

# PARA-SOCIAL INTERACTION ANALYSIS OF VALENTINO VIRTUAL SPOKESPERSON BASED ON WEIBO DATA AND SEARCH POPULARITY

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## ABSTRACT

*Brand image is one of the most important factors influencing the competitiveness of the commodity market. In order to reduce the negative impact of potential scandals of celebrity spokespersons, Valentino began to use a virtual spokesperson named **noonoouri** for promotion. In this context, we first describe the application model of Valentino's virtual spokesperson. Then, based on the Valentino Weibo data we collected and Google search popularity, we analyzed the impact of virtual spokespersons on the para-social interaction between brands and consumers. Finally, according to the analysis conclusion of the impact of Valentino's virtual spokesperson in the para-social interaction, a corresponding marketing-competitive brand image promotion proposal is put forward.*

## KEYWORDS

*Para-social Interaction, Valentino, Virtual Spokesperson, Weibo Data, Search Popularity.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Last decade, we have witnessed the rapid development of China economy and the popularity of China mobile networking. The mobile social era has arrived. Digitization and rejuvenation are the inevitable trends in the development of the luxury industry. The mainly users of major social media are young people, and most of them tend to personalize consumption such as co-branded merchandise, limited merchandise and customized merchandise. Italian high-end luxury brand Valentino uses technology to lead product promotion. What Valentino need to do is to let young consumers to recognize and shape a young corporate image through brand marketing on social networking platform. Valentino use a "para-social" model and virtual spokespersons for digital marketing on traffic platforms such as Weibo, and use digital marketing to narrow the distance with consumers and acquire new users.

In the experiment, we analyze the trends of search popularity of virtual spokespersons in global search engines and the distribution of Weibo users' age in recent years. The experiment analysis results based on 4063 interactive data published on Valentino's official Weibo discusses whether virtual spokespersons will affect the formation of para-social interaction relationship between Valentino and their consumers. Finally, it discusses the problems existing in the process of establishing para-social interaction relationship between Valentino's virtual spokespersons and its consumers, and puts forward corresponding development suggestions.

## 2. RELATED WORK

This experiment has consulted a large number of relevant literatures. According to the viewpoints of Daniel Langer and Oliver Haier on luxury brands functions, the prices of luxury merchandise contain high added-value and consumer perceived-value. Consumer perceived-value enables luxury to have the functions of enhancing the owner's self-esteem, self-awareness and attractiveness, liquidity of funds, social status and the ultimate sense of experience [1]. On the basis of such characteristics and functions, luxury merchandise added-value of is also reflected in the social status and social image which can be used as an emotional social symbol to distinguish people, so as to satisfy the psychological demands of consumers.

Virtual spokesperson refers to a virtual character which is based on the characteristics of luxury brand and comprehensive analysis of the market environment, competitors and consumer psychology. Virtual Spokesperson can be used as a carrier of brand image [2]. Like real spokesperson, virtual spokesperson not only does benefit luxury brand image brand image, merchandise and brand awareness, but also establish the reputation and loyalty of brand, stimulate brand associations, and promote brand development and promotion [3].

In 1956, psychologists Horton and Wall, based on the survey of the interaction between the audience and the host in the American radio show "Lonely Girl", put forward: Para-social interaction refers to the phenomenon in which the audience reacts to media characters as real characters and forms a para-social relationship with them. In the process of para-social activities, a person's self-identity depends on whether he can successfully play a social role and interact with others." In para-social interaction, individuals will communicate and establish relationship bonds with media characters with purpose, which can bring psychological comfort to individuals to a certain degree [4].

The para-social interaction behaviors of luxury goods in social media are increasing. Domestic academia's have gradually shifted their researches focus from exploring the use of new media in luxury marketing [5] and "How Does Luxury Advertising Make Use of Digital Media to Transform-Take Luxury Micro-Films as An Example" [6] to "The Influence of Social Interaction and Para-social Interaction in Virtual Brand Community on Brand Relationship Quality" [7] also gradually increasing. This experiment will build on the existing researches and based on a total of 4063 pieces of interaction data published on Valentino's official Weibo, including fans interaction, merchandise promotion, topic forwarding lottery and endorsements by real celebrity or virtual spokespersons, to explore how the brand's employment of virtual spokespersons affects the formation of para-social interactions between itself and its consumers.

