

# ***Strategy Analysis of Health Care Products Advertising for the Aged: Optimization Suggestions Based on Appeal Presentation and Advertising Elements***

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**Abstract:** With the increase in the elderly population, the advertising strategy of healthcare products for older people needs to be systematically analyzed and optimized. Through literature review, this study adopted the advertisements targeting the elderly of three famous Chinese health products brands as cases, analyzing the typical strategies of current advertising practices based on the expression of appeals including rational and perceptual appealing and advertising elements related to social power, then offering suggestions on needs, advertising content and media mix. The results showed that as the basis of perceptual appeal, rational appealing contained product information and health problems. Product information focused on communication at the core benefit level, while the description of health problems promoted purchasing behavior through negative reinforcement. Perceptual appeal mostly adopted the framing of family affection with the appeal objects were simultaneously the elderly and their children. Advertising elements were related to legitimate, reward, and referent power, corresponding to the use of uniform image, incentive enticement and upward social comparison related to the idealized self-image of the elderly. Recommendations involved broadening the appealing technique corresponding to alternative types and higher levels of needs, attempting heuristics including humor and celebrity endorsements, and considering social media-related touching points. This study provided mechanism clarification and theoretical support for health communication and advertising practice.

**Keywords:** older adult, health care products, advertising strategies

## **1. Introduction**

Due to the aging effect and the increased number of the elderly population, the health products market for old people has become a concern. Although some scholars have believed that the aging phenomenon has a negative impact on the economy, the market of health-functional products targeting the elderly has shown a potential that cannot be ignored [1]. In terms of market size and consumption capacity, the population over 60 years old in China was expected to account for 42% of the total population, and the consumption level of the elderly will reach 5,236.2 billion yuan in 2030, which indicates the disposable income of the elderly in medical and health care may grow rapidly in the future [2]. This has been proved in younger age groups aged from 50 to 69 years old [3]. Little shortage of macro-level strategy analysis, problem analysis, and optimization suggestions for the

marketing strategies of health care products for the elderly has been found, but the specific research focusing on advertising was limited. Also, the pointcuts of the study related to advertising for the aged and dietary supplements for the elderly were relatively simple, and have not analyzed the existing advertising strategies in detail. Through case analysis of three TV advertisements of health care products for the elderly in mainland China, this paper adopted documentation analysis to focus on the advertising tactics of health care products for the elderly, sorting out the existing advertising practice patterns by appeals and advertising elements. Then, suggestions for strategy optimization were put forward to fill the gaps in the general and broad research related to macro analysis in the past. Since healthcare product advertising has carried health communication significance with the purpose of commercial profit, this review can not only enhance the value of health appeal in the social service function of enterprises to a certain extent but also provide theoretical support for the industry's practice of health care product advertising for the elderly [4].

## 2. Literature Review

Based on the fact that health product advertising has appeared more frequently in Asian language media than in the West, and relevant international studies discussed almost consumer behavior rather than advertising strategy, the literature chosen was mainly in China [5]. Most of the past research tended to analyze the current situation of the market of elderly healthcare products, explaining the communication difficulties of this type of advertising and putting forward corresponding solutions. Although these studies did not focus on advertising strategies for detailed examination, they still provided research ideas for this study. For example, Cui mentioned that the media selected for elderly functional food advertisements were mostly traditional media and pointed out the affective needs of the elderly with the paradigm of "family tricks" commonly used in advertising processing, rising suggestions include adopting the form of expert consulting and exploring the offline touch points from the perspective of the form of content [2]. Feng described the serious homogeneity of products in the elderly healthcare market and proposed the possibility of standing out through advertising to enhance brand image [6]. Other scholars have explained the importance of audiovisual advertising in media choices [7]. Although Wu's two articles focusing on health appeal advertisements avoided the analysis of advertising tactics, he summarized the marketing value of such advertisements, that is, they conveyed basic information such as product price and health efficacy, which was corresponding to rational appeals [4, 8]. Moreover, in Wu's research on the communication strategy of alienated healthcare products, three marketing sensitive points of such advertisements have been prompted, which involved expert image, emotional appeal, and welfare attraction respectively [8]. The paper "Research on Advertising for the Elderly" concentrated on advertising strategies, explaining the media mix commonly taken in advertising for the elderly and two types of different appeal objects, which advised on the transformation of negative image construction of the old people and the single expression of advertising appeal points based on successful advertising cases [3].

