

The Impact of the Influencer Economy on Brand Promotion Effectiveness in the Digital Marketing Environment: A Case Study of MrBeast's Feastables Chocolate

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Abstract. With the quick growth of social media, influencer-owned DTC brands have emerged as a new business form, which differs from the traditional influencer who endorses third-party brands. Taking MrBeast's Feastables Chocolate as a single case, based on Source Credibility Theory and Parasocial Interaction Theory, and relying on multiple public secondary data sources, including the official Feastables website, open-access YouTube videos and social-media public metrics, industry analysis reports, and mainstream news-media coverage, to explore the brand promotion mechanism, performance, benefit, and potential risks of influencer-owned DTC brands. The results show that influencers' credibility and parasocial emotional role can help brands achieve remarkable cold-start brand awareness in beginner. However, this IP transfer also faces a lot of risks, such as influencer reputation, which means some negative events involving an influencer will directly affect the brand's reputation, over-reliance on personal IP, and so on, and thus lead to the brand being unable to transform or extend.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Social media, Influencer Economy, MrBeast, Feastables chocolate

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

In the digital era, social media platforms grow faster and faster; the effect of conventional advertising decreases. Enterprises are willing to put more budget into influencer marketing, which means using online celebrities through platforms such as social media to promote and sell goods or services.

Moreover, many of the online celebrities no longer cooperate with other enterprises; they will use their own traffic and a strong fan base to build their own brand, leveraging the trust of their fans and parasocial interactions to transform their online fans into real consumers of physical consumer goods.

However, online celebrities will not always maintain their fans and traffic; they might quickly lose their fans and traffic due to matters such as tax evasion, which poses a huge challenge to their

products. This paper takes Feastables Chocolate, founded by YouTube influencer MrBeast, as a case to explore the Impact of the influencer economy on brand promotion effects in the Digital Marketing Environment.

1.2. Research significance

1.2.1. Theoretical significance

Most existing studies have focused on the effectiveness of online celebrities who has take cooperation with third-party brands, but have insufficiently explored the promotion of online celebrities' own consumer brands. This study takes Feastables as a case to analyze the IP transformation path of online celebrities into their own brands, and also explores the evidence of how the online celebrity economy drives brand promotion.

1.2.2. Practical significance

Summarizing the logic of top-stream influencers who establish their own brands, this provides practical references and risk warnings for influencers who want to commercialize their IPs, and also provides a way to optimize traditional brands' marketing strategies. Moreover, it also encourages start-ups to utilize influencer resources to promote their own brands and build their brand reputations.

1.3. Research content and methods

This paper will examine the theories of influencer marketing and brand promotion effectiveness within the context of digital marketing. Using case analysis to explore three dimensions- Influencer Marketing and Brand Communication, Influencer Credibility and Consumer Trust, and Influencer Marketing and Brand Promotion- to analyze the role of the influencer economy in Feastables' brand promotion. Additionally, a literature review is used to summarize the theoretical perspectives on the influencer economy, digital marketing, and brand promotion to further analyze Feastables' brand promotion. This paper is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews related literature and theories. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology. Chapter 4 conducts case analysis of Feastables. Chapter 5 discusses findings. Chapter 6 summarizes conclusions, limitations, and future directions.

2. Literature review and theoretical foundation

2.1. Key concepts

2.1.1. Digital marketing

The core definition is a new marketing model for brand promotion that uses digital technology and algorithms as its platform, achieving precise reach, personalized content, and user interaction.

Social media, search engines, and brand promotion are the three main points of digital marketing; among them, social media is the core area for communication between brands and users, and the influencer economy is currently the core area of growth.

The influencer economy is a derivative idea of digital marketing that has developed significantly. The influencer economy mainly focuses on the role of influencers in promoting products within the digital marketing environment.

2.1.2. Influencer marketing

The core definition is a marketing model that uses social media creators as the platform, utilizes their fan base, content creation ability, and trust relationships to promote products to the audience, and is an important part of digital marketing.

Currently, there are two mainstream models: Third-party brand endorsement: Influencers collaborate with companies to promote their products and services, which is the most common model at present; Influencer-owned DTC (Direct-to-Consumer) brand: Influencers use their personal IP to create their own brands and directly achieve traffic monetization, which is an emerging upgraded model in recent years. Existing research mostly focuses on the first model, while this study focuses on the second one - the promotion effect and mechanism of top influencer-owned brands.

2.1.3. Brand promotion effect

The core definition is the comprehensive outcomes achieved by a brand through marketing activities in the market, which is not a single sales aspect, but a multifaceted, comprehensive manifestation.

