

Research on the Influence Path of Humorous Advertisement Types on Customer Engagement

-- Based on Interpretive Level Theory

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Abstract: Customer Engagement has become an increasingly popular topic in recent years. Higher customer engagement implies stronger brand power and is a key factor for businesses to capture market share. In the current trend of short video marketing, more and more brands are incorporating humor into their advertising campaigns. Therefore, it is important to explore the mechanisms of customer engagement formation under humorous scenarios to validate marketing practices. This study discusses the formation mechanism of customer engagement in humorous advertising contexts through three experiments. The research found that humorous advertisements promote the formation of customer engagement by reducing the psychological distance between the brand and the customer. Additionally, brand strength and perceived value play moderating roles in the paths from humorous advertising to psychological distance and from psychological distance to customer engagement, respectively. This study enriches the understanding of the formation mechanism of customer engagement in the context of content and these findings will help advertising practitioners better understand and utilize humor advertisements to improve customer engagement.

Keywords: Customer engagement, Humorous advertising, Psychological distance.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of short video social media in recent years and the profound impact of the pandemic on people's lifestyles, short videos have become one of the main ways for people to pass the time and relax, attracting a vast number of users. According to the 51st Statistical Report on the Development of Internet in China released by CNNIC, as of December 2022, the number of online video users (including short videos) in China reached 1.031 billion, accounting for 96.5% of the total internet users; among them, the number of short video users was 1.012 billion, accounting for 94.8% of the total internet users.

Short videos have multiple advantages in content marketing, including low creation thresholds, low marketing costs, high information carrying capacity, viral dissemination, and interactive fan engagement. As a result, various enterprises have begun to produce short video advertisements to market their brands or products. With the rise of short video platforms and the increasing demand for light and entertaining content, humorous advertisements in the form of short videos have become an important means of attracting user attention and enhancing dissemination. Their ability to capture user attention, improve memorability, enhance sharing and spreadability, and strengthen brand image has made them a trend in video content marketing.

Humorous advertising is a form of advertising that uses humor elements and techniques to attract consumer attention and convey advertising messages. It employs humorous language, plots, images, or sound effects, as well as funny performances and creative methods to make advertisements more engaging and entertaining. Humorous advertisements have a significant impact on consumer behavior. Research by Huang Minxue et al. (2017) found that self-deprecating celebrity endorsement ads can enhance product information and subsequently strengthen consumer word-of-mouth recommendations for practical products. Chen Lianfang and

Huang Dan (2022) discovered that negative humorous advertisements have a positive impact on consumer brand preferences.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Customer Engagement

The concept of customer engagement was first introduced in 2005 and refers to the degree to which customers exhibit their engagement through various means, such as behavioral, cognitive, and emotional expressions, when establishing a relationship with an organization. It is a comprehensive concept that encompasses psychological and behavioral dimensions. Customer engagement represents an intrinsic psychological and behavioral investment, significantly influencing the relationship and attitudes between consumers and brands, as well as consumer behavior.

In the context of social media, current academic research on customer engagement mainly explores four perspectives: behavior, psychology, process, and interaction. Social media, especially short video platforms, have become an essential part of people's daily leisure and entertainment lives. Features such as likes, comments, and shares greatly increase the interaction opportunities between viewers and content creators. A high level of customer engagement can yield positive outcomes for businesses, such as increased brand loyalty, higher purchase intentions, and enhanced word-of-mouth. Therefore, understanding how to enhance the engagement between brands and customers is a topic worthy of research.

According to Hollebeck, customer engagement refers to the gradual formation of positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses during the interaction and communication between customers and enterprises or brands. This engagement can be understood and described from both psychological and behavioral perspectives. Most academic research on customer engagement considers it to be composed

of these two dimensions. This paper will categorize customer engagement into two dimensions: emotional engagement and behavioral engagement. Emotional engagement primarily refers to the emotional connection between customers and brands, while behavioral engagement refers to actions taken by customers beyond their roles, such as providing feedback on products or services, responding to company initiatives, participating in product development and design, posting product reviews online, and making recommendations.

