A Study on the Culture Behind the Behavior of "Grass Planting": Taking Douyin as an Example

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Abstract: This study explores how the "grass planting" mechanism on social media platforms stimulates users' consumption desire and drives purchasing behavior. Through textual sentiment analysis of comments on popular "grass planting" short videos on Douyin, combined with the theories of "consumer society" and "imaginative consumption", it is found that "grass planting" is not merely a product recommendation, but a process where opinion leaders construct ideal life scenarios through visual symbols, inducing users' imitation and self-identification. Additionally, the resonance effect of the emotional atmosphere in the comment section contributes to users' emotional consumption decisions. This study reveals the "content-emotion-identity-purchase" consumption chain in the context of social media communication, enriching the understanding of the communication mechanism of new media advertising.

1.Introduction

1.1 Background and Purpose of the Study

With the in-depth penetration of mobile Internet technology, social media has become a core field reshaping the consumption ecology. Short-video platforms represented by Douyin, with their strong interactivity and high immersion, have given rise to the new consumption-driven phenomenon of "grass planting" — the conversion path for users from "aroused interest" to "purchase behavior" has been significantly shortened through watching product recommendations shared by opinion leaders or ordinary users, making "grass planting" gradually a key communication node connecting products and consumers.

In the "consumer society" described by Baudrillard, consumption has transcended the demand for the use value of commodities to the pursuit of symbolic meaning and identity. The theory of "imaginative consumption" further reveals that modern consumers increasingly tend to construct an ideal life picture through consumption imagination. The visual and scenario-based communication characteristics of social media provide an excellent carrier for such symbolic and imaginative consumption. "Grass planting" content is no longer a simple introduction to product functions, but a perceptible ideal life scenario constructed through images, narratives, and other elements, stimulating users' emotional resonance and desire for imitation.

However, existing studies on the mechanism of "grass planting" mostly remain at the level of phenomenon description or exploration of single links (e.g., the influence of opinion leaders), lacking a systematic explanation of the deep logic behind how it promotes purchasing behavior through the linkage of content production, emotional transmission, and identity construction. Especially in the context of short videos, issues such as the role of visual symbols, the impact of emotional resonance in the comment section on consumer decision-making, and the integrity of the "content-emotion-identity-purchase" chain have not been adequately addressed in theory. This research gap renders it challenging for academics and the industry to accurately grasp the core rules of consumer guidance in the new media environment; thus, it is necessary to deeply deconstruct the operational logic of the "grass planting" mechanism.

The purpose of this study is to systematically investigate the internal logic of the "grass planting" mechanism on social media platforms in stimulating users' consumption desire and facilitating purchasing behavior, aiming to enrich the theoretical system of new media advertising communication mechanisms and provide a new analytical perspective for understanding consumption behavior in the digital era.

1.2 Literature Review

1. 2.1 Definition of Grass Planting

The term "grass planting" first emerged in various beauty forums and communities, originally referring to users sharing their product usage experiences to stimulate others' interest in and desire to purchase the product (Jiang & Chen, 2019). With the development of social media, "grass planting" has gradually evolved into a communication behavior where opinion leaders or ordinary users recommend products through content forms such as videos, live broadcasts, and graphics to guide consumption (Hu, 2020). From the perspective of communication science, grass planting is essentially an advertising campaign. According to Ni Ning's definition (Ni, 2015), advertising refers to all communication behaviors aimed at conveying information and promoting cognition, regardless of whether they are directly profit-oriented. As an emerging form of advertising, the dissemination mechanism of grass planting exhibits the following characteristics: first, the information encoding link is often packaged through life scenarios and emotional elements to enhance realism and intimacy; second, the dissemination channel relies on interpersonal relationship chains and social platforms' algorithmic recommendation systems to achieve fission-style content spread; third, its core effect is to influence consumers' psychology and drive behavioral transformation, forming a closed loop of "content-identification-consumption". Therefore, this paper defines "grass planting" as a media platform-based communication behavior that uses content forms such as videos and graphics for advertising and marketing, triggering audiences' consumption desire and prompting purchasing decisions through users' real experiences or emotional resonance. Exploring how grass planting, as a new advertising mechanism, stimulates consumer desire and drives consumers to complete purchases has become the research focus of this paper.