So, the entry point of most literature for advertising strategy could be summarized into three aspects, they are, appeal expression, advertising element, and media mix. Firstly, the interpretation of appeal could be divided into rational appealing and perceptual appealing [9]. The rational appeal can be alienated into two aspects: on the one hand, it was related to the transmission of basic information about the product itself, involving the core benefit level of the goods; on the other hand, it referred to the statement of specific health problems [4]. The suggestions from the past study for rational appealing mainly paid attention to the tactic of single appeal, that is, to select the focus from a series of the efficacy of the product for promotion [2, 3]. At the level of perceptual appealing, since the elderly were mentally lonely and physically in a sub-healthy state, healthcare product advertisements usually induce consumers' resonance and trust through contents about perceptual appealing through the narration of family affection framing [2]. The targeted customers of this frame

may be simultaneously the elderly themselves and their children [3]. This tactic showed the transformation of the visual presentation of the elderly from a weak to a healthier state, portraying them as attached to the image of weak social relations, sickness and helplessness, and then changed their figure into a positive image through the intervention of product usage [1]. In addition, in terms of advertising elements, images with the title of health experts created by the brand often appeared, such as "the first man of traditional Chinese medicine food therapy," and "Taoist health master" [8]. The spokespersons nominated were typically mature and wise elderly celebrities, in order to transfer the audience's trust towards them to the brand [1, 10]. Finally, the media delivery of healthcare products for the old still mainly included radio, television, magazines, and newspapers [3]. Television advertising accounted for the largest proportion [2].

### **3. Case Study**

This paper selected TV advertisements of three well-known health supplement brands whose products were targeting the elderly as examples, analyzing the typical strategies from the aspects of appeal and advertising elements. All three were broadcast on mainstream TV channels in China. These brands included Naobaijin (Melatonin), Huangjindadang (Golden Partner), and Dongeejiao (Dong-E-E-Jiao).

#### **3.1. The Presentation of Appealing**

Although the academic definition of advertising appeals contained rational and perceptual, many cases in which brands adopted the two appeals at the same time could be found in the actual advertising practice of functional food for the aged. The blending usage of emotion and reason persuasion reached by introducing the basic effects and then rising the resonance of the elderly and their children with emotional implications. Rational appealing was the basis of content for health product advertising, and perceptual appealing could be regarded as the second stage based on it.

##### **3.1.1. Rational Appealing**

The rational appeal in this context could be divided into two categories, including the product itself and the corresponding health problems. On the one hand, the presentation of product information matched with the core benefit level, delivering messages about the most basic needs that the product could meet, which were mainly the efficacy of the product. For example, Melatonin advertisements emphasized sleep improvement, bowel laxation, and Golden Partner promoted bone health. On the other hand, health problems generally resonated with customers through negative images such as illness and pain, encouraging the elderly to buy related products to avoid similar negative consequences with negative reinforcement.

In the narrative of function, the cases presented a single presentation of multiple demands. Taking the ads for Melatonin as an example, although the product contained a variety of effects, its commercials mainly chose improving sleeping and relaxing the bowels as two key points for promotion. A typical practice was that in order to reach different types of target audiences, the brand broke down the appeal from customers into three aspects including tiredness, constipation, and melancholy appearance to persuade the elderly facing different health problems respectively based on the persuasion that if two promised functions of sleep aid and bowel hydration could take effects, problems above could be solved. This single appeal presentation could be characterized as an emphasis on the product's points of difference, aiming to deeply root the product's competitive advantage in consumer perception through unique selling points, which reached through conceptually disassembled for different health issues to appeal to different segments of consumers.

### 3.1.2. Perceptual Appealing

Given the psychological characteristics of the elderly, who long for the companionship of their children because living alone and have a lot of free time, the advertising practice of dietary supplements for the elderly has no shortage of perceptual appeal strategies centering on family affection [8]. However, the family framing was not only aimed at the elderly consumers themselves but also expected to persuade their children. Taking the advertisement "Fashion Player" from Dong-E-E-Jiao as an instance, although the case described the personal hobbies of three different old people, their children played the role of supporters and the closing sentence "Dong-E-E-Jiao honors parents with you" implied the intention to extend the appeal objects to their children. Also, Golden Partner used a similar strategy in "Chapter of Sailboat", one of its serial commercials. Although the scene of elderly people sailing accounted for a large part, the young people appeared with the role of children leading to the appeals in the ending that "buying a few boxes for parents immediately". Therefore, the emotional framing under family affection presented a dual tactic for the targeted customers, which tries to reach the purchase of children who buy products for their parents while the elderly could also be the buyers.