2.2. Humorous Advertising

Humor is an expression of emotion or attitude conveyed in a witty, amusing, or funny manner. In advertising, humor is seen as a manifestation of intelligence; it not only highlights product features but also possesses artistic quality and emotional appeal, helping to relieve consumer psychological stress. Research has found that positive humorous advertisements can influence audience brand attitudes and purchasing decisions by providing positive appeals. Conversely, negative humorous advertisements, by actively exposing a product's shortcomings, can reduce the psychological distance between the brand and consumers, thus enhancing the effectiveness of the advertisement and improving consumers' brand attitudes.

Given the massive user base of short video platforms, which are characterized by their close connection to everyday life and the unique ability for users to express their thoughts through capturing and sharing short videos, these platforms are ideal vehicles for humorous advertising. The grounded nature of short video apps is likely to facilitate a closer psychological connection between consumers and brands through humorous advertising.

Therefore, it raises a significant issue worth exploring: how does humorous advertising influence the emotional dimension of customer engagement with brands? Specifically, does it affect the degree of emotional connection consumers feel toward brands, and if so, how does this influence manifest? Exploring these questions can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of humorous advertising in enhancing customer-brand relationships.

2.3. Psychological Distance

Psychological distance is a subjective concept that describes an individual's perception of how close or far away an event is from a reference point. It is a multidimensional concept composed of four dimensions: temporal distance, social distance, spatial distance, and hypothetical distance. Temporal distance refers to the perceived proximity of an event occurring in time relative to the present; social distance pertains to an individual's perception of the closeness of their relationship with an object, such as the difference between acquaintances and strangers; spatial distance involves the perception of the geographical proximity of an object, distinguishing between nearby and distant locations; and hypothetical distance relates to the perceived likelihood of an event occurring.

Psychological distance is closely linked to consumer behavior. Research by Dhar and Kim (2007) indicated that the temporal dimension of psychological distance influences consumers' pre-purchase product evaluations, subsequently affecting their purchase intentions. In the marketing field, psychological distance is often used to describe the perceived distance between individuals and brands. Zhou Fei and Sha Zhenquan (2017) found that brand personification positively

impacts the reduction of psychological distance between brands and consumers.

From the literature reviewed, it is evident that brands can enhance consumer behavior and emotional engagement by reducing the psychological distance between themselves and consumers. Customer engagement represents a stronger relational bond between brands and consumers, reflecting the comprehensive manifestation of consumers' behaviors and emotions toward the brand. Therefore, psychological distance is closely related to customer engagement. By decreasing cognitive and emotional distances and adjusting corresponding marketing strategies and communication methods, brands can strengthen their cognitive and emotional connections with customers, thereby facilitating the formation and development of customer engagement. However, there has yet to be any academic research examining the impact of psychological distance on customer engagement.

3. Theoretical Foundation and Hypothesis Development

The Construal Level Theory (CLT) was first proposed by Liberman and Trope in 1998. This theory posits that an individual's psychological representation of an event determines their response to that event. CLT evolved from the Temporal Construal Theory (TCLT), which suggests that people approach problem-solving differently depending on the temporal context of an event. High-level construal corresponds to more abstract representations that do not rely on specific contextual information, focusing instead on the core and decisive features of an event. In contrast, low-level construal is associated with more concrete representations that depend on specific background information, are not goal-directed, and are more complex and non-schematic, encompassing the particular attributes of an event.

Construal Level Theory provides a framework for understanding how psychological distance influences cognition and behavior, helping us comprehend why individuals exhibit different thought patterns and behavioral tendencies when faced with events at varying psychological distances.

Therefore, this study is grounded in the model of Construal Level Theory to explore the impact mechanism of humorous advertisement types on customer engagement. By examining how different types of humorous advertisements affect the psychological distance between consumers and brands, we can gain insights into how these advertisements influence customer engagement and emotional connections with brands. This exploration will lead to the development of specific hypotheses regarding the relationship between humorous advertising, psychological distance, and customer engagement.

3.1. The Impact of Humorous Advertising on Customer Engagement

In recent years, humor has become a significant element in video advertising. In the marketing field, Eisend (2018) studied the persuasive effects of different types of humorous appeals in advertisements and their impact on brand attitudes. He found that humor can attract consumer interest and resonance by eliciting laughter and positive emotions, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of advertisements. Chan and Lowe (2020) examined how individuals with varying

response traits react differently to brands in humorous contexts, revealing that individuals with different levels of resistance exhibit varied brand responses in humorous situations.