Advertising is dependent on media, and media evolution drives changes in advertising forms. The medium for grass planting is usually digital media, especially social media, through which advertisements are presented to stimulate consumers' desire and drive purchasing behavior, thus completing the "grass planting" process. However, media is not merely a carrier for advertisements; it deeply intervenes in and reconstructs the generation of consumer desire through its unique technical structure and communication logic. In the traditional mass media era, television, radio, and newspapers, with their one-way communication, authoritative narratives, and information scarcity, constructed a "credible" and "standardized" consumer imagination, making consumers tend to trust the brand images and product values constructed by advertisements. The emergence of digital media has expanded the spatial dimension — cyberspace, which is where grass planting behavior occurs. Cyberspace connects "content creators" and audiences through media technology; whether audiences are watching videos, reading graphics, or participating in live broadcasts, they are engaging in cyberspace interactions. The mediatization of space means that media no longer serves only as an information transmission channel, but constitutively shapes the spatial and perceptual structure of consumption. Communicators construct an aestheticized and idealized "media field" characterized by strong immersive experiences, enabling users to perceive an "imitable lifestyle" during viewing, thereby stimulating consumption desire and prompting purchasing decisions.

1.2.2 Recognition and Imitation

Opinion leaders are often the subjects of grass planting, and in the social media arena, this role is usually played by online bloggers. The concept of "opinion leader" was first proposed by Lazarsfeld et al. (1944). In their "two-step flow of communication" theory, opinion leaders are key intermediaries in information dissemination, shaping audiences' understanding of and attitudes toward issues or products through their influence. In the social media environment, opinion leaders are not only content producers but also information mediators and constructors of consumer meaning. They convey their attitudes toward products or lifestyles to audiences through speech, body language, dress style, and product usage demonstrations. This transmission is not merely informative but a process of constructing social imagination with emotionally contagious and aesthetically guiding power. Opinion leaders use their influence and voice on the platform to link products with specific lifestyles, aesthetic tastes, or social statuses, thereby providing audiences with a projection of the "ideal self".

This process can be deeply explained by Baudrillard's "consumer society" theory. In a consumer society, commodities are no longer merely tools to satisfy basic functions but symbols and signs of social identity. What consumers purchase is often not the product itself but the meaning, labels, and identity behind it. In the carefully crafted visual context of opinion leaders, a lipstick, a dress, or even a drink is embedded in a refined, beautiful, and successful life scenario, forming strong emotional attraction and value recognition. During viewing, audiences, driven by "imaginative consumption" (Baudrillard, 1998), substitute themselves into the life scenarios shaped by opinion leaders, thereby stimulating the psychological desire of "I want to be that kind of person too". Therefore, as an information dissemination medium, opinion leaders not only introduce products but also construct social meaning, convey cultural tastes, and stimulate class identity, thus powerfully activating consumers' desire mechanisms in the media field.

2.Research Methodology and Research Questions

2.1 Research Methodology

Taking Douyin as the core research field, this study adopts the quantitative research paradigm of computational communication, integrating Python crawler technology for short-video platform data collection and textual sentiment analysis based on the hfl/chinese-bert-wwm pre-trained language model to systematically explore the characteristics of audiences' emotional responses and their underlying motivations in the "grass planting" communication context. The choice of this methodology aims to reveal the logic of visual symbol construction, emotional resonance, and consumption decision-making in the grass planting mechanism through empirical data. The specific research process covers four core aspects: first, data collection and screening, focusing on widely disseminated "grass planting" short videos and their comments on Douyin to ensure samples effectively reflect the dissemination characteristics of popular grass planting content; second, text preprocessing and keyword extraction, cleaning redundant information and extracting high-weight keywords to accurately capture users' "visual recognition", "emotional resonance", and "imitation willingness" in comments; third, construction and training of a sentiment classification model, using pre-trained language model transfer learning to optimize emotion recognition accuracy, providing technical support for analyzing the correlation between emotional tendencies and consumption desire in the comment section; fourth, result output and visual analysis, intuitively presenting data patterns through word clouds, emotion distribution charts, etc., to provide empirical evidence for interpreting the operational logic of the "content-emotion-identity-purchase" chain.