### 3.1.3. Analysis on Effectiveness

In the above practice, the single presentation of the function in the rational appeal was the key point to make the advertisement exert the maximum value. Based on the Brand Resonance Model, the two appeal types focused on the product specification and the emotion arousing respectively, namely product performance and consumer feelings, which belong to the second and third stages of the model: meaning and response creating [11]. However, by differentiating the functions of healthcare products and refining the unique selling points that were most attractive to consumers, the most basic stage of identity shaping could be consolidated, which contributed to building deep and broad awareness of consumers in salience, so as long as specific health problems are mentioned, consumers will first think of the product or brand.

In addition, although perceptual appeal under the family affection framing could target both the elderly and their children, it may gradually lose effectiveness due to the changes in the consumer behavior of the elderly. The psychological features of the aged were highlighted by a sense of loneliness and loss [12]. The former need to match with the needs of belongings or friendship, while the latter corresponds to the need for personal affirmation of achievements. Under this circumstance, family narratives fail to catering the needs of all emotional types, blocking the possibility of the elderly resolving their sense of loss and making them feel that their contributions were recognized as self-worth due to the limitation of family scenery. Relevant studies have also confirmed that the consumption custom of the urban elderly may change, who will pay more attention to the quality of life and self-realization, such as personal achievements and hobbies [2]. As a result, although the family appeal has a positive effect on the existing market, more effective framing should be explored.

## 3.2. Advertising Elements

The elements in the advertising of healthcare products for the elderly were associated with social power. The common strategies include the use of legitimate power, reward power, and referent power. Such elements could be used as mental shortcuts or heuristics to attract the attention of the audience in a short period, helping to gain trust or recognition quickly.

Legitimate power was embodied in the use of certain social contract symbols in advertising, such as uniforms [13]. In an advertisement intended to establish the high-quality perception of the product Melatonin, the image of the company's management in a suit, foreign experts wearing white coats, workshop managers in blue helmets and workwear, and researchers with aseptic clothing appeared at

the same time at once, suggesting that the product has undergone strict research and development with high-quality control. Their social power was different from expert power because these roles were not authentic managers, experts, and researchers, but brands could adopt uniform elements to enhance influence through a specific social agreement, which has an implicit persuasive effect on consumers.

Reward power was mainly reflected in the giving of benefits. By repeating messages like " I pay you for 10 days of product consuming ", "get tens of thousands of red envelopes to buy Melatonin ", and "100% winning a price", Melatonin stimulated targeted audiences to form an attitude quickly, especially for older adults who process through the low-involvement and experiential hierarchy for attitude founding. After receiving such stimulus, they may rapidly form cognition or beliefs and realize subsequent purchases, or they may quickly purchase products after forming positive emotions for hedonic consumption.

The usage of referent power in elderly health food was related to image presentation. Different from the traditional types of advertisements that build a persona with an old and sick image in the approach of negative reinforcement, the commercials of Golden Partner mostly adopt positive image construction methods. For example, the elderly couple in the " Chapter of Sailing" was nimble and praised by young people. "Chapter of Grandfather and Grandson " showed the old man easily carrying his grandson up the stairs. In 2018, one TV commercial of Golden Partner showed the scene of exercising and swimming healthy elderly people. This kind of advertisement highlighted the healthy, strong, optimistic, and positive characteristics of the elderly from the approach of opportunity recognition, that is, to raise the ideal state and guide consumers to think that owning the product will make their life better. The type of this pattern of advertising could be characterized as the strategy of using idealized images for upward social comparison. On the one hand, the contents emphasized the idealized self, lowering self-esteem by comparison with the real self-state, so as to enhance the elderly's need for self-esteem, increasing the possibility of purchase as a result. On the other hand, when the elderly have a yearning for idealized image construction, they may imitate the behavior of the group in the advertisement and consume the corresponding products.

### **3.2.1. Effects Analysis**

Due to the degradation of physiological functions brought about by aging, the undermining of human brain function for the elderly may lead to a decrease in intelligence, memory, and problem-solving ability [14]. In this situation, they may be more inclined to process simpler information and use heuristics to make decisions. The use of the elements in terms of the three social power mentioned above in advertising could cater to the characteristics of the elderly, helping consumers quickly form attitudes and induce purchasing behaviors.

## **4. Optimization Suggestion**

Starting from the types and levels of needs, this part explored the possibility of adopting other narratives besides the traditional family framing. Then, according to the psychological and physiological characteristics of the elderly, this paper proposed more cues and external factors that could contribute to attitudes formulating of the aged in simple cognitive processing. These elements could be considered for implementation in practice. Finally, the potential of Internet-related touching points has been demonstrated, which has a positive effect on word-of-mouth and loyalty.

