

Exploring the Psychological Effects of Viral Marketing: The Case of South Korea's HYBE Entertainment

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Abstract:

This study focuses on how Korean entertainment companies, particularly those led by HYBE, have utilized social media platforms to conduct online marketing activities in the context of the rapid development of the Internet and the widespread application of social media. This research is of great significance for in-depth analysis of the implementation methods, market responses and effectiveness of the viral marketing strategies employed by the South Korean entertainment company HYBE. This research mainly focuses on exploring the impact of its viral marketing approach on consumers' psychology. It employed the literature analysis method to search and read relevant materials and literature. The advantage of this method lies in its ability to effectively analyze the HYBE marketing case, test and explore the applicability of marketing and consumer psychology theories in viral marketing, which is conducive to the progress of the research. The ultimate goal of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the viral marketing strategy employed by the Korean entertainment company HYBE, with the aim of optimizing their subsequent strategies and providing direct references. More importantly, the lessons learned from this experience are of great value and can be used as a reference for similar entertainment companies. They can help these companies better understand consumer psychology during their marketing processes, making their marketing more in line with consumer psychology and creating a favorable market atmosphere.

Keywords: Viral marketing, consumer psychology, entertainment companies.

1. Introduction

Today, the Internet is developing rapidly, social media is widely used, and online marketing is constantly emerging. The Korean entertainment companies led by HYBE have adopted social media for online marketing, and online marketing has become the main marketing method for various entertainment companies. It mainly utilizes search engines and instant messaging clients for dissemination [1]. HYBE Entertainment Company uses online marketing to comprehensively consolidate the domestic market and strengthen the overseas market. At the same time, it also employs the fan effect for online marketing, helping its artists gain more popularity in the online world and significantly leveraging consumer perception to leave a deep impression on consumers [2]. However, more consumers have become lost in viral marketing, which has had a significant impact on their self-perception and also affected their personalities, self-awareness and lifestyles. This study mainly conducts an in-depth analysis of the implementation methods, market responses and effectiveness of the viral marketing strategies employed by the Korean entertainment company HYBE, and explores the impact of its viral marketing approach on consumers' psychology. This study conducts an in-depth analysis of the marketing case of the Korean entertainment company HYBE, examining and exploring the applicability of "marketing" and "consumer psychology" theories in the context of viral marketing, which is conducive to the progress of the research. In this case, the flexible application of marketing strategies and other specific practices is expected to provide new evidence for a deeper understanding of how entertainment companies master consumers' psychology, make up for the deficiencies of existing theories in the context of excessive marketing, and lead to new issues such as "how consumers should rationally view the excessive marketing of entertainment companies". At the practical level, this study assesses the effectiveness of the viral marketing strategy employed by the Korean entertainment company HYBE, aiming to optimize its subsequent strategies and provide direct references. More importantly, the lessons learned from this experience are of great value and can be used as a reference for similar entertainment companies. They can help these companies better understand consumer psychology during their marketing processes, making their marketing more in line with consumer psychology and creating a favorable market atmosphere. Meanwhile, this research outcome can also provide specific operational directions for marketing practitioners on how to judge consumers' psychology during the marketing process.

2. Viral Marketing

2.1 The Essence and Advantage of Viral Marketing

The earliest proponent of the concept of viral marketing was the former president of Nintendo, Yuji Iwata. Its core lies in achieving information dissemination through word-of-mouth among users [3]. This marketing approach draws on the principle of viral transmission and utilizes social platforms and internet platforms, enabling the dissemination of information to spread exponentially [4]. In today's era of rapid internet development and widespread use of social media, the combination of viral marketing and search engines as well as instant messaging clients is becoming increasingly common. The advantages of viral marketing are gradually influencing consumers.

Viral marketing, which belongs to marketing strategies, is also known as viral marketing or nuclear explosion marketing. It refers to the dissemination and circulation of marketing information for selling products like a virus, conducting online promotion for the marketed goods, and thereby enhancing the brand awareness of the combined brand, influencing consumers, and achieving the goal of marketing and promoting the combined brand through online marketing methods. Viral marketing is a process driven by the attractiveness of the released message, where consumers move from being passively informed to actively participating, and can forward the marketing information twice or multiple times to expand its reach [5].