Humorous advertising has become a popular tool for brands to promote their products. From an emotional perspective, humor can enhance persuasiveness, improve advertising attitudes, and increase consumer engagement. Currently, the academic community generally categorizes humorous advertisements into two types: positive and negative. Positive humorous advertisements influence audience brand attitudes and purchase decisions by providing uplifting and affirmative appeals. In contrast, negative humorous advertisements affect consumer attitudes and behaviors by employing self-deprecating humor to highlight the brand's shortcomings.

Humorous advertisements represent a prevailing trend in brand video creation today. By using humor, advertisements can easily communicate with consumers, creating a friendly and approachable atmosphere. Customer engagement, on the other hand, symbolizes the comprehensive emotional and behavioral bond between brands and consumers. Humorous advertising can influence consumer attitudes and behaviors toward brands, and this emotional and behavioral influence is precisely what reflects the degree of customer engagement. Therefore, both positive and negative forms of humorous advertising impact the customer engagement between brands and consumers. Based on this understanding, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Humorous advertising positively influences customer engagement.

H1a: Positive humorous advertising has a positive impact on customer engagement.

H1b: Negative humorous advertising has a positive impact on customer engagement.

3.2. The Mediating Role of Psychological Distance

Psychological distance, developed from the Construal Level Theory, refers to an individual's subjective perception of how close or far an object is to themselves. Research by Zhou Meihua et al. (2015) found that consumer trust tends to decrease as psychological distance increases; thus, the smaller the psychological distance, the stronger the consumer's purchase intention. In an information-rich online environment, the distance between consumers and brands introduces uncertainty, which diminishes consumers' trust in brands. This demonstrates that psychological distance significantly impacts the emotional and behavioral relationship between consumers and brands.

Humorous advertising serves as a crucial means for brands to reduce psychological distance with consumers. Incorporating humor in short video advertisements has become a prevailing trend; it not only presents the brand and its products in a light-hearted manner but also elicits laughter and positive emotions from consumers. This engagement helps to bridge the psychological distance between brands and consumers, allowing the audience to resonate with the creativity and humor of the advertisement, ultimately fostering a sense of closeness and identification with the brand.

This sense of closeness and identification facilitates consumers' acceptance of the information presented in the advertisement, increasing their interest and favorable

attitudes toward the promoted products or services. Therefore, it can be inferred that psychological distance plays a crucial role in the strength of the relationship between consumers and brands. Additionally, customer engagement encompasses the comprehensive emotional and behavioral connection between consumers and brands. Thus, psychological distance significantly influences customer engagement, with the friendly atmosphere created by humorous advertising establishing a closer connection between consumers and brands. Based on this reasoning, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Psychological distance mediates the positive effect of humorous advertising on customer engagement.

3.3. The Moderating Role of Brand Strength Between Humorous Advertising and Psychological Distance

Brand strength refers to the level of brand awareness and positive associations a brand possesses, serving as a measurement of its status and influence in the minds of consumers. Brands with high strength typically enjoy broad market recognition and a favorable brand image, allowing them to attract more consumers and loyal fans, thereby capturing a larger market share and achieving higher proengagements. Research by Du Weiqiang et al. (2011) indicated that strong brands possess greater credibility and can convey more reliable brand information through their brand signals compared to weaker brands.

In academic research, brand strength is often examined as a moderating variable in studies concerning consumer behavior and psychology. Dahlen and Lange (2006) found that strong brands are inherently more attractive to consumers than weak brands, and other studies have shown that strong brands are more likely to earn consumer trust and affection. Sun Huihui (2023) validated the positive moderating effect of brand strength on the relationship between the exaggeration of humorous appeals and advertising credibility, suggesting that strong brands are perceived as more credible in humorous advertising contexts.