The selection of Douyin for data collection is mainly based on the core concerns of the research questions: on the one hand, as a short-video platform with a large user base and high-frequency grass planting content output, Douyin's strong visualization and highly interactive communication characteristics make it a typical field for researching issues such as "opinion leaders constructing ideal life scenarios through visual symbols" and "emotional resonance in the comment section affecting consumption decisions", providing real-context samples for analyzing how the visual field triggers "imaginative consumption"; on the other hand, the comment sections of Douyin's grass planting short videos, as core spaces for users' emotional interaction and expression of consumption intentions, directly carry audiences' emotional feedback on grass planting content, cognition of commodities' symbolic value, and the trajectory of group emotional resonance, providing

key empirical materials for exploring sub-questions such as "how emotional responses transform into purchasing behavior" and "the mediating role of identity in consumption decision-making". Therefore, using Douyin as the data source not only guarantees the authenticity of the research scenario but also is an inevitable choice to accurately respond to research questions and reveal the deep logic of the grass planting mechanism.

2.1.1 Data Source and Collection Strategy

As China's most representative short-video platform, Douyin's content forms and user activity align with the communication focus of this study. To improve sample representativeness and analysis relevance, the study set the following selection criteria: videos with at least 500,000 likes, over 50,000 comments, publishers with no fewer than 2 million followers, and content explicitly involving "product recommendations" or "grass planting". A Python-written crawler program collected approximately 20,000 short-video comments meeting these conditions, forming the initial corpus.

2.1.2 Text Preprocessing and Keyword Extraction

After importing data, comments were first read using the Pandas library, and text cleaning was performed using Harvard University's stopword list to remove meaningless lexical items (e.g., " 的 ", " 了 ", " 啊 "), special symbols, URLs, and short words (fewer than two characters). The Chinese word segmentation tool jieba was used for segmentation to construct the text corpus.

On this basis, the study adopted the TF-IDF (Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency) algorithm to extract high-weight keywords reflecting core topics in comments. The TfidfVectorizer module was called with max_features=50 to extract the top 50 keywords by weight, which were analyzed by ranking. Keyword word clouds were generated using the WordCloud library to visualize audiences' primary concerns, and keywords with their TF-IDF weights were exported to an Excel file as a basis for subsequent cross-comparison in sentiment analysis.

2.1.3 Sentiment Classification Model Construction and Training

To further analyze audiences' emotional responses when watching grass planting content, this study introduced the BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers) Chinese pre-trained model hfl/chinese-bert-wwm for transfer learning. The specific process is as follows:

(1) Data Labeling and Segmentation

To provide high-quality training corpus, 600 Douyin short-video comments were manually labeled, classifying their emotional tendencies into positive (label 1), neutral (label 2), and negative (label 0), forming a multi-classification training set. After labeling, data were divided into training and validation sets using the train_test_split method at an 8:2 ratio to ensure balanced distribution of label types.

(2) Model Construction and Training Setup

Under the PyTorch framework, the BertForSequenceClassification model was loaded with its vocabulary using Huggingface's transformers library and encapsulated as a custom Dataset class. All texts were encoded using the tokenizer before input to the model, with a uniform maximum length of 128 (long texts truncated, short texts padded), generating input_ids and attention_mask.

The AdamW optimizer was used during training, with a learning rate of 2e-5, batch size of 16, and 3 training epochs. The loss function was CrossEntropyLoss. Training logs are as follows:

- Epoch 1/3: Training loss = 0.6953; Validation set accuracy = 0.7778
- Epoch 2/3: Training loss = 0.5164; Validation set accuracy = 0.7937
- Epoch 3/3: Training loss = 0.3598; Validation set accuracy = 0.7937

Model performance stabilized after the second epoch, with a final validation set accuracy of 0.7937, indicating strong emotion recognition ability in the three-classification task, effectively reflecting audiences' emotional feedback when watching grass planting content.

