

The Impact of Anime Short Video "Cuteness" Perception on Customer Integration: A Chain Mediation Model

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Abstract

Anime short video marketing activities are increasingly frequent, but the research on its mechanism is relatively scarce. Based on the resource conservation theory and experiential integration marketing theory, this study constructs a chain mediation model of anime short video "cuteness" perception influencing customer integration through positive emotions and quasi social relations. Collect data through questionnaire survey method and use multiple analytical methods for empirical testing. The results show that anime short video "cuteness" perception has a significant positive impact on customer integration, in which positive emotions and quasi social relations play an important mediating and chain mediating role. This study provides theoretical support and management enlightenment for enterprises' anime short video marketing practice, and also points out the limitations of the study and future prospects.

Keywords

Anime; Short Videos; Cuteness Perception; Customer Integration; Chain Mediation Model.

1. Introduction

In today's digital era, the anime culture is booming, attracting a large number of young consumers. As a new form of marketing, anime short video is favored by many first-line brands in the Internet, mobile phones, fast food, sports, beauty and other industries. They have set up official accounts in anime Cultural Community Station B to carry out marketing activities. However, in sharp contrast, the academic research on anime short video marketing is quite lagging behind. The "cuteness" attribute in the anime world has a unique charm, which is highly consistent with the aesthetic preference of young groups, making anime short video marketing have a significant feature of experiential integration into marketing. However, at present, the internal mechanism of how the anime short video "cuteness" perception affects customer integration is still unclear. The purpose of this study is to fill in this research gap, through integrating resource conservation theory and experiential integration marketing theory, to deeply explore the impact of anime short video "cuteness" perception on customer integration, and to provide a strong theoretical basis for enterprises' marketing practice in the anime field.

2. Theoretical Basis and Research Hypotheses

2.1. Theoretical Basis

The Resource Conservation Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) holds that individuals have a strong intrinsic motivation to maintain, protect, and build their own resources, and when valuable resources face potential or actual losses, they pose a threat to the individual. In the anime short video marketing context, "cuteness" perception, as a positive experience factor, may have an important impact on individual resources. The "cuteness" attribute of anime short videos and the audience's "cuteness" perception can lead to positive experiences, and then promote the audience to have customer integration behavior, which not only contributes resources to the

marketing function of enterprises, but also enriches the content generated by the audience itself. Based on this, according to the classification of resources based on the resource conservation theory, this study identified two key resources, positive emotions and quasi social relations, which correspond to psychological resources and relationship resources respectively, as important variables for studying the relationship between anime short video "cuteness" perception and customer integration.

The experiential customer integration marketing theory (Harmeling et al., 2017) emphasizes that experiential events can promote long-term customer integration by driving lasting changes in customer beliefs and attitudes. During this process, customers need to invest a significant amount of emotional and cognitive resources. As a typical experiential event, the positive emotions and quasi social relationships aroused by the "cute" attribute of anime short videos represent individual emotions and cognitive resources respectively, providing important support for customers' self-transformation, thus promoting the realization of customer integration. Therefore, this research takes the experiential integration marketing theory as the logical framework, and constructs a chain intermediary path to deeply analyze the complex mechanism between the anime short video "cuteness" perception and customer integration.

2.2. Research Hypotheses

Anime short video "cuteness" perception has a positive impact on customer integration (H1). The characters in the anime short videos usually adopt the Japanese animation style of "big eyes, small mouth and flat". This unique shape design has simplicity, exaggeration and innocence, which is easy to induce the audience's "immature" perception, making the audience have an impression of innocence, honesty, kindness and warmth on the characters (Xu et al., 2019), so as to establish a sense of trust and promote customer integration (van Doorn et al., 2010). At the same time, contemporary young groups pay high attention to the role "people set" in the anime works (Yan and Wu, 2020). They are more inclined to select and combine the "cute elements" of the role. This "people set" charm is far beyond the role's own experience of narrating meaning, which can stimulate the interest of young groups and urge them to actively participate in comments, video sharing, consumption of related goods, secondary creation and other customer integration behaviors once they have the "cute" perception when watching the anime short videos produced by enterprises for brands and products.