Given that strong brands carry higher reliability in consumers' minds, in the case of negative humor advertising, consumers are less influenced by self-deprecating brand messages. Furthermore, the contrast between the negative humor format and the positive brand image of a strong brand may enhance the effectiveness of bridging the psychological distance between consumers and brands more significantly than positive humor advertising. Based on these insights, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Brand strength moderates the effect of humorous advertising type on customer engagement; specifically, when the brand is strong, negative humorous advertising is more effective than positive humorous advertising in reducing the psychological distance between consumers and the brand.

Based on the above assumptions, the theoretical model of this study is shown in Figure 1 below:

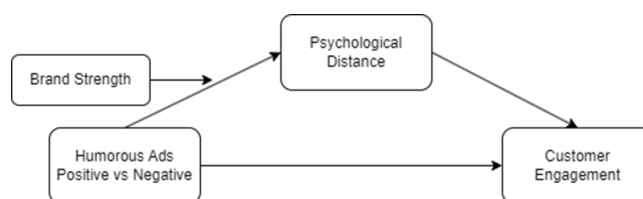


Figure 1. Theoretical Model

4. Research Design and Data Analysis

4.1. Research Methods and Process

This study employs three experiments to test the above hypotheses. The first experiment aims to validate the impact of humorous advertising types on customer engagement and the mediating role of psychological distance, specifically testing H1 (H1a and H1b) and H2. The second experiment introduces brand strength as a moderating variable to explore how different brand strengths affect the relationship between humorous advertising types and customer engagement, while again validating the mediating role of psychological distance, specifically testing H2 and H3.

4.2. Study 1

The first experiment investigates the effect of humorous advertising types on customer engagement and preliminarily tests the mediating role of psychological distance, specifically aiming to validate H1 (H1a and H1b) and H2. This experiment utilizes a one-factor (humorous advertising type: positive vs. negative) between-subjects experimental design.

4.2.1. Procedure

The experiment employs a scenario simulation method and distributes online questionnaires through the Questionnaire Star platform. Participants are randomly assigned to experimental conditions based on their birth month. A total of 156 questionnaires were collected, and after excluding responses with excessively short or long completion times, 121 valid samples were obtained. Among these, 70 participants were male (57.9%) and 51 were female (42.1%).

After reading the experimental materials, participants answered questions measuring psychological distance, customer engagement, and the manipulation of humorous advertising types. The measurement of perceived psychological distance was adapted from Du Jiangang and Ren Xingyao [25]. Customer engagement was measured based on the scale developed by Hollebeek et al. [9]. Items for measuring positive (negative) humor perception were referenced from Chattopadhyay & Basu (1990) and Marcus & Goodman (1991) [4, 12]. The Cronbach's α values for all variables were as follows: psychological distance (0.758), customer engagement (0.751), and humorous perception (0.768).

4.2.2. Data Analysis

(1) Manipulation Test

First, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to verify the successful manipulation of humorous advertising types (negative humor vs. positive humor). The analysis results indicated that the perceived humor ratings for different humor advertisement types were significantly above 3, and there were significant differences in perceptions of positive and negative humor between the groups ($M_{\text{negative}} = 3.934$, $M_{\text{positive}} = 4.20$, $F = 8.101$, $P < 0.05$). Additionally, there were significant differences in perceived psychological distance across the different humor advertisement types

($M_{\text{negative}} = 3.945$, $M_{\text{positive}} = 3.617$, $F = 9.162$, $P = 0.003 < 0.05$). Overall, this confirms that the manipulation in Experiment 1 was successful.

(2) Hypothesis Testing

a. Main Effect Analysis

To explore the effects of different types of humor on customer engagement, regression analyses were conducted separately for the positive humor group and the negative humor group, using perceived humor (positive or negative) as the independent variable and customer engagement as the dependent variable. The results indicated that both positive and negative humor perceptions positively influenced customer engagement ($\beta_{\text{positive}} = 0.444$, $t = 3.775$, $P < 0.05$; $\beta_{\text{negative}} = 0.276$, $t = 2.205$, $P < 0.05$), supporting the validity of hypothesis H1.

