

The Role of Storytelling in Social Media Marketing in China: A Qualitative Investigation

Shiwei Jing

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia

Email: a197563@siswa.ukm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i8/22316>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i8/22316

Published Date: 19 August 2024

Abstract

This study explores how storytelling in social media advertisements affects consumer purchase decisions in China, focusing on platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, and QQ. By conducting in-depth interviews with Chinese social media users from diverse demographic backgrounds, the research uncovers how storytelling influences perceptions, emotions, and reactions towards ads. The findings reveal that emotional resonance is a significant driver of consumer engagement, with participants noting that compelling narratives evoke strong emotions and create a deeper connection with the brand. Additionally, memorable stories enhance brand recall, making brands more recognizable and trustworthy. Relatable and authentic storytelling notably increases purchase intention, as consumers are more inclined to buy from brands whose narratives they can personally relate to. The study also highlights the importance of cultural relevance, with traditional values, familial ties, and community themes resonating strongly with Chinese consumers. These insights are crucial for marketers aiming to leverage storytelling in social media campaigns to boost consumer engagement, build brand loyalty, and drive purchase decisions in the Chinese market.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Storytelling, Consumer Behavior, Chinese Market, Emotional Resonance.

Introduction

With the rapid advancement of internet and mobile technologies, social media has become an integral part of daily life for millions of people worldwide, including in China. Platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, and QQ have not only transformed social interactions but also significantly impacted marketing strategies. Social media provides a unique environment where users actively engage with content, share experiences, and express their preferences, creating a rich data source for marketers (Sha et al., 2021). The importance of social media in marketing lies in its ability to reach a vast audience quickly and interactively.

For example, Douyin boasts over one billion monthly active users, offering a powerful platform for brands to promote their products and engage with consumers. Social media allows for targeted advertising based on user data, enabling brands to tailor their messages

to specific demographics and interests, thereby increasing the effectiveness of their marketing efforts (Rosário & Dias, 2023). Storytelling has emerged as a vital component of successful social media marketing strategies. Unlike traditional advertising that often relies on direct product promotion, storytelling creates a narrative that resonates with consumers on an emotional level (Kang et al., 2020). Effective storytelling can enhance brand recall, foster emotional connections, and influence consumer attitudes and behaviors. In the context of social media, storytelling can take various forms, including videos, posts, and user-generated content, making it a versatile tool for engaging audiences. The Chinese market presents unique opportunities and challenges for social media marketing. Chinese consumers are highly active on social media platforms, and their engagement levels provide valuable insights for brands.

However, cultural differences necessitate a tailored approach to storytelling. Themes that emphasize traditional values, family ties, and community are particularly resonant with Chinese audiences (Wang et al., 2024). Understanding the role of storytelling in social media marketing within the Chinese context is crucial for brands aiming to optimize their strategies and effectively influence consumer purchase decisions. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how storytelling in social media advertisements impacts Chinese consumers' purchasing behavior. The findings will provide actionable insights for marketers seeking to leverage the power of storytelling to enhance consumer engagement, build brand loyalty, and drive sales in the dynamic Chinese market.

The primary purpose of this study is to systematically explore how storytelling in social media advertisements influences consumer purchase decisions in China. With the growing importance of social media platforms like WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, and QQ, brands are increasingly leveraging storytelling to engage consumers and enhance their marketing effectiveness. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which storytelling impacts consumer behavior, focusing on emotional resonance, brand recall, and purchase intention. By examining these factors, the research seeks to offer actionable insights for marketers to optimize their social media strategies and effectively connect with Chinese consumers. The research questions guiding this study are:

- How does storytelling in social media advertisements influence the emotional responses of Chinese consumers?
- What role does storytelling play in enhancing brand recall among Chinese consumers?
- How does the relatability and authenticity of stories in social media advertisements affect Chinese consumers' purchase intentions?
- What cultural elements in storytelling resonate most effectively with Chinese consumers?

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations of Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing has evolved rapidly with the advent of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, and QQ. The theoretical foundations of social media marketing are rooted in several key theories, including the Social Influence Theory, the Engagement Theory, and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Prihadyanti et al., 2024).

