Analysis of Bullet Chats in User-Generated Content Advertisement on Bilibili Website: The Success of Madoka Magica's Mobile Game Promotion

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Abstract—**This article explores the reasons behind the success of user-generated content (UGC) advertisements on Bilibili, which is one of China's most significant video-sharing social media sites, with a core focus on East Asian pop culture. Additionally, Madoka Magica is a well-known Japanese animation about magical girls. There are two derivative games based on it. By using diffusion of innovation theory and content analysis method, this article takes UGC advertisements of Madoka Magica's mobile games as windows to investigate how early adopters (influencers) motivate early majority adopters (their followers) to play the game. Moreover, this paper also addresses three types of bullet chats in this kind of video to further explore followers' interaction with the influencers and reasons for the success of its marketing method. Bullet chats are a unique way to observe target consumers' reaction to the advertisements. The author found that word-of-mouth marketing, the right audience and influential people are important factors for the success of UGC advertising. Besides, this marketing strategy is not limited to the marketing of mobile game advertisements, but can also be used for the marketing of other products. However, the prerequisite for this marketing method to be effective is that the advertised product or service has good quality.**

Index Terms—**Bilibili, bullet chats, cyber celebrity marketing, mobile game, East Asian studies.**

I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of other East Asian popular cultures and user-generated content (UGC) videos in China, Bilibili has become one of the most influential UGC video social media platforms with a unique interactive culture enabled by bullet chats function. People who upload videos on Bilibili are called uploaders and some of them have a large number of followers. These kinds of uploaders are powerful influencers on the platform, and they have strong impacts on their fans. Companies like to work with powerful influencers on Bilibili to promote their products and services. Bullet chat technology makes it possible for users to send comments to the videos at a particular moment of it. It is a great way to check the reaction of potential consumers to the advertisements and products. This new method of marketing is different from the traditional approach and it is easier to know viewers' favorite parts and analyze the way of improving the quality of future ads.

This article takes UGC advertisement videos of Madoka Magica's mobile games as examples to discuss the reasons

behind the success of this kind of promotion. Madoka Magica is a well-known Japanese animation about magical girls and it has two popular derivative mobile games. Diffusion of innovation theory is used to examine the ways that Bilibili cyber-celebrities use UGC advertisement videos to attract their followers and help the game company to make a profit. Generally, this type of promotional video has two parts, the main part is a review of the animation and the rest is the advertisement for the product. The content analysis method is also conducted to address the reasons behind the three types of bullet chats in this kind of video, including bullet chats sent to the influencers, bullet chats sent to the animation part, and bullet chats that are sent to the advertisement part. This study explores the logic behind the effectiveness of this new marketing approach.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

A. Bullet Chats Function and Bilibili Website

The bullet chats function refers to comments floating over the video in certain ways at a specific point of time of the video, which creates a sense of shared-watching experience. Users can use this function to interact with each other and engage with the uploader. If the video is popular, it will gain a growing number of bullet chats and finally be covered by those comments [1].

Bilibili website uses this technology to create a unique, interactive culture on the site. It started as a small online community affected by anime, comics and games, and now it has evolved into a friendly community of diverse cultures, especially East Asian popular culture [2]. People not only watch videos but also upload their videos are called uploaders on Bilibili. Some influential uploaders with a large number of followers like to consume cultural texts and produce their own UGC videos to gain more fans. This type of uploader is referred to prosumers. Prosumer is a term to describe people who are involved in both consumption and production practices of cultural texts [3]. Madoka Magica is a famous Japanese animation loved by Bilibili users and it is a great cultural text for prosumption practices.

B. Madoka Magica's Animation and Mobile Games

Madoka Magica is a well-known 2011 animation in Japan, and it is also popular in China. On Bilibili, it has 9.8 score, 24,000,000 plays, 967,000 bullet chats and 2,184,000 followers until April 2021. In 2016, Bilibili had a Madoka Magica's mobile game. The website found two influential uploaders in the animation area and asked them to make UGC

promotional videos to advertise this game. LexBurner is a famous uploader with a core focus on animation, who has 7,694,000 followers on Bilibili. The video he made for this game promotion gained 3,296,000 plays, 7717 shares, and 39,000 bullet chats. Another well-known uploader, with 1,397,000 followers until April 2021, Gatiantang, got this commission to make a UGC promotional video as well. His video got 613,000 plays, 3990 likes, and 12,000 bullet chats until April 2021. These data show that the influence of them to animation lovers on Bilibili. However, after their followers played this game, their reactions turned out bad. On TapTap, an online community for game players in Mainland China, providing free download and paid purchase services for mobile games through official channels [4]. The game has 13,000 reviews and most of them are negative. The game shut down the server in 2017, and this result proves that even though the uploaders are powerful, if the product itself is bad, this marketing approach is still not effective [5].