Three core aspects:

- Brand awareness: Market recognition, exposure breadth;
- User engagement: Community interaction, content activity level;
- Brand loyalty and brand image: Repurchase intention, brand reputation.

This study starts from the above three aspects and systematically assesses the brand promotion effect of MrBeast's influencer economy on Feastables chocolate.

2.2. Literature review

2.2.1. Influencer marketing and brand communication

Wu Tongtong proposed a three-dimensional framework of "Technology - Content - People": AI algorithm-based precise push, UGC (User-Generated Content) for user participation enhancement, and the quasi-social relationship between influencers and fans for strengthening trust. These three elements jointly drive brand communication innovation [1].

In the context of short-video platforms, the effect of content placement on social media is significantly better than that of traditional advertising; the mimic reality assessment of live-streaming combined with timely discounts can further reduce users' resistance to advertisements and stimulate them to become real consumers [2].

Most of the existing research focuses on influencers acting as brand endorsers for third-party platforms. There is a lack of systematic case studies on the creation of their own consumer brands by influencers themselves, as well as the transformation of their personal IP into brand assets. Particularly, there is a scarcity of deep research on top creators establishing their own brands.

2.2.2. Influencer credibility and consumer trust

Source credibility is the core foundation for the effectiveness of influencer marketing; the attractiveness, credibility, and interactivity of influencers are the three core elements that affect the acceptance of the audience [1].

Trust plays a significant role in the characteristics of influencers and consumer purchases; influencers usually establish consumer trust first, and then this trust is transformed into a purchase intention. This mechanism has been verified in various categories such as cosmetics [3].

Trust dimensions: professional ability, sincerity and integrity, and emotional intimacy. These three elements jointly build the trust that fans have in influencers.

Most of the existing research is based on the "celebrity endorsing third-party products"; for the DTC (Direct to Consumer) brand of celebrities themselves, there is insufficient deep analysis of how "fans' personal trust in the celebrity" can be transformed into "organizational trust in the brand".

2.2.3. Influencer marketing and brand promotion effect

Digital marketing has a significant positive impact on brand awareness, sales conversion, and user engagement. Influencer marketing is one of the channels with the highest ROI [4]. The selection of suitable influencers can quickly enhance brand awareness and consumer trust, but the effectiveness depends on the compatibility between the type of influencer and the brand positioning [5].

Although influencer marketing can quickly boost sales in the short term, the long-term brand value ultimately depends on the product itself; popularity and heat do not equal long-term brand assets.

Most existing studies focus on the short-term sales conversion aspect but lack research on long-term promotion effects such as consumer loyalty.

2.3. Theoretical foundation

2.3.1. Source credibility theory

Proposed by Hovland and his colleagues, Source Credibility Theory explains that the persuasive effect of information depends on the credibility of the information source, mainly including three core aspects: attractiveness, credibility, and expertise. If audiences regard the information source as trustworthy and appealing, they are more willing to accept the viewpoints and trust them [6].

In the field of influencer marketing, social media influencers act as important information sources for product recommendations. Consumers will judge whether to accept promotional content according to influencers' perceived reliability, personal charm, and professional performance. High-credibility influencers can reduce audiences' sense of resistance.

The high personal credibility accumulated by MrBeast through long-term public benefit orientation is transferred from the influencer himself to his self-owned DTC brand Feastables. It lays a trust foundation for consumers to accept the brand's products and make it successful.

2.3.2. Parasocial interaction theory

Put forward by Horton and Wohl, Parasocial Interaction Theory describes the one-sided emotional bond formed between media audiences and media figures. Although there is no real-time social communication, audiences will generate intimacy, a sense of familiarity with media personalities after long-term watching of their content, just like interpersonal relationships in real life [1].

In influencer-marketing practice, continuous content output, comment replies, and interactive activities build parasocial interactions between influencers and their fans. Such emotional connection can expand onto products and brands recommended, enhancing emotional awareness toward brands.

In the case of Feastables, MrBeast establishes close parasocial relationships with massive YouTube followers via entertaining, challenge-style videos. Therefore, it promoted the promotion of Feastables.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Case study method

This study employed the single case study method to deeply explore "how the Influencer economy affects the promotional effect of the brands owned by influencers". Compared to quantitative research, which focuses on the relationships between variables and outcomes, the case study method is better suited to understand the mechanisms and logic behind a single phenomenon, and to better understand the process of the transfer of the individual IP of influencers to physical brands.