Social influence theory posits that individuals' behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs are significantly shaped by the social context and interactions they engage in (Davlembayeva & Papagiannidis, 2024). In the realm of social media, this theory helps explain how peer influence and social networks impact consumer decisions.

Engagement theory emphasizes the importance of interactive and participatory experiences in enhancing user involvement (Sutcliffe, 2016). On social media, engagement is driven by likes, comments, shares, and other forms of interaction that contribute to a deeper connection between brands and consumers. Diffusion of innovations theory, introduced by Everett Rogers (1962), explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technologies spread through cultures. Social media serves as a powerful channel for the rapid dissemination of new products and marketing messages.

Theories and Practices of Storytelling

Storytelling has long been recognized as a powerful tool in marketing, capable of conveying messages in a compelling and memorable way. Key theories that underpin the use of storytelling in marketing include the Narrative Paradigm Theory and the Emotional Contagion Theory. Narrative paradigm theory, proposed by Walter Fisher (1984), suggests that humans are natural storytellers and that people are more persuaded by narratives than by logical arguments. This theory supports the use of storytelling in marketing as a means to create emotional connections and convey complex information in an easily digestible form.

Emotional contagion theory posits that emotions can be transmitted from one person to another, influencing their feelings and behaviors (Fisher, 1984). In the context of social media marketing, emotionally charged stories can elicit similar emotions in viewers, thereby enhancing engagement and influencing consumer behavior. Practically, storytelling in social media marketing can take various forms, such as user-generated content, brand-created stories, and influencer narratives. Studies have shown that stories that are authentic, relatable, and emotionally resonant are more likely to be shared and remembered by consumers.

Application of Qualitative Research in Marketing

Qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, are crucial in understanding the nuances of consumer behavior and preferences. These methods allow researchers to explore the underlying motivations, attitudes, and perceptions that drive consumer actions. In-depth Interviews provide detailed insights into individual consumer experiences and opinions. This method is particularly useful in uncovering how personal narratives and emotions influence purchase decisions. In the context of this study, qualitative research is employed to gain a deeper understanding of how storytelling in social media advertisements affects Chinese consumers. By analyzing the data collected from in-depth interviews, the study aims to uncover the key themes and patterns that characterize consumer responses to storytelling in social media marketing.

Methodology*Research Design*

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the impact of storytelling in social media advertisements on Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions. Given the exploratory nature of the research, in-depth interviews were chosen as the primary method for data collection. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of participants' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors in response to storytelling in social media ads. By utilizing in-depth interviews, the study delved into personal experiences and subjective interpretations, capturing nuances that might have been overlooked in quantitative research. The conversational nature of interviews facilitated deeper probing into specific aspects of participants' responses, uncovering underlying motivations and attitudes that drove their purchasing behavior. The data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify and interpret patterns and themes, providing context-specific insights into how storytelling affected consumer behavior in China. These findings aimed to offer valuable implications for marketers to optimize their social media strategies and effectively engage with Chinese audiences.

Research Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of demographics, including age, gender, occupation, and social media usage. This method targeted individuals who are active users of major social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, and QQ. A total of 20 participants were recruited, ensuring a balance between different age groups and genders to capture a wide range of perspectives as shown in table 1.1. This diversity was essential to understand how storytelling in social media advertisements impacts various segments of the population. Younger participants might interact with and interpret social media content differently compared to older participants, while differences in occupation might influence the perception and relevance of advertisements (Stürmer & Einwiller, 2022). Including both male and female participants from various age brackets provided insights into any gender-specific or age-specific trends. Additionally, considering participants with different levels of social media usage—from occasional users to heavy users—helped explore how the frequency and familiarity with social media influence the effectiveness of storytelling techniques. This purposive sampling strategy ensured that the study's findings are comprehensive and reflective of the diverse ways in which storytelling in social media advertisements can affect consumer purchasing decisions in China.