## 3. PARA-SOCIAL INTERACTION

We collected and described the virtual spokesperson's application model in Valentino's advertisements based on the relevant information reviewed. We analyze the image characteristics of virtual spokespersons and explore the formation process of the para-social interaction between virtual spokespersons and consumers.

### 3.1. Application Mode of Virtual Spokesperson in Valentino advertising

In order not to affect the original advertising of Valentino that relies on celebrity spokespersons to promote merchandise and to retain consumers who tend to trust traditional advertising. Most of Valentino's endorsement advertisements use a combination of virtual spokespersons and celebrity spokespersons [8].

When the fame, social influence and fan base of the virtual spokesperson reach a certain level, brands will only adopt virtual character as the brand spokesperson. With the popularity of virtual spokespersons such as Lil Miquela and noonoouri in the fashion field, various virtual characters have set up the "Vmodel" development model. Vmodel poster's presentation, dialogue text, contextual, collaboration content and life image are completely team-operated to reduce negative images.

Valentino uses virtual spokespersons to make risks more controllable. Virtual spokespersons can fully meet the needs of Valentino and ensure the safety of promotion. Considering from the ideological level of young people, the image of virtual spokesperson represents the idealized lifestyle of the younger generation. The idealization and controllability of virtual spokesperson make them easier to be chosen by Valentino. After the virtual spokesperson lays the foundation for consumer acceptance, market has also made targeted changes. According to the advertisements published by Valentino's official Weibo, it can be seen that Valentino's promotion of virtual spokesperson advertisements has gradually shifted from appearing at the same time with celebrities known to young people in the early days to shooting advertisements and participating in various marketing activities alone.

### **3.2. Formation of Para-social Interaction between Virtual Spokespersons and Consumers**

Consumers' emotional projection and personal identity come from the rich character images of virtual spokespersons. In the process of para-social interaction with virtual spokespersons, consumers acquired information is transmitted as symbols. Designers can use virtual status symbol and text symbols to shape the character and construct dialogue situations for virtual spokespersons, so that it can communicate information on social media in its own language.

All of characteristics make virtual spokespersons act as media characters to a certain extent. When virtual spokespersons cooperate with brands, brand consumers act as media audience when they receiving advertisements that contains virtual spokespersons. The important prerequisite for the formation of para-social interaction is the charm of media characters and perceived similarity of media audience. The deeper the interaction between consumers and virtual spokespersons, the more they can seek spiritual sustenance and emotional needs from virtual spokespersons. The para-social interaction between consumers and virtual spokespersons depends on the imagination of consumers rather than the actual contact behavior between the two. Only when the two parties have established a symbolic interpretation method that can share meanings can they truly establish a para-social interaction relationship between the two parties. In turn, luxury consumers will have a sense of identity with their personal social status and identity, as well as a sense of identity with the brand when interacting with virtual spokespersons.

## **4. EXPERIMENT**

We obtained experiment's data from search engines and data mining. In the experiment, we store the search popularity data of keywords obtained from search engines in Excel format, and draw charts based on these data. We use Python3 code to obtain Weibo data. First, we obtain the APP\_KEY and AP\_SECRET of the newly registered application on the Weibo open platform and set the authorization return page and authorization cancellation page. Next, we create a MySQL database named Weibo to store the obtained ID and Weibo comment data. Then, we use the sinaweibopy3 module to obtain authorization from the Weibo interface and request data. Finally, compare the obtained data format with the data format in the interface document, and store the obtained Weibo data in the MySQL database after confirming that it is correct.

#### 4.1. Result and Discussion about Search Popularity

As shown in Figure 1, according to the search engine data from 2004 to the present, the statistics of the global virtual influencer keyword search popularity show that since the virtual influencer Lil Miquela was created in 2016, the attention of online audience to the virtual has increased year by year. Taking 2018 as the node, virtual spokespersons such as Shudu Gram and noonouri have been created and entered the public sight during this year. Since 2018, the attention of online audience to virtual spokespersons has increased exponentially and there is still a growth trend in the future.