Further, a one-way ANOVA was performed to analyze the main effect of humor advertisement type (positive vs. negative) on customer engagement. The results demonstrated a significant main effect of humorous advertisement type on customer engagement ($M_{\text{negative}} = 3.41$, $M_{\text{positive}} = 3.658$, $F = 5.592$, $P = 0.02 < 0.05$). Specifically, customer engagement was significantly higher in the positive humor group compared to the negative humor group, indicating that positive humorous advertisements provide a higher level of customer engagement than negative humorous advertisements.

b. Mediation Effect Analysis

To further explore the mediating mechanism of perceived psychological distance between humorous advertising types and customer engagement, this study employs the mediation analysis model developed by Preacher et al. (2008) [14] (Model 4, Bootstrapping 5000). In this analysis, humorous advertising type (negative vs. positive) serves as the independent variable, psychological distance as the mediating variable, and customer engagement as the dependent variable. Gender, age, occupation, and education level are included as control variables.

According to the final results from the PROCESS analysis, as shown in Table 1:

The humorous advertising type has a significant effect on customer engagement ($\beta = 0.246$, $t = 2.262$, $P < 0.05$). The humorous advertising type also significantly influences perceived psychological distance ($\beta = -0.256$, $t = -2.323$, $P < 0.05$). When both humorous advertising type and psychological distance are used to predict customer engagement, perceived psychological distance significantly positively impacts customer engagement ($\beta = 0.583$, $t = 7.786$, $P < 0.05$). Additionally, the effect of humorous advertising type on customer engagement remains significant ($\beta = 0.396$, $t = 4.372$, $P < 0.05$). The mediation analysis indicates that psychological distance mediates the effect of humorous advertising type (negative vs. positive) on customer engagement significantly (indirect effect: Effect = -0.149 , SE = 0.064 , 95% CI: $[-0.275, -0.025]$). This supports the validity of hypothesis H2.

Table 1. Experiment 1: Regression analysis of the mediating effect of psychological distance

Regression		Model engagement		Sig.	
Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R2	F	β	t
Customer Engagement	Gender	0.0967	2.463*	0.0075	0.0709
	Age			0.2378	1.7565
	Job			-0.0983	-1.8503
	Education			-0.0014	-0.0137
	Tye of Ads			0.2468	2.2619*
Psychological Distance	Gender	0.1614	4.4258***	0.0446	0.4171
	Age			0.4674	3.4191***
	Job			-0.0482	-0.8984
	Education			-0.0258	-0.2582
	Tye of Ads			-0.256	-2.3227*
Customer Engagement	Gender	0.4103	13.22***	-0.0185	-0.2153
	Age			-0.0349	-0.303
	Job			-0.0702	-1.622
	Education			0.0137	0.1706
	Tye of Ads			0.3962	4.3722***
	Psychological Distance			0.5834	7.7859***

Notes: *means: $p < 0.05$, **means: $p < 0.01$, ***means: $p < 0.001$

(3) Results Discussion

The results of Experiment 1 successfully validated hypotheses H1 (H1a and H1b) and H2. In the context of humorous advertising, higher consumer perceptions of positive (and negative) humor corresponded to increased customer engagement. Furthermore, this study provided preliminary evidence for the mechanisms leading to customer engagement, showing that humorous advertising affects customer engagement by influencing consumers' perceptions of psychological distance, thus supporting H2.

However, a critical question arises: does the brand factor influence the pathways through which humorous advertisements affect customer engagement? To address this, experiment 2 will introduce brand strength as a variable to explore its moderating role in the mechanism by which humorous advertising impacts customer engagement. Additionally, it will further validate the mediating effect of psychological distance.

4.3. Study 2

The purpose of this experiment is to further validate the mediating role of customer-perceived psychological distance between humorous advertising types (positive vs. negative) and customer engagement, thereby testing hypothesis H2. Additionally, it aims to verify the moderating effect of brand strength on the relationship between humorous advertising types (positive vs. negative) and customer-perceived psychological distance, thus testing hypothesis H3 (H3a and H3b).

4.3.1. Procedure

This experiment employs a 2 (humorous advertising type: positive vs. negative) $\times$ 2 (brand strength: weak vs. strong) between-subjects factorial design. The online questionnaire is distributed through the Questionnaire Star platform, with experimental scenarios presented randomly. After passing the review process, each participant receives a reward of 1 yuan for their participation. After excluding participants with excessively short or long response times, a total of 136 valid samples were obtained, comprising 56 males (41.2%) and 80 females (58.8%).