Table 1.1

Participant Information

Demographic Feature	Percentage
Age Groups	
18-24	20%
25-34	30%
35-44	25%
45-54	15%
55-64	10%
Gender	
Female	50%
Male	50%
Occupation	
Student	20%
Professional	40%
Manager	25%
Executive	15%
Retired	10%
Social Media Usage	
Heavy	40%
Moderate	30%
Light	20%
Occasional	10%
Platforms Used	
WeChat	60%
Weibo	45%
Douyin	35%
QQ	30%

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, providing the flexibility to explore emerging themes while maintaining a consistent framework across interviews (Taherdoost, 2021). Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted either in person or via video call, depending on the participant's preference and availability. This approach allowed for a more comfortable and convenient setting for participants, encouraging more candid and detailed responses. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit comprehensive insights into participants' experiences and perceptions of storytelling in social media advertisements. Questions were structured to cover a range of topics, starting with general social media usage to understand the participants' familiarity and engagement with different platforms. This was followed by

inquiries about their perceptions of social media advertisements in general, setting the context for more specific questions about storytelling in ads. Participants were asked to describe their emotional responses to various storytelling elements, such as characters, plots, and themes, to gauge the emotional impact of the advertisements. Additionally, questions aimed to assess the effectiveness of storytelling in enhancing brand recall and influencing purchase intentions. By covering these areas, the interviews provided a holistic view of how storytelling in social media advertisements affects consumer behavior, capturing both cognitive and emotional dimensions. This comprehensive data collection method ensured that the study could identify and analyze key patterns and themes relevant to the research objectives.

Data Analysis Methods

The data collected from the interviews were meticulously transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns, or themes, within the data (Taherdoost, 2021). The process began with familiarization, where the audio recordings were transcribed and repeatedly read to fully immerse in the data. Initial codes were generated by systematically highlighting interesting features of the data relevant to the research questions. These codes were then collated into potential themes, capturing significant patterns across the dataset. The themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately reflected the data and were relevant to the research questions, refined for distinctness and coherence. Themes were defined and named to encapsulate their essence and scope, followed by writing detailed descriptions. Finally, a report was produced that tied the themes back to the research questions and existing literature, providing a comprehensive account of how storytelling in social media advertisements impacts Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's ethics committee. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and provided with the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Written consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews commenced.

Results and Discussion

Data Analysis Results

The thematic analysis of the interview data provided rich insights into the impact of storytelling in social media advertisements on Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions. Several key themes emerged from the data, illustrating the complex ways in which storytelling can influence consumer behavior. These themes include emotional resonance, brand recall, purchase intention, cultural relevance, and consumer trust, each of which plays a critical role in shaping how consumers perceive and respond to advertisements.

Emotional Resonance

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the data was the emotional resonance of storytelling ads. Participants consistently reported that advertisements with compelling stories evoked strong emotional responses, such as joy, sadness, or nostalgia. These emotional reactions were found to create a deeper connection between the consumer and the brand (Ahmadi & Ataei, 2024). For instance, one participant noted, "When I see an ad that

tells a heartfelt story, I feel more connected to the brand. It makes me think they care about more than just selling products." This emotional connection often led to increased engagement with the advertisement, such as sharing it with friends or discussing it on social media platforms (Dubovi & Tabak, 2021). Participants mentioned that these ads were memorable and had a lasting impact on their perceptions of the brand. They felt that brands using storytelling were more relatable and authentic, enhancing their overall brand image. This theme highlights the powerful role of emotions in advertising and suggests that brands can significantly benefit from incorporating storytelling techniques to foster stronger consumer relationships and drive engagement.

Brand Recall

Another significant theme was the role of storytelling in enhancing brand recall. Many participants mentioned that they found it easier to remember brands that used storytelling in their advertisements. The narrative structure of these ads made both the brand and its message more memorable. One participant stated, "I can easily recall ads that have a story. It's like watching a mini-movie; it sticks in my mind." This improved brand recall was attributed to the emotional impact of the stories, which made the advertisements stand out from others that were more straightforward or product-focused. Participants explained that the storytelling ads created vivid mental images and scenarios that lingered in their minds, making it easier to associate the brand with the positive emotions elicited by the story. Furthermore, the characters and plots in these ads often resonated with participants' personal experiences or aspirations, reinforcing the brand's message and making it more relatable (Konkwo & Namkoisse, 2023). This enhanced recall was not only beneficial for immediate brand recognition but also for long-term brand loyalty, as participants were more likely to remember and prefer brands that had previously engaged them through compelling stories.

