The Marketing Transformation Logic of Self-Improvement Books on Rednote from a Symbolic Alienation Perspective

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Abstract. This paper examines self-improvement books on the Rednote platform, analyzing their symbolic alienation mechanism through the lens of Baudrillard's theory of symbolic consumption. It traces their shift from "knowledge dissemination" towards "emotional consumption". Research indicates that this transformation is achieved through a tripartite approach: knowledge visualization, emotional lexical codification, and ritualized visual communication. Platform algorithms, in collaboration with multiple stakeholders (publishers, amateur content creators, and influencer bloggers), collectively drive the substitution of symbolic value for knowledge value. This study systematically analyzes the intrinsic logic of symbolic alienation from three perspectives — theoretical adaptation, marketing practices, and algorithmic mechanisms — thereby providing a theoretical framework for understanding the symbolism trend in book marketing on social e-commerce platforms.

Keywords: Symbolic Alienation, Rednote Platform, Self-Improvement Books, Emotional Consumption, Visual Content.

1. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The Rednote platform serves as a pivotal arena for the production and consumption of knowledge, blending content, social interaction, and e-commerce. Self-improvement books feature prominently in their shared posts, exhibiting a marked phenomenon of "symbolic alienation" — where the symbolic value of the books supplants their knowledge value as the dominant factor driving dissemination and consumption. Based on Baudrillard's theory of symbolic consumption, and incorporating the perspectives of Kernah, and Fiske. Employing three research methodologies — literature analysis, case study investigation, and interdisciplinary research — it systematically examines representative and targeted visual content marketing strategies for diverse book categories across the platform. By synthesizing numerous case studies, the study identifies specific manifestations of symbiotic alienation and underlying driving factors, thereby elucidating the transformative logic underpinning the shift from knowledge dissemination to emotional consumption for such publications within the Rednote platform's ecosystem.

In "The Consumer Society", Baudrillard pointed out that "consumption in the consumer society is the process by which the signifying system of symbols absorbs consumers." [1] That is, consumption has shifted from the functional possession of objects to the pursuit of symbolic value. We live in an age of objects, but the relationship between consumers and objects is no longer that between people and objects; rather, it is the relationship between people and symbols [2]. Books and other commodities, as the externalized forms of objects, possess both use value and symbolic value. However, as consumer society continues to develop, the symbolic value of books has been magnified to the point of overshadowing their use value. The dissemination practice of my growth-oriented books on the Rednote platform precisely reflects the overstepping of symbolic value over practical value. Consumers have also shifted from the practical value of objects to the pursuit of the attached symbolic value. Kellner's "Media Spectacle" and Fisk's "Active Decoding" theory provide supplementary time for analyzing the reconstruction of user participation symbols. Most existing studies focus on the phenomenon of symbolization itself, and there is still room for deepening the exploration of the degree of alienation of different subjects and the algorithmic mechanism.

2. The Logic of Marketing Transformation Driven by Symbolic Alienation

Rudolf Arnheim mentioned in "Visual Thinking”: "Perception, especially visual perception, possesses all the abilities of thinking. This ability means that visual perception itself is not a low-level sense; it already possesses the function of thinking, the ability to recognize and understand. [3]" The shift of book marketing from knowledge dissemination to emotional consumption essentially represents a migration of the communication logic from content value-oriented to emotional value-oriented. "Almost every detail of life has been alienated into the form of a landscape.[4]", These "landscapes" are visible and objective scenes that are presented, and refer to a kind of subjective and conscious performance and showboating [5]. The triggering mechanism of this transformation stems from the dual operation of the symbolic effect: on the one hand, emotional vocabulary is summarized as stylized symbolic units; On the other hand, it begins with the ritualization of visual communication.

2.1. Knowledge visualization and emotional anchor points

"All thoughts are classified. All perceptual activities are related to prediction and thus to comparison. [6]" The platform notes reconstruct the cover with highly saturated colors and emotional symbols, thereby squeezing the space of traditional book sharing. For instance, the "Barbie Book List" uses pink tones to emphasize the theme of "female growth", directly stimulating users' emotional responses.

2.2. Emotional vocabulary is stylized

Rednote reviews trigger emotional resonance through high-mood words and pain-point questions, tagging terms such as "comeback", "healing", and "original family" lower the threshold for empathy. The notes adopt a three-part structure of "conflict - viewpoint - transformation", converting the reading experience into the emotional release of "being understood", forming a stylized book review of emotional vocabulary, transforming abstract emotions into visualized "narrative templates", and accelerating the tilt of knowledge dissemination towards emotional consumption.

2.3. Visual communication ritualized

Many books’ bloggers construct "pseudo-knowledge scenarios" through a fixed combination of symbols such as "coffee + wooden desktop + books", where form outweighs content. By staged photography, knowledge dissemination scenarios are constructed to create emotional consumption cues, encouraging the audience to pay for the sense of ceremony rather than for the knowledge itself. In this process, symbols serve as both the carriers of knowledge and the catalysts of emotions. It is both a tool for communication and an amplifier of emotions, jointly promoting the transformation from knowledge dissemination to emotional consumption.

