

Study on Effects of Ritual in Marketing

Fang Yingfeng

School of Culture and Law, Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan, P.R. China, 430070
(E-mail: 550966312@qq.com)

Abstract: As the increasing of GDP and developing of education and culture in China, the consuming needs of Chinese people are changing greatly. We are stepping into a total new Decades when spiritual rather than physical needs take mainstream. In this thesis, Case Analysis Method is used by the writer to analyze the meaning of ritual and the function of ritual in China. And according to that, the writer point out that the ritual can be used as an important medium for the in-culture communication. And some teachable points of views are also indicated: firstly, ritual can make the chance of marketing; secondly, ritual can help the enterprise foster a good and healthy company image; thirdly, ritual can beautify the environment of consumption and enrich the Consumer Culture.

Key words: Ritual; Marketing; Communication; Culture

1 Introduction

The theories of marketing are always changing with the development of the consuming behaviors and consumer psychology.

Various marketing ideas emerge in an endless stream from 4P marketing, 4C marketing to the service marketing and loyal marketing, marketing of total mark, etc.

In 1992, Don E Schultz has put forward the theory of integrated marketing communication (IMC) which based on the fact that the key factor to a successful marketing has been changed. Different from the traditional marketing mode based on the Product-focus theory, the IMC theory pointed out that a successful marketing is a communication of coherent information between the producer and the consumer. The conception of 'Marketing Is Communication' is now widely accepted by Chinese people.

Nowadays, the variation of Chinese society based on the economic boom brings the changing of consuming behaviors and consumer psychology. Some scholars began to research the changing of consumer behaviors in new century and the new ways to improve the effect of marketing communication.

Michael R. Solomon's research comes to a conclusion that the commodities have magic characters to become the icons of their consumers. Many commodities are merged in rituals. The marketing information in mystery subject is apt to be strike a chord by the consumer.^[1]

Kent Wertime also had a research about how the rituals affect marketing: the rituals are the common and universal elements in the myth, and they can also positively promote the production of the contemporary myth (the ads). Thanks to the rituals in connection with the productions in ads, the consumer shall feel comfort, and with the passage of time, they will be accustomed to the productions and the especial rituals with them. The producers can make an association between the production and the ritual so that the consumers can establish rapport with the production or the brand.^[2]

Many researchers realized the importance of ritual in marketing communication, but in the fields of why rituals can play a role in marketing communication still lack of deeper research.

In China, the rituals are used to be the most important way to establish the better image of the nation or the city. But the intensive study about how to use the rituals for marketing communication is still a blank which this work will fill.

Some research method such as Case Analysis Method and induction and deduction were used for this research to analyze the cause and the effects of ritual on marketing communication.

2 Ritual Consumption in China

2.1 The trend of 'ritual consumption'

Since 21st century, Chinese people have become to be more and more favorable of kinds of festivals, not only the native born festivals or Official Holidays such as Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Tomb-sweeping Day, Lantern Festival, National Day, Women's, Children's Day and so on, but also quantities of foreign festivals 'imported' from the West like Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day, Thanksgiving Day, Father's Day and Mother's Day, even current not quite well-known Japan-born 'Girl Days' and 'Boy Days', in which people spare no efforts to have fun.

From the data provided by Baidu Union, the annual consumption generated by wedding ceremonies

in China is over 400 billion Yuan, about 2.5% of GDP. As for individual persons, besides wedding there are many other ceremonies in their life such as Birthday, full moon celebrations, birthday celebrations, adult ceremony, apprentice ceremony, graduation, etc., while for a business company, kinds of ceremonies are inevitable too, for example, the groundbreaking ceremony, the inauguration ceremony, the completion ceremony, anniversary, new product launch ceremony, signing ceremony, etc.. As a result, there are born kinds of ceremony companies and ceremony industry is definitely a sunrise industry.