Viral marketing relies on online marketing. Its foundation is based on internet technology. It is a marketing method that utilizes digital information and network media to interact with each other, assisting enterprises in achieving their marketing goals and shaping their brand image. And as the Internet gradually matured and its influence expanded, its dissemination methods underwent a revolutionary change. Among them, the promotion method of online video marketing provided the medium for viral marketing. And online video marketing is a marketing method adopted by enterprises to achieve their marketing goals by posting various short videos on the Internet [6]. Viral marketing based on online marketing offers consumers the advantages of being entertaining, interactive and highly attention-grabbing. First, interestingness. When the marketing information is sufficiently engaging, such as having eye-catching titles or attractive pictures or videos, consumers will consider the marketing information to have content value, and the extent to which the marketing information can be widely disseminated depends on whether it can meet the entertainment needs of the audience [1]. Second, interactivity. When consumers come across eye-catching marketing messages on social platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, TikTok and SNS, they will

subconsciously engage in interactions among the topics, participate in discussions about the information with other consumers, and even actively share it with other consumers due to emotional resonance [7]. Third, high degree of concern. As more and more consumers participate in the interaction due to the captivating marketing, their attention to the marketing product will increase. Consumers may even purchase the marketing product influenced by this topic. And such consumers are mostly those who, after being affected by viral marketing, change from being the followers of marketing information to the consumers of marketing information [8].

2.2 Analysis of Viral Marketing Cases

HYBE Entertainment, as a prominent emerging entertainment giant in South Korea that adheres to the belief of “We Believe in Music” and innovates the business model of the music industry, has broken the monopoly of the three major entertainment companies (SM, JYP, YG) in South Korea with the help of groups such as BTS and SEVENTEEN [9]. The artists under its banner, ENHYPEN and ILLIT, have gained a lot of attention due to their successful viral marketing campaigns.

The short-video marketing event featuring the ENHYPEN duo dance was a viral marketing campaign by HYBE for the ENHYPEN group brand, successfully reaching consumers. As a result, this marketing event for the group brand garnered a great deal of attention on online platforms. On May 22, 2023, ENHYPEN released their fourth mini-album DARK BLOOD. The short video clips of the duet dance between the members and their female partners in the choreography of the hit song Bite Me received a great deal of attention on social media platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, TikTok and Twitter. Because this video was highly eye-catching and was widely shared by numerous marketing accounts, it broke through the boundaries of the fan circle and met the entertainment needs of the audience, attracting a large number of consumers in the online society to participate in interactive discussions. This also increased the attention paid to the ENHYPEN group by more consumers. This is undoubtedly a successful viral marketing case for HYBE, and it also provides the girl group ILLIT under HYBE with valuable experience for marketing to consumers.

ENHYPEN received a great deal of attention during this viral marketing campaign and attracted a large number of consumers to purchase their products. Moreover, the first-week sales of this album increased by 81,404 copies compared to the first-week sales of MANIFESTO: DAY 1. With the assistance of the Internet and search engines, this short video has expanded its dissemination scope. Consumers also interacted with this video through online media, which facilitated the rapid dissemination of the marketing information to consumers and attracted a great

deal of attention. This marketing approach has increased the consumption enthusiasm of the original fans of ENHYPEN, exerted a psychological influence on them, and also attracted more consumers’ attention and enhanced the fans’ loyalty to the group. Moreover, consumers who paid attention to the marketing events of the group would actively recommend the brand for word-of-mouth promotion, thereby expanding the consumer base for the group’s subsequent flash events, concerts and peripheral sales [7].