Purchase Intention

The data also highlighted the significant impact of storytelling on purchase intention. Participants indicated that relatable and authentic stories markedly increased their likelihood of purchasing the advertised products. They felt that stories mirroring their own experiences or values made the products more appealing and trustworthy. For instance, one participant shared, "If the story in the ad resonates with my own life, I'm more likely to buy the product because it feels relevant to me." This sense of relevance and personal connection fostered a sense of trust and emotional investment in the product and brand (Cardoso et al., 2022).

Additionally, participants noted that storytelling ads often provided a more engaging and less intrusive way of presenting product information. Rather than feeling like they were being directly sold to, viewers felt they were being entertained or emotionally moved, which created a more positive and receptive attitude towards the advertisement. This approach made the product information more digestible and memorable, as it was woven into a narrative that held their attention and interest.

Participants also highlighted that ads featuring well-crafted stories were more likely to hold their attention compared to traditional, product-focused advertisements. They appreciated the creativity and effort put into creating these narratives, which often led to a more favorable perception of the brand. This positive experience with the advertisement increased their overall purchase intentions, as they were more inclined to support brands that they felt

connected to emotionally. Thus, the data underscored the effectiveness of storytelling in not only capturing consumer attention but also in driving their purchase decisions by making the products feel more relevant, trustworthy, and engaging.

Cultural Relevance

Cultural relevance emerged as a crucial factor in the effectiveness of storytelling ads. Participants emphasized that stories reflecting traditional Chinese values, family ties, and community were particularly impactful (Wang 2024). These culturally resonant narratives were more likely to engage consumers and foster positive brand associations. One participant explained, "Ads that incorporate Chinese cultural elements or family values really speak to me. It feels like the brand understands my background and values." This sentiment was echoed by many others, highlighting the importance of cultural context in creating emotionally engaging advertisements.

The inclusion of traditional Chinese values, such as respect for elders, the importance of family, and the concept of harmony, resonated deeply with participants. They felt that when ads included these elements, they were not just promoting a product but also acknowledging and celebrating the cultural identity of their audience. This cultural connection made the advertisements more relatable and memorable, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the marketing message (Liang, 2019).

Additionally, participants noted that ads featuring familiar cultural symbols, festivals, and traditions helped create a sense of nostalgia and pride. For instance, stories set during significant cultural events like the Chinese New Year, or those highlighting traditional practices, were particularly well-received. These ads evoked positive emotions and a sense of belonging, making the brand feel more trustworthy and aligned with the consumers' values (Liu & Zhao, 2024).

This finding suggests that marketers should consider cultural elements when crafting their stories to better connect with Chinese audiences. By integrating cultural themes and values, brands can create more meaningful and impactful advertisements that resonate with their target audience on a deeper level. This approach not only enhances brand recall and emotional engagement but also fosters a stronger and more authentic connection with consumers, ultimately driving purchase intentions and brand loyalty.

Consumer Trust

Trust was another important theme that emerged from the data. Participants expressed that advertisements featuring genuine and believable stories tended to build more trust towards the brand. They felt that when a brand shared stories that were sincere and aligned with their values, it portrayed the brand as more trustworthy and reliable. One participant mentioned, "When an ad tells a story that I can believe, it makes me trust the brand more. It shows that they are honest and care about their customers." This sentiment highlights the critical role of authenticity in advertising.

The sincerity of the stories conveyed in these advertisements was key to fostering trust (Teraiya et al., 2023). Participants noted that when brands presented realistic and relatable narratives, they were more likely to perceive the brand as transparent and committed to its

values. This perceived honesty made participants feel more secure in their purchasing decisions, as they believed the brand was not merely trying to sell a product but genuinely cared about the customer experience and their needs.

Furthermore, the alignment of the stories with the participants' personal values and life experiences enhanced this sense of trust. When ads reflected values such as integrity, family, and community, they resonated more deeply with viewers, reinforcing the brand's image as ethical and customer-centric. This connection often led to increased brand loyalty, as consumers were more likely to support brands they trusted and felt a personal connection with.

Additionally, participants indicated that this trust often translated into a greater willingness to recommend the brand to others. They felt confident sharing these trustworthy brands with friends and family, knowing that the brand's values and honesty would resonate with their social circles as well. This word-of-mouth endorsement is a powerful testament to the impact of trustworthy storytelling in advertising.