2.2 The trend of 'ritual consumption' indicate the changing of consumer psychology

For such social phenomenon, the Chinese scholar Zhang Yiwu pointed out, 'a rising society and their hopeful people are eager for the solemn rituals and the sense of respect to life. Culture, is not visional, and it exists in the rituals which is material and visible. A society will have its own culture groundwork with the rituals witch can carry on the culture and value. So the rituals above the everyday life are very necessary for the nations.'^[3]

From the aspect of economy, this trend of ritual consumption is never a short-term or casual event, whereby it demonstrates that as the increasing of GDP and developing of education and culture in China, the consuming needs of Chinese people are changing greatly. We are stepping into a total new Decades when spiritual rather than physical needs take mainstream, or in other words a 'Spiritual Economy' Decade. 'In many aspects, physical products are just carriers of consuming activities and people are more concerning about the symbol values during the consumption. Spiritual needs are becoming the biggest needs of mankind and spiritual consumption is becoming the mainstream.'^[4]

2.3 Rituals have specific effects on consumers

First, ritual can consolidate social identity. Participating in the ritual used to be considered as the admission to a kind of group. And in the ritual, person can get the formal position in a group, such as the ceremony for the beginning of a school or the initiation rite.^[5]

Second, ritual can make people to share particular information or value. For example, drinking is just a normal human behavior, but the Tea Tao is totally different. Tea Tao changes the simple human behavior into more complicated ritual with more procedures. And thanks to that, the participators can understand or even sharing the value of the country by apperception to the ritual.

Last, ritual can make things sacred. In the wedding ceremony, or in the fete, the Chinese people are interested in making more and more new procedures to show how they think highly of that event or moment or the visitors. More meticulous ritual means more seriousness. Other than the casual and personal behaviors, ritual behaviors mean that people have to be serious to the things or be more cautious of the decision-making. Ritual is not everyday life, but it is in everyday life.

3 The Positive Effects Brought by Rituals to Modern Marketing

3.1 Large ceremonial activities would stimulate consuming and create marketing opportunities.

The most outstanding examples are varieties of festivals, for instance, the custom activities of China Spring festival are New Year's Eve family dinners and visiting friends and relatives, which would be a super chance for restaurant and gift marketing. Similarly, moon-cakes for Mid Autumn Days, rice dumplings as well as dragon boat races for Dragon Boat Festival, rave parties in Christmas eves, Chocolates and roses for Valentine's Day and so on. So merchants spare no efforts to kinds of 'festivals' even the Religious festivals such as Easter and Thanksgiving Days which are hardly associated with Chinese. Besides, vary personal or family memorial and ceremonial activities such as wedding, Birthday ceremonies, and Anniversary celebrations also attract great interests from modern marketing. Basing these custom rituals, ceremony industry rises with quantities of celebration companies established and well operated, meaning that a ritual society has come.

Meanwhile, the return of traditional rituals has become one of the important methods adopted by modern marketing especially tourism marketing. Take the 'Patron of Agriculture Worship' activities in Sui Zhou city of Hubei Province of China for example, where the grand ceremony to memorize Patron of Agriculture (Ancestor of the Chinese nation in legend stories) held by ancient Chinese people is exactly reproduced, which not only creates unique worship traveling products but also drives the development of leisure Villas nearby.

3.2 Rituals in marketing would help to establish nice brand images

Introducing kinds of ritual in the processes of producing, marketing and consuming of products would implant some kind of culture value, so that some emotional needs of customers would be satisfied. When a clever property developer held a huge Coming Home Ceremony, the topic had been changed successfully from a pure business issue to an emotional cultural activity. Such a ritual brought great

cultural charming to the brand, which would definitely be imitated by other companies and create a new trend. Ritual is especially important for high-end or culture products, as ritual is essential to promote the cultural identity or emotional reliance of customers.

Horizon Research Group CEO Mr. Yuan said, ritual enhances people's serious sense, and the more solemn sense means achievement the more hard to reach, while the more serious ritual directs to the more important dispute.^[6] Compared with daily free activities, ritual activities are usually more complicated, and the decisions need more deeply consideration. Once a ritual was held, some achievements or consequences were certain. So, ritual would also enhance the confidence of customers for their consumption decisions and they would further more recognize the value of such brands.

3.3 Ritual would make social consumption environments more comfortable, and enrich the contents of consuming cultures.

Consuming culture refers to the total of consuming attitudes, modes, activities and environments during the process of material and spiritual production, social living and consumption during a certain stage. In shorts, it's what to consume and how to consume. What modern people consume are not only products, services or symbols (or brands), but also ceremonies or rituals. Like drinking a cup of tea, people would follow the ritual instructions as wash the tea, brewing, sealed pot, and cup, sub-pot, serve tea, smell the incense, and so on, which are known as 'Tea Tao'. If such rituals are removed, drinking tea lost its inherent pleasure. As diamonds are more than precious stone and roses never only mean flowers, once a product is connected with some holy ritual, the things consumed would include not only products, symbols, but also the consuming process itself. That is the truth of consumption culture.