Anime short video "cuteness" perception has a positive impact on positive emotions (H2). According to the extension construction theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998), positive emotions can not only promote individuals' approach behavior or sustained action, but also expand their short-term thinking action reserves, thereby affecting the construction of personal resources. The "cute" elements in the anime short video, such as the unique character shape, clothing, personality, etc., are easy to trigger the audience's favorite reaction and trigger specific positive emotions such as interest, satisfaction and joy. When young people watch anime short videos, once they feel "cute", they will have a reflexive love for the cute elements, thus stimulating positive emotions.

Positive emotions have a positive impact on customer integration (H3). Positive emotions can expand an individual's thinking action reserve, making them more willing to participate in brand related activities. When viewers watch anime short videos, they will have positive emotions, such as love, interest, satisfaction and joy, which will encourage them to more actively comment, share videos, consume related goods and recreate, so as to achieve customer integration. Therefore, positive emotions play a mediating role (H4) between anime short video "cute" perception and customer integration.

Anime short video "cuteness" perception has a positive impact on quasi social relations (H5). The "cuteness" attribute of anime short videos can trigger social exchanges between audiences and characters, bring cuteness objects into the moral circle (Sherman and Haidt, 2011),

stimulate empathy and sympathy of audiences, and promote the formation of complex social relations. The audience develops the awareness of "understanding" of the role by applying their interpersonal construction system to the interaction with the anime role, and then establishes the quasi social relationship. Different cuteness attributes can attract different audiences. When audiences have strong emotional reactions to anime roles, such as sense of autonomy, relevance and attachment, it will promote the formation of quasi social relations.

Quasi social relationships have a positive impact on customer integration (H6). The quasi social relationship between the audience and the anime role includes cognitive, emotional and behavioral components (Ge, 2013), which can improve the perceived proximity and correlation between the audience and the role, and affect the audience's behavioral intention. In order to meet social needs and gain a sense of belonging, young groups will stimulate strong desire for return and actively participate in customer integration behaviors such as comments, video sharing, consumption related goods and secondary creation after establishing a quasi-social relationship with anime characters. Therefore, quasi social relations play a mediating role between anime short video "cuteness" perception and customer integration (H7).

Positive emotions and quasi social relations play a chain mediating role (H8) between anime short video "cuteness" perception and customer integration. From the perspective of cognitive psychology, customers' perception of core products is an interconnected network, and experiential integration programs can enhance and create new cognitive keys (Anderson, 1983). Anime short video "cuteness" perception can not only strengthen the cognitive keys related to brands or products, but also create cognitive keys related to anime roles, enriching customers' psychological representation. At the same time, the positive emotions triggered by the perception of "cuteness" can promote the formation of quasi social relationships, and the audience can complete self-transformation by investing in positive emotions and quasi social relationships, thereby promoting long-term customer integration.

3. Research Design

3.1. Variable Measurement

This study involves four core variables, namely perceived cuteness, positive emotions, quasi social relationships, and customer integration, as well as two control variables, gender and age. To ensure the reliability and validity of variable measurement, appropriate modifications were made to the measurement items of each variable based on existing mature scales and the specific context of this study. All items were measured using the Likert five points scale (1=completely disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=average, 4=somewhat agree, 5=completely agree), and participants self-reported the items based on their own feelings.

The measurement of "Cuteness" perception draws on the research of Miesler et al. (2011), Feng and Yi(2019), Sherman and Haidt(2011), Xu et al. For example, Cronbach's α is 0.892 for "cute anime character in short video" and "cute anime character in short video", which indicates that the scale has high reliability.

The measurement of positive emotions drew on the research of Watson et al. (1988) and Qiu et al. (2008), selecting 8 positive emotion description items, such as "focused", "interested", "excited", "joyful", "happy", "passionate", "firm", and "active", with Cronbach's alpha of 0.942, demonstrating good reliability.

The measurement of quasi social relations draws on the research of Reinikainen et al. (2020), Escalas and Bettman (2017), and is evaluated through 10 items. The representative items include "If the video of this anime image appears on other websites, I will watch it", "I seem to have the same personality characteristics as this anime image", etc. Cronbach's α is 0.937, with high reliability.

The measurement of customer integration drew on the research of Yan and Wu (2020) and designed 9 items, such as "I am willing to send the bullet screen when watching the anime video produced by the brand with this anime image", "I am willing to recommend the anime video produced by the brand with this anime image to my friends", Cronbach's α is 0.937, which is reliable.