In addition, in 2020 Bilibili had a new Madoka Magica's mobile game and they also asked a well-known animation uploader, Fanshi, with 3,799,000 followers, to make an UGC promotional video for it. His video got 1,122,000 plays, 91,000 likes and 6,518 bullet chats until April 2021. Players' reaction to the new version of the game is better than the previous one. On Bilibili, it has 8.6 scores, 11,000 comments, 392,027 popularity and its public praise ranking is 13 until April 2021 [6].

C. Diffusion of Innovation and Content Analysis

Diffusion of Innovation by Rogers is a popular theory in the communication field that focuses on society or an individual's adoption of innovations. It is used to address the process of a product or an idea spreading through a particular group of people or social system. The final stage of diffusion is that people, as part of a community, adopt a new behavior, idea, or product. There are five different categories of adopters, including innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Innovation is the degree to which a person adopts a new thing. It is the most important standard for the adopter categorization. Early adopters are stated for individuals who use a new product, innovation, or technology before others. The early majority refers to people who adopt innovations and new products before the average person. In this study, uploaders are early adopters and their followers who played the games are an early majority. The three promotional videos display different approaches of uploaders motivate their followers to spend money on the games, and help the game company to make a profit. Diffusion of innovation is an important theory to understand when developing market share, and it is often referred to in the marketing of new products [7].

Content Analysis is a research approach conducted to examine patterns in communication. To use content analysis, the researcher needs to systematically gain data from a group of texts, which can be oral, written or visual [8]. There are numerous of UGC advertisement videos on Bilibili to sell different kinds of products. Due to the huge amount of data, it is hard to analyze all of them. Therefore, this study only focuses on three typical UGC promotional videos of Madoka Magica's mobile games by three impactful uploaders. Bullet chats in these videos show various ways of interacting between viewers, uploaders, and videos. The aim is to examine ideas and gain detailed insights into this specific context.

III. ANALYSIS OF THREE TYPES OF BULLET CHATS

Based on the observation of the three videos, bullet chats in these videos can be roughly divided into three categories, including the bullet chats sent to the uploaders, the bullet chats sent to the animation, and the bullet chats sent to the mobile games.

A. Bullet Chats Sent to the Uploaders and Word-of-Mouth Marketing

For video uploaders, bullet chat is the most intuitive evaluation of their videos. Especially when the object of the bullet chat is the uploader, these bullet chats usually contain subjective emotions towards the uploader. Generally, two different kinds of bullet chats are sent to the uploaders: the first one is appreciation and the second one is teasing. Appreciation includes "Nice review!", "I love your script!" and "I knew it, this is an ad! But I like his ad!". These bullet chats reflect viewers' love and support toward the uploaders. Most of the bullet chats in Fanshi and Gatiantang's videos are appreciated.

Teasing includes "Wake up, you don't have female fans" and "Runaway, this is an ad!", "An ad? Now I can leave". In LexBurner's video, this kind of bullet chat is often observed. These barrage contents imply the psychological connection between the fans and the uploader. People will not speak so bluntly when talking to strangers but would be more polite. Only if they think they have intimate connections with someone, they would use casual or even mocking language to interact with them. Even if these fans send such negative bullet chats, they will still support these uploaders and continue to play the games recommended by the uploaders. Comments like "From Lex (LexBurner's nickname), I know it is an ad, but I am here" and "I am also Lex's fan" are found in the comment box under the 2016 version on Taptap website.

Word-of-mouth means transmitting information from one person to the other by using oral communication, and word-of-mouth marketing makes use of this idea in the marketing context. It refers to the process of a product or service information being passed from one individual to another [9]. This type of marketing has more power to affect decision-making because people tend to trust people in their social networks as they are more similar to them [10]. These three animation uploaders' followers are people who drown to animations with the same interests, making their fans feel they have a strong psychological connection to the uploaders. Hence, they are more likely to listen to the uploaders' suggestions. Even though they know this is an advertisement, they still watch it and play the game.

B. Bullet Chats Sent to The Animation and The importance of Right Audiences

These kinds of bullet chats usually talk about specific plots, characters, and visual style in the animation, which reflect viewers' familiarity with the animation. For instance, in Gatiantang's video, bullet chats like "I love this college

background!" and "The beautiful visual is the reason I watched it in 2011!" are observed regarding the battle scene in "witch field", a space created by fascinating collages. These comments indicate that many senders have watched this animation before and they love it.

In LexBurner's video, "She is in danger!" and "She will lose her head" are typical bullet chats when it comes to the scene that Mami Tomoe was killed by a witch. Mami is an important character in the animation, and this is the most well-known scene of her. These bullet chats imply that viewers are familiar with the animation. They know when this scene will happen and they like to send bullet chats right before the scene to provide warnings.

In Fanshi's video, when it comes to Mami's daily life scenes, bullet chats about her death are frequently viewed. People express the shock that they experienced in the past, and the possible reason is that, from the traditional concept of people, magic girls are symbols of dreams and miracles who would not die in the story. This animation challenges the definition of a magic girl. The bullet chats sent to a certain character also suggest viewers know the animation very well.