Overall, this theme underscores the importance of authenticity and sincerity in storytelling. By crafting ads that are believable and aligned with consumers' values, brands can build trust, foster loyalty, and encourage positive word-of-mouth, ultimately enhancing their overall market presence and consumer relationships.

Interaction and Engagement

Participants also discussed how storytelling in advertisements significantly influenced their interaction and engagement with the ads. Many reported that they were more likely to like, comment, and share ads that featured compelling and emotionally resonant stories. This increased interaction not only boosted the visibility of the ads but also created a sense of community among viewers (Araujo, 2020).

For instance, one participant noted, "I often share ads with good stories with my friends. We talk about it and sometimes even have discussions about the brand." This behavior highlights how storytelling can transform a passive viewing experience into an active and engaging one. The narratives within the ads provided common ground for viewers to connect and communicate, fostering social interactions that extended beyond the initial advertisement.

The compelling nature of these stories encouraged viewers to engage more deeply with the content, as they felt emotionally invested in the outcomes of the narratives. This emotional engagement often led to higher levels of interaction, such as liking the ad to show appreciation, commenting to express personal reflections or opinions, and sharing to spread the message to their own social networks. These actions amplified the reach and impact of the advertisements, as they were not just seen by the original audience but also by the friends and followers of those who shared them.

Moreover, the discussions sparked by these ads contributed to a sense of community among viewers. Participants mentioned that they enjoyed talking about the stories in the ads with friends and family, which sometimes led to deeper conversations about the brand itself. This

community-building aspect of storytelling ads created a more connected and engaged audience, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the advertising campaign.

In summary, the data highlighted that storytelling in advertisements not only increased direct engagement metrics like likes, comments, and shares but also facilitated meaningful social interactions and community building among viewers. This elevated level of engagement helped to boost the visibility and impact of the ads, making storytelling a powerful tool for enhancing consumer interaction and fostering a sense of community around the brand.

Discussion

The findings from the thematic analysis offer significant insights into the influence of storytelling in social media advertisements on Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions (Lee et al., 2023). This discussion section delves deeper into the implications of the identified themes, linking them with existing literature and exploring their broader significance for marketing strategies.

Emotional resonance was a prominent theme, highlighting the power of emotions in advertising (Ahmadi & Ataei, 2024). The participants' responses indicated that storytelling ads that evoke emotions such as joy, nostalgia, or sadness create lasting impressions and foster brand loyalty. These emotional engagements lead to stronger connections with brands, suggesting that marketers should prioritize emotionally charged narratives to enhance consumer engagement and recall. The ability of stories to evoke strong emotional responses makes them a powerful tool for creating memorable and impactful advertisements (Vrtana & Krizanova, 2023).

The role of storytelling in enhancing brand recall was another significant finding (Konkwo & Namkoisse, 2023). Participants consistently reported that they found it easier to remember brands that used storytelling in their advertisements. This enhanced recall is attributed to the narrative structure of the ads, which makes the brand and its message more memorable. The findings suggest that narrative advertising is more effective than traditional, straightforward advertising in improving brand visibility and retention. Integrating storytelling into social media marketing strategies can thus significantly enhance brand recall among consumers (Dias & Cavalheiro, 2022).

The impact of authenticity and relatability in storytelling on purchase intentions was also evident from the data. Participants indicated that stories that mirrored their own experiences or values increased their likelihood of purchasing the advertised products. This relatability creates a sense of authenticity, making the advertised products feel more relevant and necessary to consumers' lives (Cardoso et al., 2022). The findings suggest that brands should focus on creating authentic narratives that reflect consumers' lives and values to drive purchasing decisions. Authentic and relatable stories help build trust and credibility, which are crucial for influencing consumer behavior.

Cultural relevance emerged as a crucial factor in the effectiveness of storytelling ads (Wang, 2024). Participants emphasized that stories reflecting traditional Chinese values, family ties, and community were particularly impactful. These culturally resonant narratives were more likely to engage consumers and foster positive brand associations. The use of culturally

relevant themes helps brands to connect on a deeper level with their audience, enhancing the overall impact of the advertisement. Marketers should tailor their storytelling approaches to align with the cultural values of their target audience to create more effective and engaging advertisements (Belova, 2021).