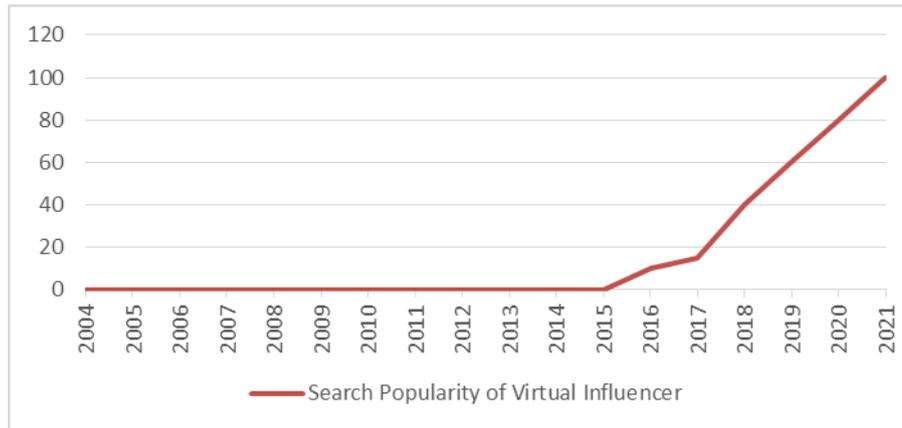


Figure 1. The search popularity statistics of global Virtual Influencer keywords since 2004.

Since the image of digital virtual spokesperson can be more conveniently transmitted to consumers through various social media. Digital virtual spokesperson can endorse more than one brand. The image of the virtual spokesperson represents the image and interests of itself, the creative team and various cooperative brands, which also makes its image more independent. At present, digital virtual spokespersons are mainly virtual spokespersons such as Lil Miquela and noonouri.

As shown in Figure 2, according to *iResearch*'s survey data on PC and mobile Weibo users, the majority of them are young people. Among them, the users groups of 25 to 30 years old on the PC and APP respectively accounted for 21.6% and 29.1%, the users groups under the age of 24 includes teenagers on the PC and APP respectively accounted for 37.7% and 37.5%.

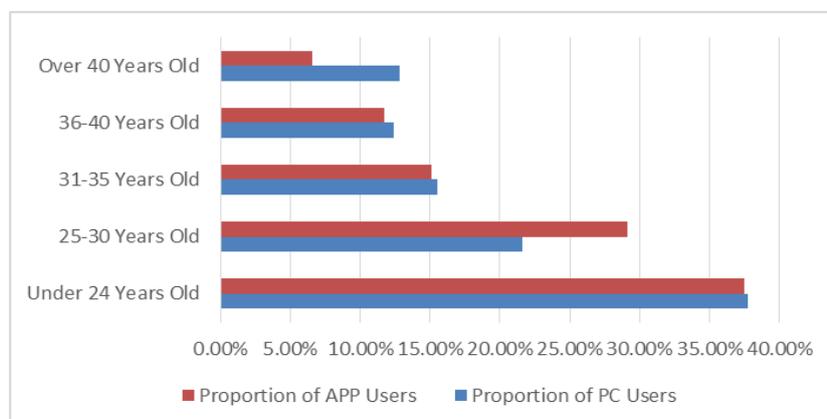


Figure 2. Age distribution of Weibo Users on PC and APP.

According to the survey, the fan groups of virtual spokespersons such as noonouri employed by luxury brands are mainly concentrated in the 18-24 age groups. Virtual spokespersons such as noonouri represent the ideal lifestyle of young people. In order to enhance "young consumers' willingness to purchase Valentino, the core of Valentino marketing strategy is gradually becoming younger. The Weibo has a wide range of younger audiences, which provides an opportunity for virtual spokespersons of Valentino and young consumer groups to form a para-social interaction relationship and also provides favorable conditions for the transformation of Valentino to younger generations.

#### 4.2. Result and Discussion about Weibo Data

In order to test whether Valentino's use of virtual spokespersons for advertising will affect the formation of para-social interaction between Valentino and its consumers, this experiment takes Valentino as an example and collects the brand's official Weibo data from 2012 to present 3806 in total. The experiment uses whether there is a virtual spokesperson (VS) in the published Weibo advertisement content as an independent variable and use Weibo users' like (DZ), forward (ZF), and comment (PL) data on each original Weibo of Valentino brand as the criteria for judging the effect of its para-social interaction.

In order not to affect the results of the experiment, we screened the obtained Weibo data and excluded data containing celebrity spokespersons and certain brand marketing activities that have a greater impact on user likes and comments. Finally, from the remaining data, 3 original Weibo data including virtual spokesperson noonouri and 97 ordinary advertising and marketing Weibo originals were selected. We sorted out a total of 100 original Weibo content and user replies and comments data and stored them in Excel form.