Using a scenario simulation method, all participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions:

positive & strong brand, positive & weak brand, negative & strong brand, and negative & weak brand. After reading the materials related to brand strength, participants read the humorous advertisement materials, with the brand name in the advertisement replaced by the brand name from the strength materials. Upon completion of the experimental materials, participants began answering the questionnaire items.

The measurement of perceived psychological distance was adapted from Du Jiangang and Ren Xingyao [25]. Customer engagement was measured based on the scale developed by Hollebeek et al. [9]. Items for measuring positive (negative) humor perception were referenced from Chattopadhyay & Basu (1990) and Marcus & Goodman (1991) [4, 12]. The Cronbach's α values for all variables were 0.658, 0.739, and 0.729, respectively.

4.3.2. Data Analysis

(1) Manipulation Test

For the manipulation check of brand strength, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The results showed that the perceived brand strength of strong brands was significantly higher than that of weak brands ($M_{\text{strong}} = 4.59$, $M_{\text{weak}} = 2.18$, $F = 201.646$, $P < 0.05$), indicating that the manipulation of brand strength was successful.

A one-way ANOVA was also performed to assess the perceived humor of different humorous advertising types. The analysis revealed that the mean scores for both positive and negative humor perceptions were greater than 3, and there were significant differences between the positive and negative humor advertising groups ($M_{\text{positive}} = 4.275$, $M_{\text{negative}} = 3.709$, $F = 71.835$, $P < 0.05$), confirming that the manipulation of the humorous advertisement materials was successful. In summary, the manipulations in Experiment 2 were successful.

(2) Hypothesis Testing

a. Main Effect Analysis

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the main effect of humorous advertising type (positive vs. negative) on customer engagement. The results indicated that the effect of humorous advertising type on customer engagement was significant ($M_{\text{positive}} = 4.207$, $M_{\text{negative}} = 4.037$, $F = 4.255$, $P < 0.05$).

b. Mediation Effect Analysis

To test the mediating role of perceived psychological distance, the mediation analysis model developed by Preacher et al. (2008) [14] (Model 4, Bootstrapping 5000) was employed. In this analysis, humorous advertising type (negative vs. positive) served as the independent variable, psychological distance as the mediating variable, and customer engagement as the dependent variable, with gender, age, occupation, and education level included as control variables.

According to the final results from the PROCESS analysis, as detailed in Table 2, humorous advertising type significantly

influenced consumers' perceptions of psychological distance ($\beta = -0.214$, $t = -4.024$, $P < 0.05$). When both humorous advertising type and psychological distance were used to predict customer engagement, perceived psychological distance had a significant positive impact on customer engagement ($\beta = 0.711$, $t = 6.188$, $P < 0.05$), while the effect of humorous advertising type on customer engagement remained significant ($\beta = 0.324$, $t = 4.391$, $P < 0.05$). The analysis showed that psychological distance partially mediated the effect of humorous advertising type (negative vs. positive) on customer engagement (indirect effect: Effect = -0.152, SE = 0.044, 95% CI: [-0.248, -0.074]).

Table 2. Experiment 2: Regression analysis of the mediating effect of psychological distance

Regression		Model engagement		Sig.	
Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R2	F	β	t
Customer Engagement	Gender	0.1222	3.619**	-0.0006	-0.0079
	Age			0.1596	2.5514*
	Job			0.0643	1.6713
	Education			0.0142	0.2637
	Tye of Ads			0.1699	2.1817*
Psychological Distance	Gender	0.1395	4.2164**	-0.0096	-0.1751
	Age			0.0797	1.8679
	Job			0.0137	0.5235
	Education			0.0281	0.7659
	Tye of Ads			-0.2156	-4.0581***
Customer Engagement	Gender	0.2988	9.1629***	0.0057	0.0787
	Age			0.1072	1.8846
	Job			0.0553	1.5994
	Education			-0.0043	-0.0889
	Tye of Ads			0.3116	4.2025***
	Psychological Distance			0.6575	5.7007***

c. Moderating Effect of Brand Strength

First, we examined the interaction effect of humorous advertising type (positive vs. negative) and brand strength on customer perceptions of psychological distance. A two-way ANOVA was conducted, and the results indicated that humorous advertising type significantly affected perceived psychological distance ($F(1, 135) = 14.590$, $P < 0.05$). However, brand strength did not have a significant effect on perceived psychological distance ($F(1, 135) = 0.23$, $P > 0.05$). Notably, the interaction between humorous advertising type and brand strength was significant ($F(1, 135) = 4.368$, $P < 0.05$).