Trust was another important theme that emerged from the data. Participants expressed that advertisements with genuine and believable stories tended to build more trust towards the brand (Teraiya et al., 2023). They felt that when a brand shared stories that were sincere and aligned with their values, it portrayed the brand as more trustworthy. This increased trust often translated into higher brand loyalty and a greater willingness to recommend the brand to others. The positive relationship between storytelling and consumer trust suggests that brands should focus on creating honest and transparent narratives to foster trust and loyalty among their audience (Al-Hadrawi et al., 2024).

The increased interaction and engagement with storytelling ads highlight the participatory nature of social media (Araujo, 2020). The study found that consumers are more likely to like, comment, and share ads that featured compelling stories. This increased interaction not only boosts the visibility of the ads but also creates a sense of community among viewers. Marketers should leverage this by encouraging user interaction and creating shareable content (Al-Hadrawi et al., 2024). The findings suggest that storytelling can enhance the viral potential of social media campaigns, making them more effective in reaching and engaging a wider audience.

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the role of storytelling in social media marketing within the Chinese context. The themes of emotional resonance, brand recall, purchase intention, cultural relevance, and consumer trust are critical for developing effective advertising strategies (Sha et al., 2021). By incorporating emotionally resonant, relatable, culturally relevant, and trustworthy stories into their social media campaigns, marketers can enhance consumer engagement, build brand loyalty, and drive purchasing decisions (Rosário & Dias, 2023). These findings highlight the importance of storytelling as a powerful tool in social media marketing, offering practical implications for brands looking to optimize their advertising strategies in the dynamic Chinese market.

Practical Implications

The findings from this study provide valuable insights for brands and marketing strategies, especially concerning the influence of storytelling in social media advertisements on Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions. These insights have practical implications for optimizing advertising strategies to effectively engage target audiences.

Firstly, the theme of emotional resonance underscores the importance of emotions in advertising. The results indicate that advertisements that evoke emotions such as joy, nostalgia, or sadness leave lasting impressions and foster brand loyalty. Brands should prioritize emotionally charged narratives to enhance consumer engagement and recall. Emotion-driven stories not only create memorable advertisements but also build deeper connections with audiences, ultimately increasing the long-term value of the brand.

Secondly, the role of storytelling in enhancing brand recall is significant. Participants consistently found it easier to remember brands that used storytelling in their advertisements. This enhanced recall is attributed to the narrative structure of the ads, which makes the brand and its message more memorable. Therefore, brands should incorporate storytelling into their social media strategies to significantly improve brand visibility and retention.

The impact of authenticity and relatability in storytelling on purchase intentions was also evident. Participants indicated that stories reflecting their personal experiences or values increased their likelihood of purchasing the advertised products. This relatability creates a sense of authenticity, making the products feel more relevant and necessary to consumers' lives. Brands should focus on creating authentic narratives that reflect consumers' lives and values to drive purchasing decisions. Authentic and relatable stories help build trust and credibility, which are crucial for influencing consumer behavior.

Cultural relevance emerged as a crucial factor in the effectiveness of storytelling ads. Participants emphasized that stories reflecting traditional Chinese values, family ties, and community were particularly impactful. These culturally resonant narratives were more likely to engage consumers and foster positive brand associations. Marketers should tailor their storytelling approaches to align with the cultural values of their target audience to create more effective and engaging advertisements.

Trust was another important theme that emerged. Participants expressed that advertisements with genuine and believable stories tended to build more trust towards the brand. They felt that when a brand shared stories that were sincere and aligned with their values, it portrayed the brand as more trustworthy. This increased trust often translated into higher brand loyalty and a greater willingness to recommend the brand to others. The positive relationship between storytelling and consumer trust suggests that brands should focus on creating honest and transparent narratives to foster trust and loyalty among their audience.

The increased interaction and engagement with storytelling ads highlight the participatory nature of social media. The study found that consumers are more likely to like, comment, and share ads featuring compelling stories. This increased interaction not only boosts the visibility of the ads but also creates a sense of community among viewers. Marketers should leverage this by encouraging user interaction and creating shareable content. The findings suggest that storytelling can enhance the viral potential of social media campaigns, making them more effective in reaching and engaging a wider audience.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the role of storytelling in social media advertisements and its impact on Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions. The thematic analysis reveals that storytelling in advertisements significantly influences consumer behavior through several key dimensions. Emotional resonance emerged as a crucial factor, with participants noting that ads that evoke strong emotions, such as joy or nostalgia, forge a deeper connection with the brand. This emotional engagement not only enhances consumer recall but also strengthens brand loyalty, demonstrating the power of emotionally charged narratives in making advertisements memorable.