This experiment uses the SPSS statistical tool to count the average and standard deviation of the respective replies and comment data of the marketing Weibo containing virtual spokespersons in the Valentino brand official Weibo and the ordinary merchandise marketing Weibo (As shown in Table1). Then, we performed an independent sample t test on the data (As shown in Table2).

Although the average and standard deviation of the interactive data of marketing Weibo with virtual spokespersons in Valentino's official Weibo are higher than those of ordinary marketing Weibo, the significance of the values obtained by independent sample t-test is greater than 0.05 that is no statistically significant difference. The experimental results show that the use of virtual spokespersons for advertising by Valentino does not significantly affect the formation of para-social interactions between Valentino and their consumers.

Table 1. Results of Statistical Evaluation of Valentino Weibo Interactive Data Set.

| VS |   | Number of Cases | Average Value | Standard Deviation | Standard Error Average |
|----|---|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| DZ | Advertising Marketing Weibo with Virtual Spokesperson | 3               | 685.33        | 528.905            | 305.363                |
|    | General Product Advertising Marketing Weibo           | 97              | 62.96         | 39.559             | 4.017                  |

|           |  |    |        |         |         |
|-----------|--|----|--------|---------|---------|
| <b>ZF</b> | <b>Advertising Marketing Weibo with Virtual Spokesperson</b> | 3  | 426.33 | 681.732 | 393.598 |
|           | <b>General Product Advertising Marketing Weibo</b>           | 97 | 7.09   | 14.494  | 1.472   |
| <b>PL</b> | <b>Advertising Marketing Weibo with Virtual Spokesperson</b> | 3  | 210.00 | 279.807 | 161.547 |
|           | <b>General Product Advertising Marketing Weibo</b>           | 97 | 7.46   | 12.521  | 1.271   |

Table 2. Independent Sample Test Results of Valentino's Weibo Replies and Comments Interactive Data.

| Levene Variance Equivalence Test |              | Mean Equality T Test |                   |                   |                 |                           |                                    |             |
|----------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------|
| F                                | Significance | T                    | Degree of Freedom | Sig.(Double tail) | Mean Difference | Standard Error Difference | Difference 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|                                  |              |                      |                   |                   |                 |                           | Lower Limit                        | Upper Limit |
| 261.589                          | 0.000        | 12.476               | 98                | 0.000             | 622.375         | 49.886                    | 523.377                            | 721.372     |
|                                  |              | 2.038                | 2.001             | 0.178             | 622.375         | 305.390                   | -691.176                           | 1935.925    |
| 632.652                          | 0.000        | 7.265                | 98                | 0.000             | 419.241         | 57.707                    | 304.722                            | 533.759     |
|                                  |              | 1.065                | 2.000             | 0.398             | 419.241         | 393.601                   | -1274.242                          | 2112.723    |
| 413.174                          | 0.000        | 8.256                | 98                | 0.000             | 202.536         | 24.533                    | 153.852                            | 251.220     |
|                                  |              | 1.254                | 2.000             | 0.337             | 202.536         | 161.552                   | -492.482                           | 897.554     |

At present, Valentino marketing is still based on its exquisite craftsmanship and style. The promotion of virtual spokespersons is relatively lacking. Valentino has only published three promotional Weibos about virtual spokesperson noonouri in its official Weibo account. In its official Weibo account and the data of user replies under each virtual spokesperson's publicity Weibo was only about 100.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the marketing data on virtual spokespersons and ordinary Weibo published in Valentino's official Weibo, this research found the following conclusions.

Although Valentino's marketing strategies for virtual spokespersons and para-social interactions abroad are relatively complete, its social media marketing strategies are still in the development stage in our country. Valentino's promotion of virtual spokespersons on its official Weibo is relatively lacking, which is not conducive to giving full play to the advantages of virtual spokespersons and not conducive to the construction of para-social interactions between consumers and Valentino.

In order to solve the problem of inadequate promotion of virtual spokespersons, Valentino can try to create a brand virtual character that can endorse the brand and has customer Q&A services and

sales services, which can enhance the sense of interaction between Valentino virtual spokespersons and consumers to gain consumer trust, so as to better form a pseudo-social interaction relationship with them.

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