral culture", Advertising expression, Brand positioning, Advertising effect.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the world's economic growth has entered a period of sluggish fluctuation, with "decadence, anxiety and helplessness" as the theme of youth subculture once again in China, the United States and Japan and other countries quietly emerged. For example, in 2013, the main character of the Japanese cartoon "Lazy Egg" represented the stressed-out office workers; in 2014, the American animation "Horse Boy Jack" revealed the disappointment of helplessness in life. 2016, "funeral culture" broke out in mainland China, which originated from a large family sitcom in 1993 "I Love My Family". The actor Ge You played the role of a mixed character, whose disheveled image of paralyzed on the sofa like a salted fish became popular on the Internet, not only by celebrities to imitate, but also by all netizens to make expression packs. In the past two years, due to the impact of the new crown epidemic, all major economies have been hit hard, work pressure has also increased, "playing workers", "lying flat" segment has become a way for netizens to flirt with stress relief, "funeral culture" has once again triggered a phenomenal spread.

Although "funeral culture" has been widely spread in mainland China since 2016, the academic research on "funeral culture" is still not deep enough. Most of the available literature has been analyzed from the perspectives of social psychology and linguistics, while few articles in the field of marketing have been analyzed superficially in terms of marketing strategies and means, with a single perspective and lack of depth, which is not conducive to guiding practice. Faced with these two different expressions of "funeral culture" advertising, what are the different reactions of consumers? What are the psychological mechanisms behind them? In addition, are consumers' attitudes toward "funeral culture" advertisements with different expressions also influenced by brand factors? In this study, we introduce social identity theory and brand positioning theory to investigate the mechanism of advertising effects brought about by different expressions of "funeral culture" advertisements.

At the same time, many businesses have also seized the hotspots to take advantage of the marketing. 2017, NetEase News joint hungry to launch the first domestic tea flash store, only open 4 days, only by 6 products, it attracts more than a million people. Chengdu's creative team "try things out" for the local famous dairy New Hope launched "no hope" and "heart" yogurt and so on. Unlike the positive marketing of mainstream culture, a "funeral marketing" is planned to ride on the coattails of "funeral culture", which becomes a new form for brands to expand their influence and get closer to consumers.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1. The status of domestic and foreign research

#### 2.1.1. "Funeral culture" and "funeral culture" marketing

Xiao Ziyang (2019: 53) was the first to define the concept of "funeral culture", and he believed that "funeral culture" is a new youth subculture formed by the anxiety and pessimism of contemporary youth under the pressure of life, which is expressed through words and pictures on the network platform and spread to each other. This is a new subculture of youth that has been formed. Regarding the reasons for the popularity of "funeral culture", Zhou Peishu (2017: 2) offers insights on the reasons for the popularity of "funeral culture" from the perspective of linguistics, emphasizing that once online buzzwords are imitated, copied and widely spread, they can be called modalities. The "funeral culture" is easy to remember, catchy and easy to imitate and copy, and some of these new words also meet the psychological demands of online youth for newness and differences, so they are sought after by a large number of online youth. The emotional exaggeration under the alienation of consumer society, the rebellious psychology under the over-packaging of emotions, and the identity and emotional belonging under the cultural consumption are the inner mechanisms of the marketing of "funeral culture". The above research basis inspired this study to determine the mediating variables of the effect of "funeral

culture" advertising.

### **2.1.2. Advertising expressions**

The presentation of advertising language affects the way consumers process and understand advertising information, and further influences consumers' emotional attitudes and purchase intentions (Liu Shixiong 2019: 7). Consumers' attitudes toward elegant and vulgar advertising styles and found that there is an interaction effect between the high and low end positioning of brands and elegant or vulgar advertising styles through matching mediation (Wu Yueyan et al 2019: 12). This study investigated the cases of "funeral culture" advertisements and found that there are two significantly different ways of expression - self-improvement and self-deprecation. For example, the "funeral culture" advertisement of Netease Cloud Music: "People who have eaten with tears are able to go on." "If everyone knows what you're thinking, then you're such an ordinary person." Adopting the expression of self-improvement, the "funeral culture" advertisement of funeral tea: "You are fat enough anyway, one less drink won't make you lighter." "We only have single tables, so you don't have any friends anyway." This is a self-deprecating way of expression. Self-improvement ads mostly use comfort and inspiration to enhance consumers' self-confidence, while self-deprecating ads use humor to dissolve consumers' pessimistic and negative emotions.

### **2.1.3. Social identity theory**

Social identity theory suggests that when individuals believe they belong to a social organization and see themselves as part of that organization, a psychological zone discrimination effect will occur (Tajfel 1986: 24). If individual behaviors are consistent with their group perceptions, individuals will be satisfied. Conversely, if an individual's behavior conflicts with his or her group perception, dissatisfaction will result and his or her behavior will be adjusted accordingly. When a company can provide a product that meets the self-defined needs of consumers and creates an emotional connection with them, they will identify with the product and bring positive advertising effects.

### **2.1.4. Brand Positioning Theory**

The stereotype content model suggests that individuals' perceptions and evaluations of others revolve around two dimensions: "enthusiasm" and "competence". "The "enthusiasm" dimension answers the question of the likelihood of others to convey goodwill to them, and those who are perceived to be sincere, friendly and trustworthy are usually regarded as highly enthusiastic. Aaker et al. first applied the stereotype content model to brand research and found that people perceive nonprofit organizations as high in enthusiasm and low in competence; conversely, people perceive for-profit organizations as high in competence and low in enthusiasm. Therefore, we classified brand positioning into "passionate" and "capable" based on the stereotype content model in the social perception field.