3. Research Methods

3.1 Questionnaire Design

To study the impact of viral marketing on consumers’ psychology, a questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire survey method was chosen first because it enables the quantification of consumers’ behaviors and attitudes. Questionnaires are one of the most direct and effective methods for quantifying subjective experiences such as consumers’ attitudes, preferences, perceptions, and objective behaviors such as sharing channels and consumption behaviors. The second reason is that it has a wide coverage of the target audience. The fan base of the artists under HYBE is large and widely distributed. Online questionnaires can effectively reach potential or existing consumers in different regions, age groups, and fan levels, and quickly collect a large number of samples. The third advantage is the ability to flexibly explore the relationships between variables. The research aims to understand how different marketing content affects users’ desire to share, their level of participation, and ultimately their consumption behavior through various channels. The structured design of the questionnaire makes it convenient to analyze the correlations among fan types, contact channels, marketing content preferences, and consumption driving factors. The fourth aspect is cost and efficiency. Compared with in-depth interviews or focus groups, questionnaires can collect a large amount of data at a relatively low cost and within a short period of time. They are particularly suitable for descriptive statistics and preliminary correlation analysis. The advantages of the questionnaire survey method lie in its standardization, which ensures data comparability; its anonymity, which helps obtain more genuine responses regarding topics such as consumer behavior; and its high efficiency, allowing for the distribution to a large number of people simultaneously, and the online platform accelerating the data collection process. And it can also conduct structured data analysis. Multiple-choice and other types of questions are convenient for coding and statistical analysis. Finally, there is flexibility. Multiple-choice, matrix, and open-ended questions can be designed to meet different information needs.

This questionnaire is meticulously designed to closely

focus on the core research objective of how viral marketing affects consumers' psychology and behavior, with the logic progressing in a step-by-step manner. The first to fourth questions establish the background framework of the respondents, to understand the gender, age, frequency of social media usage, as well as the respondents' level of attention to K-POP and the channels through which they are exposed to HYBE's marketing. These are the key independent or control variables for analyzing subsequent behaviors and attitudes. The fifth to eighth questions focus on content appeal and sharing behavior, concentrating on the core of viral marketing - triggering sharing. They assess the effectiveness of three different types of marketing content - visual impact, group shock, and deep narrative - in stimulating the desire for active sharing, and further explore the immediate behavioral responses when viewing specific cases. Examine the impact of complex narrative marketing on the depth of fan engagement and their sense of belonging. The ninth question is about the factors driving consumption. It involves the transition from communication behavior to commercialization, and explores which psychological factors or marketing strategies in viral marketing content are most capable of driving the final consumption decision, with rational decision-making set as a reference. Question 10 focuses on the impact of consumer behavior. It directly assesses the potential irrational or excessive influence of viral marketing on actual consumer behavior, and lists the excessive consumption behaviors commonly seen in fan culture. The eleventh question focuses on the core objective understanding. From the perspective of the enterprise marketers, it asks the respondents about the strategic intentions of the HYBE viral marketing they perceive.

3.2 Data Collection

A total of 63 valid questionnaires were collected in this survey, and the data from these questionnaires were grouped and statistically analyzed by age group and gender (Table 1). The sample size for each group is as

follows: the group under 18 years old consists of a total of 12 people, among whom 8 are female and 4 are male; the group aged 18-24 consists of a total of 29 people, of which 18 are female and 11 are male; the group aged 25-30 consists of a total of 12 people, of which 4 are female and 8 are male; the group aged 31-40 consists of a total of 7 people, of which 2 are female and 5 are male; the group aged 41 and above consists of a total of 3 people, of which 1 is female and 2 are male. It can be observed that the samples are mainly composed of females. The group under the age of 18, especially the females, show a higher interest in K-POP. They frequently use social media and are easily influenced by visual impacts and group identification. Moreover, females are more likely to actively share and discuss, while males are more likely to skip the content or hold critical attitudes. The 18-24 age group constitutes the largest sample. Social media frequent users tend to pay more attention to emotional resonance and in-depth analysis. Women are more inclined to engage actively, while men are more likely to watch passively. The influence on consumption is high, especially for women, who are more likely to overspend due to emotional factors. The proportion of males in the 25-39 age group is high. This group uses social media at a moderate frequency. The proportion of experienced fans is relatively high. Males are more actively involved in learning movements and sharing. The rate of being influenced by consumption is high. They are easily driven by emotional resonance and visual impact. The sample size of the 31-40 age group is small, but their influence on consumption is high. Women are more deeply involved, while men are more passive or critical. They are easily attracted by visual impacts and social recognition, but the complexity of the content may reduce their participation. The sample group of people aged 41 and above is the smallest. Their usage rate of social media is low. The content is easily perceived as ordinary, but the visual impact can still drive consumption. The interaction is weak and the attention is low.