4 The New Theory and Practice: Ritual Marketing Communication

2.1 What is ritual marketing communication?

Nowadays, the key of modern marketing is building brand recognition. The marketing communication has changed its way from advertisement to enriching the images and communicating with the customers. In general, communication means ritual which can make a cultural intercourse between the corporation and customers. That is to say, marketing is a special ritual, and ritual is one of the most important way to marketing communicate.

Therefore, we define ritual marketing communication as marketing activities to create or guide consumers' behaviors by decorating special actions of the consumer to ritual and giving it sacred significance or heritage value. In general, the Ritual activity consists of four elements:

The Aesthetic: The process of the ceremony should have some aesthetic value, from which the participants can enjoy it themselves.

The Lofty: The ritual is appeal enough for participants to well reverence.

The Iconic: There must be languages or symbolic actions to mark the ritual by identity value.

The Formal: The Ritual activity isn't a must for practice, of which, the significance is much more than the substance.

2.2 Method for ritual marketing communication

2.2.1 Spread the rituals in the production process

Enterprises, in the beginning of production, will hold foundation or launching ceremony, showing emphasis and expectations for the production process. And it is common phenomenon that the ancient people divine or pray at the start of a war or handicraft production. Through the ritual, companies announce that a new product or new service is about to born, which is an activity that the production ritual is used for marketing communication. However, this behavior is often primitive and unconscious. The Ritual marketing emphasizes companies ritualized the production process consciously, which is given sacred and noble cultural significance, and the ritual is enhanced through the mass media or other ways, triggering the public's participation, thereby to achieve marketing purposes.

2.2.2 Spread the rituals in the sales process

If you go to buy a costly watch, you will see: the saleswoman, whose makeup is exquisite, comes out gracefully with the watch on a beautiful tray combined with silk lining. In that case, the sales process is no longer simply a pay for the goods, but an admiration of the ceremony, thus reinforcing the High-end brand image. The goods are put in the worship of the ritual, which can also be typically seen as 'commodity fetishism'.

The sales process of wine is usually a tasting ceremony of wine culture. Some High-end red wines are usually put on sale by the means of private salon. In such circumstances people are art connoisseur and ceremony participants instead of consumers.

2.2.3 Spread the ritual in the consumption process

A cigar enthusiast says: When enjoying a good cigar, you need to cut the cap of cigars, and use a professional lighter. There is a strong Ritual before enjoying, which can gradually pull you out of daily business, and then have you come back to the true state that's completely relaxed and comfortable. The smoking process of cigars can be neither too fast nor too slow. A medium length one often requires an hour to enjoy.

Enthusiasts have described the magic of Polaroid cameras as follows, 'it's not only in the realizing of colors in white film, but also in the serials of comprehensive senses over mechanism', 'such as the rapid friction among kinds of components after the shutter flashed, with a sweet sound, and finally a photo came from the mouth accompanied with a Bata cry, and then the door shut down suddenly, all of which inevitably stimulate a boy-like desire to take it apart in order to have a throughout look .' So they implemented 'an impossible project' over internet, and wished the coming back of Polaroid through new technologies. Someone even developed pretty software which tried to simulate Polaroid effects.

The consumption is not just cigars and the camera. It is the programs of ritual to give consumers sense of satisfaction with non-attachment to the goods. In a way, what they consume is the ceremony.

5 Conclusion

The production, marketing, purchasing and consuming activities of human being is never just attributed as pure economic issues but also a kind of culture behavior there rituals play an important role. The producers can use rituals as the important method for marketing communication. As a new theory, Ritual Marketing Communication has been put forward by the researcher. But how to consummate the theory still need deeper and more detailed research.

References

- [1] Michael R. Solomon. Conquering Consumer Space[M]. Beijing: Publishing House of Electronics Industry, 2006:30 (In Chinese)
- [2] Kent Wertime. Building Brands and Believers[M]. Beijing: ChinaTextile&ApparelPress, 2004:106 (In Chinese)
- [3] Zhang Yiwu. The Disappearance of Ritual Cause Serious Consequences[J]. Beijing Morning Paper, Oct, 20, 2010 (In Chinese)
- [4] Zeng Zhi. Study on Symbolic Sonsumer Behavior Based on Consumer Self-concept[J]. Business Age, 2009:15 (In Chinese)
- [5] Lorelies Singerhoff. Why We Need Rituals [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2009:1-3 (In Chinese)
- [6] Yuan Yue. Rituals Are Necessary[J]. <http://www.chinapr.com.cn>, June, 29th, 2009 (In Chinese)