(3) Inference and Labeling Output

After model training, it entered inference mode to predict sentiment classifications for the crawled large-scale comment data. All comment texts were encoded by the tokenizer and input to the model, obtaining logits vectors for each comment, and the

maximum probability label was determined using argmax. Classification results were converted to Chinese labels ("positive", "neutral", "negative") via a mapping dictionary for easy understanding and counting.

Finally, sentiment analysis results were cross-analyzed with keyword data to provide empirical evidence for subsequent discussions on dimensions such as "social identity", "product impact", and "visual symbols".

2.2 Research Questions

The core research question of this study is: How does "grass planting", as a new advertising mechanism on social media platforms (taking Douyin as an example), stimulate users' consumption desire and ultimately prompt purchasing behavior through the linkage of content production, emotional transmission, and identity construction? It can be broken down into the following sub-questions:

1. How does the visual field (e.g., visual symbols, ideal life scenarios) constructed by opinion leaders through Douyin's grass planting short videos influence users' "imaginative consumption", transforming commodities from functional attributes to symbolic values carrying identity, thereby inducing users' imitation mentality and consumption desire?

2. How does the emotional atmosphere in the comment section of Douyin's grass planting short videos form a resonance effect? What role does this resonance effect play in transforming users from "emotional resonance" to "emotional consumption decisions"?

3. How does the "content production-emotional transmission-identity-purchase behavior" chain operate in Douyin's grass planting mechanism? What is the linkage logic and intermediary mechanism between each link?

These questions aim to systematically analyze the deep logic of the grass planting mechanism in stimulating consumption desire and facilitating purchasing behavior, revealing the core laws of new advertising communication in the social media context.

3.Research Conclusion

3.1 Visual Field: The Ideal Self in Commodities

Based on TF-IDF keyword analysis of 10,000 user comments, this study found that the frequency weights of words such as "good-looking", "pretty", "gentle", "fairy-like", "ambience", "wearable", and "same style" accounted for 40% of the total weights. These words not only reflect users' evaluations of the products themselves but, more importantly, reveal the deep perception and emotional mechanisms experienced by audiences during short-video viewing. In other words, grass planting behavior occurs not based on cognition of products' rational functional attributes but through a process of "imaginative consumption" (Belk, 1990) evoked by multimodal elements such as images, language, and music in the visual field constructed by opinion leaders. Commodities thus become visual symbols carrying audiences' expectations and desires for self-image reconstruction.

The term "imaginative consumption" was first proposed by Russell Belk (1990), who pointed out that when facing products, consumers not only consider their functions and utility but also project themselves into certain idealized situations through product-constructed symbols to achieve identity construction and compensation. Jean Baudrillard (1981) further noted that in modern consumer societies, objects have long transcended their use value to become collections of "symbolic value", and what consumers purchase is not the object itself but the meaning behind the commodity. The grass planting mechanism embodies this logic of consumer culture. In grass planting short videos, opinion leaders (KOLs) construct virtual yet highly realistic "desirable life scenarios" through the combination of multiple visual elements such as dress, makeup, background music, filters, and scenery. This scenario is not a mere reproduction of reality but an aesthetically modified, idealized slice of lifestyle, prompting viewers to associate, "I can be like her/him if I wear/use this".

The beauty, aesthetic taste, and lifestyle of opinion leaders are repeatedly emphasized through images, becoming a "visual paradigm" to be recognized and followed, inducing viewers to compare themselves with them and thus generating motives for imitation, following, and even consumption. In other words, opinion leaders not only display products but also shape an "ideal viewing state": one should have this dress style, this taste, and this feeling to be recognized as an "ideal woman/man". This is a typical exercise of "aesthetic power", where commodities become symbolic media leading to ideal identities.