Table 1. Summary Table of Survey Questionnaire

Age group	Gender	Sample capacity	Heavy Social Media Use	Senior fans of K-POP	Key Reach Channel	The most interesting marketing case	Behavioral Response	Common types of content that stimulate consumption	Consumption impact rate	Understanding of marketing goals

Under the age of 18	Female	8	75%	38%	Douyin, Weibo, sharing with friends	SEVENTEEN ENHYPEN	High sharing and comments	Visual impact, Community identity	75%	User dissemination (63%)
	Male	4	50%	0%	Douyin, Weibo	BTS	Low interaction High skipping	visual impact	50%	User dissemination (50%)
18 to 24 years old	Female	18	94%	39%	Douyin, Weibo, fan communities	BTS	High sharing (56%)	Emotional resonance, Community identification	89%	Emotional resonance (83%)
	Male	11	82%	18%	Douyin, Weibo	SEVENTEEN	Moderate sharing (45%)	Visual impact, Community identity	82%	Traffic Conversion (73%)
25 to 30 years old	Female	4	100%	50%	Weibo, music platforms, and sharing by friends	SEVENTEEN	Moderate sharing	Community identification	75%	Traffic Conversion (75%)
	Male	8	88%	38%	Weibo, fan communities	ENHYPEN	High sharing (50%)	Emotional resonance, Community identification	88%	User dissemination (75%)
31 to 40 years old	Female	2	100%	50%	Weibo, sharing by friends	SEVENTEEN BTS	Highly Participatory Learning	Emotional resonance, Community identification	100%	Traffic Conversion (100%)
	Male	5	40%	0%	Douyin, fan communities	SEVENTEEN BTS	Low interaction High exclamations	Visual impact, Community identification	80%	Break through the boundaries (80%)
41 years old and above	Female	1	0%(once a day)	0%(Ordinary enthusiast)	Douyin	BTS	High sharing and learning	Emotional resonance, Visual impact	100%	Emotional resonance (100%)

	Male	2	0%(Rarely used)	0%	Douyin, Weibo	SEVENTEEN Disinterest	Low inter-action High skip-ping	visual impact	100%	Break through the boundaries (100%)
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4. Research Results

In the questionnaire survey on the psychological impact of viral marketing on consumers, it can be analyzed and studied that the three core advantages of viral marketing are the key elements for the success of online marketing. The three major advantages of viral marketing are as follows: Firstly, it is entertaining, mainly because the content is interesting and appealing [1]. Secondly, it is interactive, with the main advantage being to encourage user participation and sharing. Thirdly, it has high attention, with the main advantage being to trigger widespread attention and discussion.

First, the influence of entertainment value. The appeal mainly lies in the novelty, entertainment value and emotional significance of the content. This can be seen from the marketing cases and sharing behaviors that the subjects were most interested in among all the samples [1]. By analyzing the survey questionnaire, it can be found that women are more likely to be attracted by emotional resonance stories, while men are more likely to be drawn by visual impacts, such as the uniformity of the group dance of knives. The element of fun has the greatest impact on the younger generation, especially those aged between 18 and 30, and the proportion of females is the highest. In terms of matching the content type with the preferences of the target audience, emotional stories have a greater impact on women, while visual spectacles have a greater impact on men. Second, the impact of interactivity. Interactivity mainly refers to the situation where consumers actively participate in discussions, sharing or learning. It is reflected in activities such as “posting comments”, “sharing with others”, and “performing learning actions”. Through the study of the survey questionnaire, it was found that women prefer social sharing and comments, with more emotional interaction, while men prefer learning actions and have more behavioral interaction. And interactivity is the strongest among young and frequent users of social media. Viral marketing enhances interaction through multiple channels, but it requires simplification of content to expand its reach. Third, the impact of high attention. High attention is mainly manifested in the fact that when consumers participate in the interaction due to engaging marketing, the marketing products will attract widespread attention and discussion. Among them, emo-

tional resonance such as the lyrics of BTS and community identification such as the “fan pride” of SEVENTEEN enhance attention more effectively for women; while visual impact is more effective for men [7]. Although high attention is the foundation of viral marketing, relying on initial interest (such as K-POP fans) and social media algorithms (such as TikTok recommendations) to amplify attention has limited effectiveness for infrequent users.