3.2. Survey Methods and Aample Composition

This study used a questionnaire survey method to collect data. Before the formal survey, 50 anime fans were selected for pre survey in March 2024. The preliminary survey results showed that the five core variables involved in the questionnaire have good reliability and validity. At the same time, based on the feedback from the preliminary survey, some of the items in the questionnaire were optimized and adjusted to improve the quality and effectiveness of the questionnaire.

In April 2024, a large-scale questionnaire survey will be officially conducted through the Wenjuanxing platform. The survey was first distributed in the anime student association of a university in Shanghai to ensure that the core anime fan group can be covered. Then, with the help of the participants who have participated in the survey, the snowball sampling method was used to find other anime fans they know to participate in the questionnaire, so as to gradually expand the sample range. After two weeks of intense collection, a total of 519 questionnaires were received. In the data processing stage, strict screening was carried out on the collected questionnaires to eliminate invalid questionnaires with obvious regularity or short response time. Finally, 466 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective rate of 89.8%.

Sample structure analysis shows that males account for 45.9% and females account for 54.1%, indicating a relatively balanced gender ratio; In terms of age distribution, the proportion of subjects between the ages of 18-25 and 15-18 is as high as 90.1% and 9.9% respectively, which indicates that the sample is mainly concentrated in young groups, which is consistent with the characteristics of the main audience groups of anime culture; In terms of education level, undergraduate education accounts for 85.8%, high school education accounts for 9.9%, and master's education accounts for 4.3%, reflecting that the sample has a certain level of cultural literacy and can better understand and answer the questions in the questionnaire.

3.3. Research Methods

This study comprehensively utilized various data analysis software, including SPSS21.0, Amos 21.0, PROCESS and Mplus, to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the research results. Firstly, SPSS21.0 was used for reliability and validity analysis to test the internal consistency reliability and construct validity of each variable measurement scale, and Harman single factor test was used to evaluate the common method bias among variables. Secondly, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS21.0 to calculate the mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficient of each variable, in order to gain a preliminary understanding of the relationships between variables. Then, hypothesis testing was conducted on the mediating effect using Amos 21.0 and PROCESS software. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the overall relationship structure between variables, and Bootstrap method was used to test the significance of the mediating effect. Confidence intervals were constructed through repeated sampling to determine the presence or absence of the mediating effect.

4. Research Results

4.1. Reliability and Validity Analysis

The reliability and validity tests were conducted on each variable, and the results showed that the Cronbach's alpha values of the four core variables were all above 0.80, indicating that the

scales have high reliability and the measurement results are relatively stable and reliable. Specifically, the Cronbach's alpha perceived as "cuteness" is 0.892, positive emotions are 0.942, quasi social relationships are 0.937, and customer integration is 0.937. At the same time, the combined reliability (CR) values of each variable are all greater than 0.8, the average variance extracted (AVE) values are all greater than 0.5, and the square roots of AVE are all greater than the direct correlation coefficients between variables (see Tables 1 and 2), which fully demonstrates that each scale has good convergent validity and discriminant validity, and can effectively measure corresponding concepts.

Table 1. Results of Reliability and Validity Analysis

Latent Variable	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α
"cuteness" perception	0.891	0.672	0.892
positive emotions	0.945	0.686	0.942
quasi social relationship	0.939	0.609	0.937
customer integration	0.936	0.621	0.937

4.2. Homogeneity Error Test

In addition, Harman single factor test method was used to test for homology errors. The results showed that without rotation, five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were obtained, among which the variance explained by the first common factor was 31.310%, and the total variance explained by all factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 was 71.364%. Due to the fact that the variance explained by the first common factor did not exceed 40% and did not account for more than half of the total variance explained, this indicates that although homologous errors exist in this study, they are not severe and will not have a significant impact on the validity of the research results.