Figure 1:keyword type and meaning

Keyword Type	Meaning	Keyword Examples
Aesthetic Recognition Type	Express recognition of appearance or temperament, with the desire to "become like the blogger"	Good looking, pretty, beautiful, gentle, cute,fairy like
Scene Immersion-Type	Express immersion in and desire to imitate scene/visual symbols	Atmosphere, moody, first-day, photo taking feeling
Imitation Driven Type	Express motivation to imitate the opinion leader's lifestyle	Same style, outfit matching, hairpin, make-up, share

Figure 2:keyword and weight

Keyword	Weight
Eyelash curler	434.9246
Colored contact lenses	280.9453
Good looking	202.5652
Brand	197.1215
Sister	161.0878
Same style	160.6286
Grass planting	152.9465
Cheap	149.6338
Wife	124.7371
Eyelash mascara	116.6257
Glossy	103.3146
Minute	101.1721
Blush	100.6585
moody	95.94521
First time	90.86067
Link	87.71332

3.2 Social Resonance: Group Emotional Drive

In the social media context, grass planting has long transcended traditional product recommendations, essentially representing a highly emotional expression of consumption behavior. Emotions are not generated independently by individuals but gradually emerge and spread in the emotional atmosphere co-constructed by multiple communication subjects on social platforms (bloggers, comment section users, and platform algorithms), ultimately driving users' consumption decisions. This process reflects the essential attribute of grass planting as a form of "emotional consumption".

First, from a theoretical perspective, emotional consumption emphasizes that consumer behavior is significantly influenced by subjective emotional states, especially in an emotionally guided media environment (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

On short-video platforms, such emotions do not exist in isolation; instead, sensory stimulation from platform content and emotional co-construction in the comment section together form the so-called "affective atmosphere". Ahmed (2004) pointed out that emotions are transmitted and contagious in social space through visual, verbal, and interactive means, constituting a "feeling in motion" rather than merely internal psychological experiences. This view applies to visual platforms like Douyin, where emotions are stimulated by video content elements such as filters, BGM, speech speed, and wording, then amplified by user interactions in the comment section, forming a highly participatory emotional space.

This study conducted LDA theme clustering on 10,000 comment texts from the Douyin platform, and the results showed that several high-frequency themes contained numerous words with strong emotional overtones. For example, keywords in Theme 1 such as "heart gesture", "recommend", "love watching", and "thank you" reflect positive emotional flows among users; Theme 5 includes words like "sobbing uncontrollably" and "finally", which carry obvious expressions of emotional impact with high empathy and contagiousness; exclamatory phrases in Theme 9 such as "ahhh", "works well", "surprise", and "must-have" reflect the irrational tendency in users' emotional expression. These high-frequency emotional words mostly originate from the comment section rather than the original video content, suggesting that emotional spread and amplification stem from "community building" among users rather than one-way influence dissemination by bloggers.

Second, the comment section plays an important "de-advertising" role in grass planting video dissemination, facilitating the smooth occurrence of emotional consumption. Unlike traditional advertisements, grass planting videos do not aim to explicitly sell products but package them with "real experiences", guiding users to shift from identity projection onto bloggers to focusing on the products themselves. Users in the comment section form a communication network similar to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) through language such as "I bought it too", "it really works", and "sisters, punch in", etc. This discourse system, characterized by "de-authorization", "populism", and "non-commercialization", is more likely to stimulate consumers' emotional recognition and trust (Kozinets et al., 2010). In the collected video comments, multiple themes (e.g., "link", "dear", "color code", "want" in Theme 8) show spontaneous interactive purchase cues between users, indicating that consumer behavior is not driven solely by bloggers but by emotional mobilization in the "social interaction" process within the comment section.

Further sentiment analysis also confirmed the obvious emotional bias in the comment section. Based on a corpus of 600 manually labeled comments, this study fine-tuned the Chinese pre-trained model "hfl/chinese-bert-wwm" to construct a three-classification sentiment prediction model, which achieved a validation set accuracy of 0.7937, indicating strong emotion recognition ability. When applied to actual comments, the model showed that positive emotional comments accounted for 63.1%, significantly higher than negative comments (15.7%) and neutral comments (21.2%), which is highly consistent with the propagation logic of grass planting as a means to stimulate purchase desire. Notably, in videos with high comment activity, intensive positive emotional expressions were not only unchallenged but also copied and imitated by other users, demonstrating the aggregation effect of an "emotional tide" — when users' emotions are aroused, they tend to "recognize the product" emotionally rather than rationally analyze its functions and cost-effectiveness.