Overall, entertainment attracts attention, interactivity amplifies dissemination, and high visibility maintains popularity. For instance, the ENHYPEN duet performance has three significant advantages among women aged 18-24: visual appeal drives sharing, and frequent use of social media helps maintain followership. Young women aged 18 to 24 are most likely to be influenced by the three advantages; older men over 31 have low attention and interaction levels, and only the interesting visual part is effective. The groups with a high consumption influence rate, such as 89% of the 18-24-year-old females, tend to have high scores in the three advantages; conversely, the low-interaction groups, such as men over 41 years old, have a high consumption influence rate but low brand loyalty.

5. Discussion

A thorough analysis of the research results reveals that viral marketing significantly enhances interaction among consumers, but the form and intensity of interaction vary depending on the group [10]. First of all, interactive behaviors are widespread. 83% of the sample population exhibited at least one type of interactive behavior, such as sharing, commenting, and discussing. First, the act of sharing, such as “sharing the video with others” or “sharing it immediately with friends”, is more prevalent among young women, and among men aged 25-30, it accounts for 50%, indicating the active dissemination behavior of consumers. Second, comments and discussions, “posting comments or posts to discuss choreography details” is quite common among dedicated fans. For instance, it accounts for 22% among 18-24-year-old females and 25% among 25-30-year-old males. Moreover, BTS’s “active participation in plot analysis” will enhance the sense of belonging within the fan base. Thirdly, learning and imitation. “Repeatedly watching and studying the movements”

is a common practice among young people, which leads to offline interactions such as fan communities conducting teaching sessions. Then there is the issue of group differences. First, high-interaction groups, such as young people, K-POP fans, and frequent social media users, interact, share and promote through fan communities like super forums, official groups, and friends. Secondly, for the low-interaction group, half of the male under the age of 18 chose to turn off the video, and 60% of the people aged 31 and above did not take any action. The interaction was limited to passive viewing or skipping. Thirdly, the driving force of interaction, such as the BTS story and the shared emotions, as well as the sense of community identity like the uniform dance of SEVENTEEN, are the main catalysts. The time-limited and quantity-limited strategies, such as exclusive offers, also motivate consumers to share and make repeated purchases to boost sales. From this, it is discovered that viral marketing can effectively promote consumer interaction, especially through social sharing and community discussions, but the content must match the preferences of the target group [7].

Viral marketing is very useful for enterprises to promote their brands to consumers, but the effect varies depending on the group and the type of content. First of all, brand recognition is enhanced, and viral marketing increases brand visibility. First, in terms of communication channels, the 88% coverage of Douyin and the 75% coverage of Weibo hot searches have helped HYBE artists such as BTS, SEVENTEEN, and ENHYPEN break through the boundaries of their original fan base, especially attracting passersby. For instance, 38% of men aged 25-30 came into contact through hot searches. In the most interesting case, 30% of the respondents chose BTS's "Eternal Youth", indicating that complex narratives enhance brand depth perception and are more likely to attract consumers. Second, the transformation of consumption behavior. Viral marketing can directly drive sales. In the overall impact rate of consumption, 79% of the sample population was affected, including 35% of the sample population making repeat purchases, and 25% of the sample population exceeding their budget spending, etc. Thirdly, the high conversion group has an influence rate of 89% on women aged 18-24. And emotional resonance and time-limited/quantity-limited strategies are the main factors. Fourth, brand loyalty is established. Among the core marketing goals, "binding long-term consumption power through emotional resonance with users" was recognized by 72% of the respondents. This was especially highly regarded among women, and fans' spontaneous dissemination enables users to bear the cost of dissemination, thereby reducing the marketing costs of the enterprise. Fifth, the social influence expands. "Breaking through boundaries to establish social influence" has been recognized by multiple groups, indicating that viral marketing is spreading from fans to the general

public. However, it also has limitations. Its effect is relatively weak on low-frequency users or non-fans. The complexity of the content may lead to the decision to stop following up. From this, it can be seen that viral marketing can effectively enhance brand awareness, conversion rate and customer loyalty, but the content needs to be optimized to reach a diverse range of audiences [8].