Another critical finding is the enhanced brand recall facilitated by storytelling. Participants consistently reported that they remembered brands more effectively when the advertisements included compelling narratives. The narrative structure of these ads creates vivid mental images that linger in consumers' minds, making the brand and its message more salient. This improved recall is vital for long-term brand retention and visibility, highlighting the effectiveness of narrative advertising over traditional, product-focused approaches.

The study also underscores the significant impact of storytelling on purchase intention. Ads featuring authentic and relatable stories were found to increase consumers' likelihood of purchasing the advertised products. Stories that reflect personal experiences or values make products feel more relevant and trustworthy, thereby enhancing purchase intentions. This connection between relatability and authenticity in storytelling suggests that brands should craft narratives that resonate with consumers' lives and values to drive purchasing decisions.

Cultural relevance was identified as another essential factor in the effectiveness of storytelling ads. Ads incorporating traditional Chinese values, family ties, and cultural symbols were particularly impactful. Such culturally resonant narratives foster positive brand associations and create a stronger connection with the audience. This finding highlights the importance of tailoring storytelling to align with the cultural values of the target audience to enhance engagement and effectiveness.

Trust also emerged as a significant theme, with participants indicating that genuine and believable stories build greater trust in the brand. When ads convey sincerity and align with consumers' values, they enhance the brand's image as trustworthy and reliable. This increased trust often translates into higher brand loyalty and a greater willingness to recommend the brand to others. Thus, the study emphasizes the need for brands to create authentic and transparent narratives to foster trust and loyalty among consumers.

Finally, the study highlights the increased interaction and engagement that storytelling ads generate on social media. Participants were more likely to like, comment on, and share ads with compelling stories, which not only boosts the ads' visibility but also fosters a sense of community among viewers. This elevated engagement underscores the participatory nature of social media and the effectiveness of storytelling in enhancing the viral potential of advertising campaigns.

Despite these valuable insights, the study has several limitations. The sample size may not fully represent the broader Chinese consumer population, which could affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the research was conducted in a specific geographical area, potentially limiting the applicability of the results to other regions. The reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of bias, as participants might provide socially desirable responses. Furthermore, the study does not account for temporal changes in consumer behavior or advertising trends, which could influence the effectiveness of storytelling over time.

Future research could address these limitations by expanding the sample size and including participants from diverse geographical locations to enhance the generalizability of the results. A mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data could offer a more

comprehensive understanding of storytelling's impact. Additionally, investigating the effects of different types of storytelling, such as humorous versus dramatic narratives, could provide insights into tailoring advertising strategies. Exploring how emerging digital platforms influence storytelling and adapting narratives for various cultural contexts beyond China could also offer valuable contributions to the field. By addressing these areas, future research can further elucidate the role of storytelling in social media marketing and assist brands in optimizing their advertising strategies.