MrBeast is the top YouTube creator globally, and Feastables is the DTC consumer goods brand created by him. It is a typical example of internet celebrities moving from "third-party endorsement" to "owned brands", with strong representativeness.

3.2. Secondary data collection and analysis

This study relies entirely on publicly-available secondary data without questionnaires, interviews, or other primary-data collection. The data sources consist of the official Feastables website, open-access YouTube videos and social-media public metrics, industry analysis reports, and mainstream news-media coverage.

To improve the reliability of qualitative case analysis. Drawing on Source Credibility Theory and Parasocial Interaction Theory as the analytical lens. Collected materials around four core aspects to analyze: trust-transfer effect, entertainment value, IP transfer, and native promotion. Since internal confidential sales data is inaccessible, this research focuses on public data rather than precise internal operational figures.

4. Case analysis and results (MrBeast's Feastables chocolate)

4.1. Overview of the case

4.1.1. Information about top youtube influencer mrbeast

Jimmy Donaldson (known online as MrBeast) is a leading global YouTube creator. In June 2026, he became the first individual creator to reach over 50 million subscribers all around the world. His YouTube channel has over 510 million subscribers, and his total followers exceed 900 million across all platforms. There are a large number of repeat users on different platforms; the actual independent audience is lower than this figure. His core content includes high-cost challenge videos, large-scale charity, and real experiments. Through these videos, a "generous, genuine, and highly invested" image was created, accumulating strong credibility and shaping popularity and personal charm worldwide.

Corresponding to the research conclusion of KO JUNSIK (2024): Credibility and entertainment value are the two strongest characteristics influencing consumers' purchase intentions. MrBeast happens to possess both of these traits [7].

By launching its own brand "Feastables" through Beast Industries, the company successfully transferred its IP and became a typical representative of the DTC model in the influencer economy.

4.1.2. The background of the Feastables chocolate brand

In 2022, the DTC chocolate brand "Feastables" was launched by Beast Industries. MrBeast has been deeply involved in the product formula, packaging design, and brand operation, rather than just being an endorsement.

It hardly invests in traditional offline advertisements. The core initial traffic comes totally from MrBeast's own social media, and it is a typical influencer DTC brand.

4.2. The effect of influencer on brand promotion

4.2.1. Trust transfer effect

Based on the Source Credibility Theory, MrBeast's personal trust accumulated through years of charity and real challenge videos was directly transferred to the Feastables brand. Compared to third-party endorsements, fans would directly assume, "This is his own brand, and he himself must approve of the quality", reducing consumers' doubts about Feastables.

This phenomenon also verifies and confirms the KAPINGA (2024) path of "credibility → trust → purchase intention" [3].

4.2.2. Entertainment value

Based on the Parasocial Interaction Theory. Fans and influencers form quasi-social emotional connections through long-term content consumption; this reduces consumers' psychological resistance to advertisements and enables brand information to be naturally accepted. Feastables rarely conducts independent traditional advertisements; instead, they are all integrated into MrBeast's regular video challenges and giveaways, and naturally appear as plot props.

Highly entertaining videos are watched in their entirety, with users engaging in interactive comments or sharing the videos with friends, which completes the natural secondary dissemination. This precisely corresponds to the conclusion of KO JUNSIK (2024) - entertainment value is the second-largest factor influencing purchase intentions, second only to credibility [7].

4.3. Performance of Feastables' brand promotion effect

4.3.1. Brand awareness (exact data)

Due to the lack of precise data for non-listed enterprises, this section conducts an objective assessment of Feastables based on publicly available data from the platform and third-party industry reports. As of the public observation point, the cumulative views of content related to Feastables on the YouTube platform have exceeded 4.3 billion, and the views of Feastables-themed videos have reached several billion. In terms of social media accounts, the official TikTok account of Feastables has attracted over 4.5 million followers. According to publicly reported industry media, the sales of Feastables' chocolate products in the first week of its launch exceeded 10 million US dollars; this data is from publicly available industry reports. In summary, the publicly observable data shows that Feastables, relying on MrBeast, completed the transformation from 0 to high popularity within a short period of time. However, it should be noted that the high popularity of Feastables is highly tied to the individual IP, and its long-term existence is uncertain.