### **4.1. Innovation in the Framing Based on Types and Levels of Needs**

Depending on the gradually shifting consumption habits of the elderly, the advertising of healthcare products for the old could broaden the type and explore higher levels of needs. Health supplements



advertising was often based on the primary needs of the elderly to stay healthy, but other types of needs could also be considered, such as the desire for material, to enjoy a comfortable and convenient life, or the need for power (making choices and controlling life). In other words, advertising could explore the framing associated with the need for self-realization, power, and uniqueness, conveying the information of having a healthy body, controlling the surrounding environment, and emphasizing a unique identity relying on the strategy that the aged is the single appealing object. In addition, the brand could broaden the expression of emotional relationships beyond the solidified selection of the family affection narration, adding more elements about love and friendship with more diversified paths to incorporate the perceptual appealing tactic.

#### **4.2. Enrich Heuristics of Peripheral Route**

From the existing case analysis, it can be proved that elderly health product commercials tended to adopt the peripheral route to persuade the audience explained by the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which may be due to the elderly's lack of motivation and ability to interpret complex information [15]. As a consequence, consumers consider how much they like the information, so the brand could implement external cues to facilitate rapid cognitive processing. The specific methods are to invite the elderly's favorite celebrities as spokespersons, apply humor elements, employ creative expression, and so on. When these cues are increased, they could be combined with social power to increase consumer attention and brand exposure, then promote purchase behavior.

#### **4.3. Broaden the Media Mix**

Because the aged audiences tend to process information through the peripheral route, they are susceptible to the interference of incentives such as discounts from other brands and switch to choose alternatives. So, brands may face the problem of insufficient user loyalty. To decrease this risk, companies could try to develop new touching points to build an effective mix of media based on traditional options. In recent years, the number of elderly people exposure and use to the Internet has shown a growing trend. According to the data of China Internet Network Information Center, compared with 2021, the number of people over 60 years as Netizen in 2022 increased from 11.5% to 14.3%, reaching 153 million in total [16]. For that reason, enterprises are able to disseminate information to targeted audiences through social media channels such as public accounts and short video platforms on WeChat, one of the social media that own the high using frequency of the elderly to process health communication [17]. Communication on such platforms is conducive to the formation of word-of-mouth marketing and the sense of community, which not only accumulates user basis and improves user stickiness, but also contributes to the subsequent engagement campaign of enterprises, forming a virtuous circle of loyalty enhancement.

### **5. Conclusion**

By analyzing TV advertising cases of three famous brands about health care products for the elderly, this paper reviewed and summarized the common strategies from the appeals expression and advertising elements, finding that the existing health supplements for the aged were based on rational appeals and carried out perceptual appeals from the perspective of family affection framework. Among them, rational appeals could be divided into product information and health problem narration. The former focused on the core benefit level, while the latter applied negative reinforcement to persuade. Perceptual appeal showed the dual object strategies of the elderly and their children under the family affection framing. Besides, in terms of advertising elements, persuasion is accomplished through different social powers as heuristics. The social power commonly accepted includes legitimate, reward, and referent power.

Based on the existing advertising strategy, this article introduces optimization suggestions in terms of needs, information processing routes, and media mix, involving demonstrating more needs types, supplying high demand levels narrations to cater to changed consumption habits, adding external factors as elements to incorporate social power to form synergy, and expanding media mix, such as social media to help word-of-mouth marketing and enhance loyalty.

In summary, this study analyzed the typical strategies of health care product advertising for the elderly, explained the possible mechanisms and reasons behind it, and filled the gap in strategies analysis focusing on advertising in this kind of product. At the same time, this review also proposes development suggestions based on the effect evaluation, which provided a theoretical basis for the follow-up practice of this type of advertising.

However, although this paper discussed the main consumer-sensitive points, it did not cover the determination of detailed picture presentation, creative performance, and playback time. Besides, the analysis material is TV advertisement, and the plain text rebroadcast such as radio was ignored. Moreover, the effect evaluation adopted theoretical deduction and lacks empirical support in consumer behavior. Finally, the definition of the elderly in this study was general. This paper has not subdivided this group into old-old or young-old, whose values and lifestyles may be different, so the advertisements targeted at them may also be different. Future studies could begin with more aspects of advertising content, subdivide the elderly population into deferent layers, and add variables such as lifestyles to explore the effectiveness of advertising strategies.

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