## **2.2. Review of existing studies at home and abroad**

At present, academic research on "funeral culture" is mostly concentrated in the fields of linguistics, communication and social psychology, which provides a reference for us to understand the concept of "funeral culture" and the reasons for its generation and popularity. However, there is still a lack of research on "funeral culture" advertising,

and to sum up, the existing research has the following shortcomings.

1. Although "funeral culture" has been widely spread in mainland China since 2016, academic research on "funeral culture" is still not deep enough. Most of the available literature has been analyzed from the perspectives of social psychology and linguistics, and few articles in the field of marketing, and all of them are superficial analyses on marketing strategies and means, with a single perspective and lack of depth, which is not conducive to guiding practice. Therefore, there is an urgent need to deeply explore the mechanism of "funeral culture" advertisements, and dig out the boundary of the influence of "funeral culture" advertisements on the audience.

2. The presentation of advertising language affects consumers' processing and understanding of advertising information, and further influences consumers' emotional attitude and purchase intention. At present, some scholars have investigated from the perspective of style and rhetoric, but it is still relatively new to adopt self-improvement and self-deprecation from humor theory. Some scholars have studied the effect of self-improvement or self-deprecation on word-of-mouth recommendation for celebrity endorsement, while others have studied which approach is more effective in resolving conflicts. However, it is the first time that self-improvement and self-deprecation are introduced in the study of "funeral culture" advertisements. In the end, "funeral culture" advertising is a kind of emotional marketing, and these two approaches can cause more obvious attitudinal tendencies of audience attitudes, thus producing obvious advertising effects, which are suitable as antecedent variables and suitable for empirical research.

3. The research on brand positioning has been more extensive, but there is still more research space to apply the stereotype content model to the field of brand research. Based on the analysis of real cases, this paper inferred the existence of this moderating effect, so the introduction of this moderating variable is conducive to better explaining the mechanism of "funeral" culture advertising, and also enriching the study of brand positioning theory.

## **3. Theoretical Framework and Research Hypothesis**

### **3.1. The interaction between "funeral culture" advertising expressions and brand positioning**

Self-improvement humor refers to the humorous expression of a company's strengths, while self-deprecating humor refers to the humorous expression of a company's weaknesses and the search for laughs. Enthusiasm in consumer behavior research focuses on the analysis of consumer emotions, for example, whether the brand design is human and aesthetic can affect the consumer's perception of brand enthusiasm. In contrast to enthusiasm, competence refers to characteristics related to perceived competence, including intelligence, skill, creativity, and effectiveness. For example, the reliability and durability of a brand's products are often interpreted by consumers as the brand's "competence". Competent brands are perceived by consumers as reliable, trustworthy, and capable, and therefore the use of self-improvement in "funeral culture" advertising is more in line with their brand image, and consumers are more likely to

be inspired and persuaded based on trust. On the contrary, if capable brands adopt self-deprecation, it will cause consumers' disgust if it is not used properly, such as BMW's stunt of "beating workers", which is considered by netizens as a "pseudo-self-deprecation" that is actually a show full of superiority. Passionate brands pay more attention to emotional care, and the psychological distance with consumers is also closer, therefore, in the "funeral culture" advertising, the use of self-deprecation, more in line with consumer expectations, through self-deprecation, to further enhance the distance with consumers, dispel the pessimism and frustration. For example, "there is no hurdle that cannot be overcome, only the hurdle that cannot be finished", etc. When consumers see such advertising slogans, they will be infected by the brand's humor and form a positive impression. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: There is an interaction between the expression of "funeral culture" and brand positioning.

H1a: When competence-based brands use self-improvement expressions, the ads are more effective.

H1b: When passionate brands use self-deprecating expressions, the advertising is more effective.

### 3.2. The mediating role of social identity

The emergence and popularity of "funeral culture" is caused by the general anxiety of youth groups in the Internet era. In the face of the "funeral culture" advertisements, the audience can have emotional resonance with them, and then form an identity, which can lead to positive product and advertising attitudes and even purchase intentions. Therefore, social identity is used as a mediating variable in this study. That is, there are the following hypotheses.

H2: Consumers' social identity plays a mediating role in the interaction between the expression of "funeral culture" and brand positioning on advertising effectiveness.

## 4. Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contributions of this study include the following three points.

1. The existing studies on "funeral culture" mostly start from sociology and linguistics, which are not in line with the prevalence of "funeral culture" advertisements, and the few studies from marketing perspective are also general and superficial, failing to clarify the mechanism behind, and lacking in convincing empirical studies. The few studies from the marketing perspective are rather general and superficial, failing to clarify the underlying mechanism and lacking convincing empirical studies. This paper, through the combining of relevant theories and the research on "funeral culture" advertisements, starts from the expressions of "funeral culture" advertisements and introduces the self-improvement and self-deprecation expressions of humor theory, and adopts empirical research, which can deepen the research in this field and open up the research. This paper will deepen the research in this field and open up a new way of thinking.

2. This paper applies the stereotype content model to the field of brand positioning and finds that different types of brand positioning affect the advertising effect of different expressions of "funeral culture" advertisements. As we know, the ability and enthusiasm dimensions of the stereotype content model have been widely researched, but the interaction with advertising expressions is not studied, and this paper explores this interaction to make up for the lack of

existing research.

3. In this paper, we introduce social identity theory into the field of advertising effectiveness, and construct a causal chain model from "funeral culture" expressions to social identity to advertising effectiveness, so as to theoretically and empirically explore how "funeral culture" advertising expressions affect consumer. We also verify the inner mechanism of "funeral culture" acting on social identity and then influencing advertising effectiveness, and establish the boundary conditions for the main effect and mediating mechanism, and build a more in-depth and clear framework in the theoretical and applied fields.

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