3. Comparative Analysis of the Intensity of Multi-Agent Alienation Phenomeno

The role of marketing entities in promoting symbolic alienation in the knowledge-dissemination ecosystem of the Xiaohongshu app is most significant. It can roughly be divided into three types of entities: publishers, ordinary people, and Internet celebrity bloggers. The difference in the intensity of their promotion is due to the different natures of the entities, and the fundamental reason is that they are constrained by the interaction between the platform's algorithm and user psychology.

3.1. Publishing House

As limited participants in symbolic alienation, they often use visual symbols as auxiliary tools for knowledge dissemination rather than substitutes, maintaining a bottom line of keeping symbols instrumentalized. Adopt a selective symbol adaptation strategy and a complementary model of "symbol diversion - knowledge sedimentation" to prevent symbols from being completely detached from the content. This strategy makes its degree of symbolic alienation significantly lower than that

of other entities, always anchoring on the authority of knowledge and preserving the authenticity of commercial books.

3.2. Ordinary users

As passive promoters, ordinary users often unconsciously adopt the popular symbol templates of the platform to seek recognition. Real people originally lived in the real world. Real people can also "create" a "symbolic world" in various ways [7]. Although this symbolic behavior originated from genuine emotional expression, under the recommendation of algorithms, it gradually formed a fixed assembly-line-like pattern and became a symbolic tool for users to seek group identity and identity recognition.

3.3. Internet celebrity blogger

"We live in a world where the more information there is, the scarcer the meaning becomes. Information swallows up one's own content, blocking communication and depriving opportunities. [8]" Try to ask, how to stand out in many similar texts. This is a problem in front of each text sender [9]. Internet celebrity bloggers are systematic drivers of symbolic alienation. They attract traffic and monetize through symbolic segmentation and emotional tags, forming a closed loop with algorithms.

4. The Tripartite Manifestations of Symbolic Alienation

In a consumer society, what people consume mainly is the symbolic value of commodities. When consumption itself serves as the goal, the symbolic value at this point is mainly the added value of vanity.

4.1. Functional alienation

The core function of books should be knowledge transmission and cognitive enhancement. However, on the Rednote platform, their instrumental nature has been restructured, and cultural subjects have been placed in a situation of catering to and blindly following symbolic values [10]. Books have been alienated from "cognitive tools" to "identity markers", and consumerism has eroded the essence of learning. According to Jamson, postmodern symbolic culture indicates a new planarity or lack of depth, the emergence of the most literal surface [11]. This kind of social coercion leads users' reading motivation to shift from "self-improvement" to "gaining recognition", forming a closed loop of symbolic value exchange. The sense of identification that users gain from virtual interaction even exceeds the value of knowledge itself, eventually forming an alienated cycle of "reading for the sake of showing off".

4.2. Meaning distortion

The fragmentation of knowledge and emotional narratives obscures rational thinking. Scene consumption substitution is to establish an emotional connection and value consensus with readers, enabling them to display specific emotions and charm to others through book consumption, thus replacing the book product marketing model on social media [12]. Elements such as cover design and binding form have become the core of communication, while content depth has taken a secondary position.

4.3. Algorithm boost

The traffic-oriented and user profiling strategies reinforce the production of symbols, creating a "symbol tyranny". Algorithms can construct personalized consumption paths for users by analyzing their behavioral data and provide relevant symbolic content corresponding to their preferences. However, this precise analysis and content feeding algorithm also has certain drawbacks. It will gradually cause readers to lose their ability to make independent choices and unconsciously become

"symbolic puppets" controlled by the algorithm. By forming a symbolic reinforcement cycle through "tagging" and "collaborative filtering", users will be trapped in a closed-loop dissemination.

5. Conclusion

Based on Baudrillard's symbolic consumption theory, this study takes self-growth books on Rednote as samples to analyze their marketing transformation from "knowledge dissemination" to "emotional consumption", highlighting symbolic alienation as the core driver. Three mechanisms underpin this shift: knowledge visualization with emotional anchor construction, stylized emotional vocabulary, and ritualized visual presentation. Publishers, ordinary users, and influencer bloggers drive symbolic alienation differently amid algorithm-user psychology interactions, ultimately making books' symbolic value outweigh knowledge value, leading to functional alienation, meaning distortion, and algorithm-driven alienation.

This transformation reflects emotional value's squeeze on content value in consumer society and the "content + social + e-commerce" model's marketing innovation and alienation dilemmas. While symbolic book marketing lowers dissemination barriers and boosts efficiency, it slips into "form-over-content" consumption alienation, undermining knowledge dissemination. Correspondingly, publishers should uphold knowledge dissemination, balance symbolic marketing and content value; platforms need to optimize algorithms to avoid excessive traffic orientation; users must remain rational and clarify the boundary between emotional resonance and knowledge acquisition.

Overall, this transformation epitomizes symbolic alienation in the digital-era consumer society. Amid pervasive symbolic consumption, balancing commodities' symbolic and core values to prevent marketing from deviating from its essence is key for the book publishing industry and all content products to achieve sustainable development in social e-commerce. By revealing the transformation's inherent logic and potential risks, this study provides theoretical references and practical insights for guiding symbolic marketing back to value essence and building a healthy digital content consumption ecosystem.

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