Furthermore, based on brand strength, we divided the sample into strong brand and weak brand groups. We then conducted one-way ANOVA with humorous advertising type (positive vs. negative) as the independent variable and perceived psychological distance as the dependent variable. The results revealed that, in the strong brand group, humorous advertising type significantly impacted perceived psychological distance ($F = 14.129$, $P < 0.05$), while in the weak brand group, the effect of humorous advertising type on perceived psychological distance was not significant ($P > 0.05$). Compared to the weak brand group, the difference in the impact of humorous advertising type on perceived psychological distance was greater in the strong brand group ($\Delta M_{\text{strong brand group}} = 0.317$, $\Delta M_{\text{weak brand group}} = 0.093$). Therefore, hypothesis H3 is supported.

(3) Results Discussion

Study 2 further verified hypothesis H2, confirming the mediating role of psychological distance, and tested

hypothesis H3, which posited that brand strength moderates the relationship between humorous advertising type and psychological distance. Specifically, when the brand is a strong brand, negative humorous advertisements have a more pronounced effect than positive humorous advertisements in reducing the psychological distance between the brand and consumers.

Moreover, the findings from both Study 1 and Study 2 indicate that negative humorous advertisements lead to a greater perceived psychological distance compared to positive humorous advertisements. However, the customer engagement in the negative humorous advertisement group is lower than that in the positive humorous advertisement group. This suggests that there is an important factor influencing the relationship between psychological distance and customer engagement, underscoring the complexity of how humor in advertising impacts consumer perceptions and behaviors.

5. Research Conclusions and Implications

This study, through two experimental investigations, demonstrates that humorous advertising affects customer engagement with the brand by influencing consumers' perceptions of psychological distance. Brand strength plays a moderating role in the path from humorous advertising to psychological distance, while perceived value moderates the impact of psychological distance on customer engagement. Specifically, strong brands, which inherently carry higher trust among consumers, use negative humor to draw

consumers closer compared to positive humor. The confidence that strong brands instill in consumers enhances this effect. Additionally, our research indicates that positive humor results in higher customer engagement compared to negative humor, as positive humor generates greater perceived value, which positively regulates the relationship between psychological distance and customer engagement.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

This research explores and validates the impact mechanism of humorous advertising on customer engagement, enriching the relevant theories regarding the formation of customer engagement within the context of humorous advertising. Previous literature primarily focused on the antecedent variables affecting customer engagement; this study investigates the mechanisms underlying its formation. We reveal that in the context of humorous advertising, both types of humor (positive vs. negative) can reduce the psychological distance between consumers and brands, facilitating improved customer engagement. Furthermore, we delve into the moderating role of brand strength in this process.

5.2. Practical Implications

This study provides valuable guidance for corporate marketing practices. First, humorous advertising can enhance consumer engagement with the brand, and positive humor is more effective than negative humor in promoting customer engagement. This highlights the importance of incorporating positive humorous elements in brand advertising to achieve better results. Second, companies should focus on conveying perceived value while using humorous advertising, as perceived value positively contributes to the formation of customer engagement. Brands should ensure that they showcase the perceived value of their products, which can be emotional value or functional value, while incorporating humor.

5.3. Research Limitations and Future Directions

This study has certain limitations. First, both studies rely on experimental methods, and future research could consider using secondary data for further exploration. Second, while this study examines the mediating role of psychological distance in the formation of customer engagement, future research could investigate whether other factors influence customer engagement formation in this process. Additionally, this research focuses on the context of positive and negative humorous advertising; future studies could explore these contexts in isolation or investigate other forms of humor in advertising. Importantly, this study approaches the mechanism of customer engagement formation from the perspective of advertising content; future research could further explore this mechanism from the perspectives of advertising form and medium.

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