References

- Ahmadi, A., & Ataei, A. (2024). Emotional attachment: a bridge between brand reputation and brand advocacy. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration*, 16(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJBA-11-2021-0579>
- Al-Hadrawi, B. K., Nasser, Q. O., & Gogsido, S. B. (2024). Empowering Brands: The Art of Persuasive Marketing and Building Unshakable Consumer Trust. *Journal of Production and Industrial Engineering*, 5(1), 26-37. <https://doi.org/10.26706/jpie.5.1.20242144>
- Araujo, T., Copulsky, J. R., Hayes, J. L., Kim, S. J., & Srivastava, J. (2020). From Purchasing Exposure to Fostering Engagement: Brand–Consumer Experiences in the Emerging Computational Advertising Landscape. *Journal of Advertising*, 49(4), 428-445. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2020.1795756>
- Belova, A. (2021). Storytelling in advertising and branding. *Cognition, Communication, Discourse*, 22, 13-26. <https://doi.org/10.26565/2218-2926-2021-22-01>
- Cardoso, A., Gabriel, M., Figueiredo, J., Oliveira, I., Rego, R., Silva, R., Oliveira, M., & Meirinhos, G. (2022). Trust and Loyalty in Building the Brand Relationship with the Customer: Empirical Analysis in a Retail Chain in Northern Brazil. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 8(3), 109-125. <https://doi.org/10.3390/joitmc8030109>
- Davlembayeva, D., & Papagiannidis, S. (2024) *Social Influence Theory: A review*. TheoryHub.
- Dias, P., & Cavalheiro, R. (2022). The role of storytelling in the creation of brand love: the PANDORA case. *Journal of Brand Management*, 29, 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-021-00254-6>
- Dubovi, I., & Tabak, I. (2021). Interactions between emotional and cognitive engagement with science on YouTube. *Public understanding of science*, 30(6), 759-776. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662521990848>
- Fisher, W. R. (1984). Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument. *Communication Monographs*, 51(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758409390180>
- Kang, J. A., Hong, S., & Hubbard, G. T. (2020). The role of storytelling in advertising: Consumer emotion, narrative engagement level, and word-of-mouth intention. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 19(1), 47–56. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1793>
- Lee, H. W., Huat, O. C., & Ramayah, T. (2023). The impact of social media communication on consumer-based brand equity and purchasing intent in a pandemic. *International Marketing Review*, 40(5), 1213-1244. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-12-2021-0353>
- Liang, X. (2019). Americanized or localized: A qualitative study on Chinese advertising practitioners' perceptions of creativity and strategy in the digital age. *Global Media and China*, 4(2), 233-253. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436419836455>

- Liu, L., & Zhao, H. (2024). Research on consumers' purchase intention of cultural and creative products-Metaphor design based on traditional cultural symbols. *PLoS one*, 19(5), Article e0301678. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0301678>
- Okonkwo, I., & Namkoisse, E. (2023). The Role of Influencer Marketing in Building Authentic Brand Relationships Online. *Journal of Digital Marketing and Communication*, 3(2), 81-90. <https://doi.org/10.53623/jdmc.v3i2.350>
- Prihadyanti, D., Aziz, S. A., & Sari, K. (2024). Diffusion of Social Innovation: the Innovation Provider's Perspective. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy* 15, 4516-4570. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-023-01365-y>
- Rogers, E. M. (1962). *Diffusion of Innovations*. The Free Press.
- Rosário, A. T. & Dias, J. C. (2023). Marketing Strategies on Social Media Platforms. *International Journal of E-Business Research*, 19(1), 1-25. <http://doi.org/10.4018/IJEER.316969>
- Sha, H., Dolan, R., & Rashidirad, M. (2021). The Role of Social Media Content Format and Platform in Users' Engagement Behavior. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 53(1), 47-63. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2020.05.001>
- Stürmer, L., & Einwiller, S. (2022). Is this advertising or not, and do I care? Perceptions of and opinions regarding hybrid forms of content. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 29(2), 161-178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2022.2154065>
- Sutcliffe, A. (2016). Designing for User Experience and Engagement. In H. O'Brien., & P. Cairns (eds), *Why Engagement Matters* (pp. 105-126). Springer.
- Taherdoost, H. (2021). Data Collection Methods and Tools for Research; A Step-by-Step Guide to Choose Data Collection Technique for Academic and Business Research Projects. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management*, 10 (1), 10-38. <https://hal.science/hal-03741847>
- Teraiya, V., Namboodiri, S., & Jayswal, R. (2023). The Impact of Storytelling Advertising on Consumer Advertising Experiences and Brand Equity. *GLIMS Journal of Management Review and Transformation*, 2(1), 76-83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/jmrt.231160591>
- Vrtana, D., & Krizanova, A. (2023). The Power of Emotional Advertising Appeals: Examining Their Influence on Consumer Purchasing Behavior and Brand–Customer Relationship. *Sustainability*, 15(18), Article 13337. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151813337>
- Wang, N., Abidin, S. Z., Shaari, N., & Mansor, N. (2024). Influence of Chinese cultural values on consumer decision-making: A PRISMA-based systematic review. *International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences*, 11(1), 78-86. <http://www.sciencegate.com/IJAAS.html>
- Wang, X. (2024). *Cultural Diversity and Fusion in Chinese Culture*. Springer.