A social group that builds around a specific media product, like a movie, book, or television show, is called an audience community [11]. In an audience community, members like to talk about text and develop their own interpretations that are influenced by their specific identities and backgrounds [12]. In this study, Madoka Magica's animation lovers create an audience community and they use the three uploaders' UGC video ads, to have their discussions in bullet chats. Seeding is a technique of sending products to influencers [11]. In this study, the three uploaders are the opinion leaders and the game developer hopes to gain positive word-of-mouth marketing through their promotional videos. "Seeding works best when it is congruent with the celebrity's persona and interests" [11]. The idea may seem a little bit off here because people would think the game company should seek game uploaders to make the promotional videos. However, on Bilibili, game uploaders tend to make videos for keyboards, mouses and other electronic devices. As Madoka Magica's mobile games are derivative works of the animation, the audiences of the animation would be more likely to play the games and they are the right audiences of the games.

C. Bullet Chats Sent to the Mobile Games and Fan Economy

In Gatiantang's video, bullet chats like "The 2016 version is shut down, the 2020 version will open for registering!" are observed in this part. They suggest that viewers do not like the 2016 version. Nonetheless, they still advertise the 2020 version to other viewers. Since they like this animation and they want more people to have access to derivative works of it—the good version of the game and create more Madoka Magica's animation lovers. Some mobile game lovers do not like to watch animations, but they may be interested in the animation after playing the game. This kind of bullet chat also helps the game developer to promote the 2020 version without financial cost. Bilibili's website embedded a link to the 2020 version near the promotional videos for the 2016 version to help navigate viewers to the 2020 version. Similarly, in LexBurner and Fanshi's video, "Great game, I have already spent a large amount of money on it!" and

"Finally, I can play it!" are repetitive bullet chats in the game introduction part. They show the followers love and support for the game as well.

In fan communities, the social hierarchy has a strong connection to the capital. Bourdieu addresses that social capital, economic capital, and cultural capital are accumulated prestige and social distinctions that are unevenly spread to various social classes [13]. In fandom, fans rely on different types of social and cultural capital to gain power within a fan community. Jenkins suggests that fans consume and reproduce cultural works from official works without profit-making as an approach to establish themselves within a fan community [14]. This is a unique way to accumulate cultural capital and these reproduced cultural works can raise fans' social hierarchy within fan communities. They become influencers who are "worthy of being known" [13]. Then they have an increasing number of followers and they start to gain more power within the fan communities. It is a common method for members of a fan community to build their reputations.

In this study, the three uploaders are people who have more social and cultural capital within the animation lovers community on Bilibili, in that they love to make UGC videos related to animations. Their practices have helped them to attract a lot of followers who share the same interests with them, which is the reason that the game developer chooses them to make the ads. From the bullet chats in the game introduction parts of the videos, their fans show support to their practices and listen to their recommendations. Since the three uploaders have more social power and higher status in this community, their fans tend to listen to their suggestions. As a result, their fans are more likely to play the game. Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, the 2016 version promotion is not very effective. Although impactful uploaders recommended the game, their followers would still not play it if the game is bad.

IV. CONCLUSION

Bullet chat is a great window to observe target consumers' reaction. This study takes the UGC videos for Madoka Magica's mobile game promotion as examples to analyze the ways that influencers push their followers to play the game. The three types of bullet chats imply the reasons behind the effectiveness of this promotion approach, including word-of-mouth marketing, the importance of finding the right audiences, and the power of influencers in fan communities.

People tend to listen to people who are like them. Since followers and the uploaders have a close psychological relationship with each other, they are more likely to listen to the uploaders' recommendations. The game developer finds that the right influencers who connect to the correct target consumers. Some target consumers use bullet chats to further help promote the 2020 version in these UGC promotional videos for the 2016 version because they want to create more companions. In this way, the game company saves a lot of money on the promotion of the 2020 version, as people are directed by the link near the 2016 videos to the game of 2020 version. Besides, the three influencers have a high social hierarchy in the community, which means they control more

social and cultural capital in this social group. The power of these uploaders makes them sound more reliable and makes fans trust their suggestions in this community. Fans also show their love and support to these uploaders by sending bullet chats to the game introduction part of the videos.

This marketing strategy can be used in some other areas in the future, not only the mobile game advertisements, but also other types of products, and services promotion. Bullet chat is a great way to observe target consumers' reaction. Other video platforms can learn this marketing strategy and use it to advertise their products. Most of the video websites in China have the bullet chats function, but they did not make good use of it. Other video platforms may also cultivate their own influencers and attract more audiences. They can collaborate with influencers on Bilibili, and attract Bilibili uploaders to upload videos on their platforms as well, because Bilibili uploaders' fans may follow them to the new platforms. Nevertheless, the bad result of the 2016 version proves that if the product or service itself is not attractive, this marketing approach is still not effective.

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