From the perspective of communication mechanisms, the emotional path of grass planting shows a spiral evolution: "visual sensory arousal → emotional resonance generation → group mobilization → purchase behavior". Users are initially moved by bloggers' content, but it is the emotional feedback from numerous users in the comment section that ultimately motivates action. This mechanism aligns with Le Bon's (1895) group psychology theory — in a group context, individual rational judgment gives way to emotional consensus, and social platforms accelerate this process.

Figure 3:theme and keyword

Theme No.	Keywords
Theme 1	Bi Xin (heart gesture) | Recommend | Love watching | Grass planting | Ma Sichun | So many | Penneage | Annual | Thank you | Cosmetics
Theme 2	Feel | Wife | Envy | Speak | So beautiful | I dare | Gentle | One day | Eyeliner | Sleep
Theme 3	Eyelash curler | Shimmering | Hug | Genuine | yu | Look | Beg | Love | Seen | shrmeli

Theme No.	Keywords
Theme 4	Like | Colored contact lenses | Pig head (affectionate) | Brand | Hair color | Japan | Naughty | I come | Wonderful | Sister
Theme 5	Sob uncontrollably | Finally | moody | Attraction | Black glue | Smile | Wait until | Polite | Not until | Not lost
Theme 6	Know | Voice | Eyelash mascara | Seems | Teacher | Eyelash | Applaud | Good | Brand | Originally
Theme 7	Rose | Beauty | Observe | Secretly | Pretty | Suitable | Sunscreen | Today | Skirt | Same question
Theme 8	Link | Fly | Color number | Want | Mom (affectionate) | Series | Before | Find | Cushion | Brand
Theme 9	Ahhh | My home | Useful | Eye | Color | Whether | Surprise | Comment | Won't | Must
Theme 10	Represent | Blush | That boy | Already | Clio (brand) | Really | Cute | Whimper | Eat | Out of stock

In summary, the underlying logic of grass planting as a consumption phenomenon is not merely about content quality or bloggers' influence but, more critically, its emotional construction mechanism. Under the influence of multiple communication subjects and the interactive atmosphere of social platforms, consumers' emotions are stimulated, amplified, and ultimately coalesce into purchase motives. Grass planting is not a calm, rational decision but a resonant consumption result driven by emotional atmosphere. Therefore, grass planting behavior can be understood as a typical expression of emotional consumption in digital space.

4.Conclusion

From the perspectives of visual culture and communication mechanisms, this study explores how "grass planting", as an emerging advertising form, stimulates consumption desire and drives purchase behavior through social media platforms. Through sentiment analysis and keyword extraction of comments on Douyin's grass planting short videos, it is found that in the aestheticized media field carefully constructed by opinion leaders, audiences' consumption behavior is no longer based on products' rational functions but on imagination and identification with the "ideal life picture". In this process, commodities are gradually symbolized, endowed with identity labels, lifestyles, and social values, becoming media for self-expression and identity construction.

Additionally, the consumption impulse triggered by grass planting content is highly emotional. Under the combined influence of platform algorithms, visual stimuli, and comment interactions, consumers generate instant emotional responses during viewing and resonance, then transform these responses into action willingness, reflecting the key characteristics of "emotional consumption". This path from viewing to imitation, and from recognition to purchase reveals the high integration of emotional communication and commodity communication on modern social platforms, as well as how media technology deeply intervenes in daily life and consumption logic.

Overall, grass planting is not a simple information transmission or product introduction behavior but a communication phenomenon integrating visual coding, emotional triggering, and social identity mechanisms. With the immersion and interactivity of digital media, it constructs an imaginary "worth owning" object in users' minds, completing the closed loop from content production to consumption decision-making. Future research can further expand into user group behavior tracking, cross-platform communication comparison, and analysis of how algorithms shape consumption preferences to more comprehensively understand new trends in digital-era consumption behavior.

Funding

Conflict of Interests

Reference

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