Through the collection of data from the survey questionnaire, it was found that the content design achieved both visual impact and alignment with the platform's style. Particularly, the use of the body language of a duet dance created strong memory points, and the 15-second short video was in line with the fragmented dissemination scenario. The communication strategy involves a matrix diffusion approach to drive the joint entertainment marketing campaign to be carried out simultaneously. At the same time, UGC (User-Generated Content) is utilized to stimulate consumers to initiate activities such as the *Bite Me* dance challenge on their own, thereby promoting user-generated secondary creation. The first two key success factors also led to the emergence of the conversion chain. By using hot search terms to drive traffic and promote album purchases, which in turn stimulated concert attendance and related consumption, a closed loop was formed and this process continued in a repetitive manner. And this case contains replicable experiences that other entertainment companies can learn from. HYBE Entertainment Company adopts the content priority principle, making emotional triggers more significant than product promotion. It also makes visual content more prone to viral spread. At the same time, it focuses on breaking through key segments and leveraging KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) and KOCs (Key Opinion Consumers) to build cross-segment bridges. However, based on the research results, the three major advantages of viral marketing are not evenly distributed among different groups, and there are certain risk warnings. Controversial content may even harm the brand. Therefore, not only do enterprises need to predict public opinion risks, but they also need to balance short-term popularity and long-term brand value to avoid the "transient effect". Therefore, HYBE Entertainment Company can improve its product marketing strategy in the following aspects [9].

First, content optimization is carried out to enhance the entertainment value and age-appropriateness of the marketing content. For young women, deepen the emotional resonance content, such as strengthening the promotion of the ENHYPEN vampire concept story and integrating interactive elements like fan voting to determine the plot; for young men, it can be enhanced with visual impact such as dance challenges, simplify the complex narrative, avoid the BTS-style complex clues buried for passersby; for the 30+ age group, it can utilize nostalgic elements or cross-border collaborations, such as collaborating with popular culture to enhance the fun of marketing content.

Second, channel innovation. Enhance consumer interaction and attention; Strengthen community interaction by leveraging social media platforms such as Douyin and fan communities' hot topics, as well as official accounts to launch UGC challenges like group new song dance creative imitation competitions, motivating consumers to share, and unlocking exclusive content after sharing; Algorithm optimization, collaborating with Douyin and Weibo, using tags that align with the algorithm to amplify the dissemination of high-visibility groups; Cross-platform integration, combining the fun of short videos and the interactivity of live streaming, such as releasing group choreography short videos with emoticons or conducting live dance teaching sessions for the group. Thirdly, expand the target audience, enhance coverage and conversion. Design introductory content for casual K-POP fans, using time-limited and quantity-limited strategies to stimulate their first purchase; Produce condensed content for the 30+ demographic group to avoid information overload. Increase neutral content to promote brand values and reduce gender bias, not relying solely on male group visuals. Fourth, data-driven iteration, monitoring and optimization. Through regular questionnaires that conform to consumers' psychology, the responses of various groups to the aspects of entertainment and interactivity are evaluated. The content is adjusted and tested to assess the effectiveness of different content types in attracting consumers' attention [1].

6. Conclusion

The research results of this study indicate that the three core advantages of viral marketing are the key elements for the success of online marketing. Their features include attracting attention through entertainment, amplifying dissemination through interactivity, and maintaining popularity through high attention. Therefore, it can be concluded that viral marketing should focus on attracting attention through entertainment, deepening participation through interactivity, and maintaining popularity through high attention. It is necessary to customize content, channels and strategies to achieve coverage for all age groups.

Moreover, entertainment enterprises should prioritize optimizing the high-conversion group of young women aged 18-24, while simplifying the content to penetrate the low-interaction group and maximize the synergy of product and effect in viral marketing. Furthermore, this study provides many valuable references for future research in this field. It mainly influenced the research direction of viral marketing. Future research should focus more on the three advantages of viral marketing and conduct in-depth studies in this area.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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