4.3.2. Comparison with different brands

Compared with traditional chocolate candy brands, Feastables achieved faster customer acquisition by relying on the influencer's own traffic. While traditional brands build consumers' brand awareness through TV advertisements, Feastables achieved a 90% brand recognition rate among American Gen Z in a short period of time and reached \$10 million in sales in the first week. This indicates that social media traffic can significantly shorten the time for consumers to establish brand awareness. However, traditional brands have a mature supply chain and nationwide offline retail coverage, which are exactly what Feastables currently lacks. Moreover, the early brand value of Feastables was highly dependent on MrBeast's personal IP rather than the brand itself, which is consistent with the research findings: the compatibility between high-impact figures and the brand can accelerate early recognition, but it may also bring risks of brand personality binding [8].

However, compared with traditional DTC food brands, Feastables had significantly lower customer acquisition costs and higher user engagement.

4.3.3. Stable formation of brand loyalty

Initially, the users who came from MrBeast's fans were attracted by MrBeast's parasocial emotional ties and were willing to try and support. However, brand loyalty still relied on the product itself.

Fans could only support the first purchase, while brand loyalty always depended on the product's taste, cost-effectiveness, etc. If the product quality wasn't good enough, it could not support user to repeat purchases.

This corresponds to the viewpoint that "brand loyalty is jointly determined by brand reputation and product quality" [9].

4.4. Potential risks

The brand is deeply linked to the founder. Negative events of MrBeast's will directly affect the Feastables brand itself, causing a negative impact on its brand's reputation. This corresponds to the Source Credibility Theory - when the source credibility collapses, trust in the brand will also collapse at the same time.

Furthermore, the dissemination of the brand relies on MrBeast's personal content output; if the creator reduces updates or exits, the brand's traffic will directly decrease.

The promotion of Feastables relies on social media platforms such as YouTube; without stable channels independent of third-party platforms like offline retail, traffic control is not in the hands of the brand but in the platform algorithms.

5. Discussion

5.1. Existing research conclusions

In this case, the source credibility theory and the Parasocial Interaction Theory are reflected. Fans establish trust and Parasocial emotional relationships with Mr Beast based on their long-term viewing of his videos, and then transfer this trust to the brand. However, most of these theories focus on online celebrities endorsing third-party brands, while in the self-owned DTC model, the path for trust transfer is shorter.

5.2. Extended findings

In the conventional model of influencer endorsement, fans can distinguish between the "influencer themselves" and the "third-party company being endorsed", and there is a certain distance in terms of trust; but under the DTC model of influencers, the influencer becomes the founder, and personal trust and traffic can be more directly transferred to the brand. However, at the same time, risks are also magnified. The DTC brand model causes the brand to be highly bound to the creator, making it difficult for the brand to extend beyond the influencer image. Previous literature has focused more on the benefits brought by influencers to the brand and has discussed less about the "long-term risks of the binding" [10].

5.3. Practical effect for brand marketing

For online content creators who plan to establish themselves in DTC and traditional companies that want to collaborate with online influencers, the cold start stage can fully use source credibility and the parasocial relationship with fans to reduce costs and accumulate customers. However, the short-term traffic advantages do not equal long-term accumulation. Product quality is always the foundation.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Main research conclusions

This study takes MrBeast's Feastables chocolate as an example, based on the source credibility theory and the quasi-social interaction theory, to explore the brand promotion mechanism, effect, and risks of the DTC brand of online celebrities. First, the credibility of the online celebrity and the quasi-social emotional relationship established with the fans enable the self-owned brand of the online celebrity to develop rapidly in the cold start stage. Second, compared with the celebrity endorsing a third-party brand, the DTC model of the celebrity enables the transfer of fan trust to occur faster and more credibly. At the same time, the high binding of the IP also brings potential risks. Third, short-term traffic and high popularity cannot achieve long-term brand loyalty; product quality is the foundation of a long-term brand. Fourth, the DTC model of online celebrities faces risks such as celebrity reputation risks and excessive reliance on personal IP, becoming risks for brand development.

6.2. Research limitations

This article only selects the DTC brand of MrBeast, a globally renowned YouTube influencer, as the case study. The sample of this case is limited, and the traffic and fan base of the top influencers are something that most creators do not possess. Moreover, all the research is based on public secondary data and platform public information. A non-listed company has no way to obtain internal information. Also, Feastables has a relatively short establishment time and lacks long-term tracking.

6.3. Future research directions

Based on the limitations of this study, there are some future research directions. First, more case studies can help better understand the different of promotion mechanisms of the DTC model of online influencers at different fan levels, different types, and different regions. Second, research can

be carried out by combining primary data such as questionnaires and interviews to overcome the limitations of secondary data. Third, the two business models of online influencers endorsing third-party brands and those with their own DTC can be further compared, and the differences in communication effects and risks between the two can be systematically analyzed.

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