4.3. Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Variables

The descriptive statistics of the studied variables are shown in Table 2. From Table 2, it can be seen that the perception of "cuteness" is significantly positively correlated with customer integration ($r=0.414, p<0.01$), positive emotions ($r=0.538, p<0.01$), and quasi social relationships ($r=0.498, p<0.01$), and H1, H2, and H5 have been preliminarily validated; Positive emotions are significantly positively correlated with quasi social relationships ($r=0.585, p<0.01$) and customer integration ($r=0.611, p<0.01$), and H3 has been preliminarily validated; There is a significant positive correlation between quasi social relationships and customer integration ($r=0.604, p<0.01$), and H6 has been preliminarily validated. The descriptive statistics of the described variables are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistical Results and Correlation Coefficients

Variable	Mean Value	Standard Deviation	"cuteness" perception	positive emotions	quasi social relationship	customer integration
"cuteness" perception	3.49	0.84	(0.820)			
positive emotions	3.71	0.86	0.538**	(0.828)		
quasi social relationship	3.19	0.86	0.498**	0.585**	(0.780)	
customer integration	3.03	0.87	0.414**	0.611**	0.604**	(0.788)

Note: ***, **, * represent significant correlations (bilateral) at the 0.001, 0.01, and 0.05 levels, respectively. Same as below. The values in parentheses in the table are the square roots of the AVE variables.

4.4. Hypothesis Test

This study combines the structural equation model based on Mplus8.3 software and the Bootstrap method to test the mediating effect. The results of the theoretical model run and the Bootstrap method test are shown in Table 3. After controlling for gender and age variables:

The path coefficient of "cuteness" perception and customer integration is 0.231, $p < 0.01$, indicating that anime short video "cuteness" perception positively affects customer integration, and H1 is established.

The path coefficient between "cuteness" perception and positive emotion is 0.383, $p < 0.001$, indicating that anime short video "cuteness" perception positively affects positive emotion; The path coefficient between positive emotions customer integration is 0.470, $p < 0.05$, indicating that positive emotions have a positive impact on customer integration. Moreover, the results of PROCESS showed that positive emotions had a significant partial mediating effect between perceived cuteness and customer integration ($\beta = 0.180$, $p < 0.05$). The 95% confidence interval for Bootstrap=5000 was [0.0144, 0.3456], excluding 0. Hypotheses H2, H3, and H4 are valid.

The path coefficient between "cuteness" perception and quasi social relations is 0.317, $p < 0.01$, indicating that anime short video "cuteness" perception positively affects quasi social relations; The path coefficient between quasi social relationships and customer integration is 0.414, $p < 0.001$, indicating that quasi social relationships have a positive impact on customer integration. Moreover, the PROCESS operation results showed that the partial mediating effect of quasi social relationships between "cuteness" perception and customer integration was significant ($\beta = 0.131$, $p < 0.01$). The 95% confidence interval for Bootstrap=5000 was [0.0459, 0.2162], excluding 0. Hypotheses H5, H6, and H7 are valid.

The path coefficient between positive emotions and quasi social relationships is 0.422, $p < 0.01$, indicating that positive emotions have a positive impact on quasi social relationships. Moreover, the PROCESS operation results showed a significant chain mediation effect between positive emotions and quasi social relationships in the relationship between "cuteness" perception and customer integration ($\beta = 0.067$, $p < 0.01$). The 95% confidence interval for Bootstrap=5000 is [0.0168, 0.1173], excluding 0. Hypothesis H8 holds.

Table 3. The Mediating Effect Estimated By Bootstrap Method

path	Indirect Effect Estimation (Standardized)	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Total Indirect Effects	0.378	0.0301	0.7261
Specific Indirect Effect Decomposition			
"cuteness" perception - positive emotions - customer integration	0.180	0.0144	0.3456
"cuteness" perception - quasi social relationships - customer integration	0.131	0.0459	0.2162
"cuteness" perception - positive emotions - quasi social relationships - customer integration	0.067	0.0168	0.1173

5. Research Conclusion and Discussion

5.1. Research Conclusion

Anime short video "cuteness" perception positively affects customer integration. Positive emotions and quasi social relations play a partial mediating role in the positive impact of "cuteness" perception on customer integration, respectively. Positive emotions and quasi social

relations play a chain mediating role in the positive impact of "Cuteness" perception on customer integration.

5.2. Limitations of the Study

Due to the cross-sectional data used in this study, the causal relationship between variables is not rigorous enough to reflect the dynamic impact process of anime short video "cuteness" perception on audience emotion, cognition and behavior. Future research may consider obtaining data through longitudinal tracking methods to explore the mechanisms of interaction between variables.

The measurement of each variable in this study comes from a single source of self-report, which may result in common method bias. Future research may consider using multiple tools and sources to measure variables more accurately, such as using facial electromyography to measure emotional responses, obtaining quasi social relationship building and customer integration behavior data through experimental methods, in order to improve data authenticity and objectivity, and reduce common method bias.

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