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ACHIEVING PROMOTION THROUGH CONSTRUCTING PRAGMATIC IDENTITIES IN ANTHROPOMORPHIC SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING – A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

As a large number of companies adopt anthropomorphic marketing approaches to share information and promote products on social media, this paper examines the role of identities constructed by these companies on such platforms in enhancing their marketing endeavors. Utilizing three e-commerce official accounts on Weibo, a prominent Chinese social media platform, this research delves into the linguistic perspective to uncover how diverse pragmatic identities constructed by these accounts can impact their promotional efforts. A tailored analytical framework, integrating pragmatic identity theory with rapport management theory, is developed to reflect their projected identities and elucidate the strategies employed in their construction across discourse, stylistic, and illocutionary dimensions. Under the content analysis of a self-built mini-corpus, this study shows that their identities, which belong to pragmatic identities, are defined in three dynamic and interactive aspects: good bargain promoter, beautiful life sharer, and e-commercial media introducer. Each identified identity is subsequently exemplified with authentic posts, providing an understanding of their promotional facilitation functions. Finally, the feasibility of constructing various pragmatic identities within social media contexts is discussed.

KEYWORDS: identity construction, pragmatic identity, promotion, anthropomorphic social media marketing, rapport management

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of Internet and information technologies has made the flourishing of social media possible. For enterprises, the adoption of social media marketing has evolved into a pivotal component within their marketing strategies. Notably, these platforms enable companies to engage directly with their customers, eliciting prompt feedback, enhancing brand recognition, and shaping consumer sentiments (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Within the area of social media marketing, anthropomorphic social media marketing (ASMM) as a unique communicative strategy has been proven successful in promoting brands and products (Kim et al., 2020; Yuan et al., 2020). The emblematic features of anthropomorphism and interaction in ASMM to a large extent reveal the essence of companies seeking to establish a good and intimate relationship between brands and

followers, which determines the strategies and style that brands employ in promotion. To do that, one effective method is to construct various identities in the self-presentation of brands, as anthropomorphic discourse is conducive to the construction of various human identities that are easy to interact with customers and establish good relationships.

From the perspective of linguistics, especially interpersonal pragmatics, the feature of interactivity and contextuality may shed light on how marketers can employ various and well-designed language forms to forge different identities to connect with followers and potential customers in ASMM (Locher, 2013; Ran & Huang, 2019). However, to the best of the author's knowledge, anthropomorphic marketing posts in social media were rarely analyzed from a linguistic perspective, not to mention the analysis of identity construction. Therefore, in this paper, I adopt a discursive approach to investigate the identity construction as a marketing strategy in ASMM. As far as the research object is concerned, I have noticed that the posts by some official accounts of Chinese e-commerce (Tmall, Taobao, and JD) on Weibo, a popular social media platform in China, fully reveal the characteristics of ASMM. In fact, they are regarded as anthropomorphic (Kwon & Sung, 2011) and thus will be utilized as research data for this study. Furthermore, this research will employ an interpersonal pragmatic point of view, specifically pragmatic identity theory (Chen, 2013, 2018) and rapport management theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), to investigate what identities these platforms construct and how the various identities can make a difference in their advertising and promotion.

In a nutshell, the remainder of the article is organized as follows: Section 2 outlines basic notions and representative literature related to this study. Section 3 provides an introduction of research methods, where how data are collected and coded under a working analytical approach will be presented. Section 4 first reports the findings and then discusses each type of pragmatic identity and its realization form under rapport management theory. Then, a discussion about the feasibility and reasons for constructing pragmatic identities in ASMM will be presented. In the concluding section, the general summary of the findings and discussion, and the implications and limitations are discussed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Anthropomorphic marketing in social media

As social psychologists suggest, people tend to anthropomorphize nonhuman entities due to cognitive and social motivations (Waytz et al., 2010). Accordingly, anthropomorphism is the phenomenon in which nonhuman entities are given human-like traits (Epley et al., 2007). In business, applying anthropomorphic elements to brands has been proven an effective marketing strategy, as consumers have the tendency to humanize or anthropomorphize brands for remembering better (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012). Traditionally, marketers often utilize anthropomorphism in producing animation tactics, brand characters, and spokespeople (Fournier & Alvarez, 2012). Nowadays, with the presence of social media, increasingly more companies employ anthropomorphic expressions as a communicative strategy to give their followers information and promote their products. Brand presence on social media attracts consumer attention, generates brand awareness and familiarity, and

thus enables marketers to reach consumers directly. Therefore, employing anthropomorphic marketing on social media is necessary and plausible.

In literature, anthropomorphic social media marketing (ASMM) is defined as a marketing strategy in which brands personify themselves by using human representatives, personal pronouns (first and second pronouns), or verbs in imperative forms to post information and interact with their followers in social media, with the aim of promoting themselves and their products (Golossenko et al., 2020; Kwon & Sung, 2011). Previous studies suggested that anthropomorphic social media marketing is a successful strategy both on Western platforms (Kim et al., 2020; Kwon & Sung, 2011) and Chinese social media (Yu & He, 2018; Yuan et al., 2020). For example, the result of Kim et al.'s (2020) study revealed that customers perceived the anthropomorphized brand as a trustworthy relationship partner, thus giving more 'Likes' for the posts from the anthropomorphized brand than those of non-anthropomorphized.

Despite the noteworthy contributions of ASMM research, its findings have predominantly been confined to marketing perspectives, with limited alternative research methodologies, such as linguistics. Given that the essence of ASMM lies in linguistic messages conveyed through posts, a linguistic examination of this phenomenon offers a compelling avenue for exploration. The widespread adoption of social media by brands underscores their pursuit of rapport-building strategies. Consequently, an interpersonal pragmatic analysis, which delves into the linguistic aspects of social interactions, deserves greater attention. By adopting this perspective, we can gain a deeper understanding of how ASMM employs linguistic strategies to enhance brand-consumer relationships, thereby broadening the scope and depth of existing research.

2.2 Identity and pragmatic identity

Identity is a popular topic in many fields of social science, like philosophy, sociology, and linguistics. From a pragmatic perspective, constructing identity is the process through which a communicator uses linguistic symbols to dynamically construct an identity in order to meet communicative purposes (Yuan, 2013). In ASMM, identities are also constructed in that brands personify themselves as human beings who have multiple identities catering for different settings, and those identities are what I will focus on in this research.

Enlightened by the post-modern social constructionism, the identity studies acquired new approaches and revealed major shifts for understanding identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Chen, 2013, 2018; De Fina et al., 2006; Tracy & Robles, 2013). Notably, identity has been viewed as a discursive achievement that is dynamically constituted in discourse and varies in specific contexts. One representative concept of it is a framework of five principles for constructing identity by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), where they stressed that the study of identity is "the social positioning of self and other" (p. 586), recognizing its interpersonal feature. With the framework, one principle, the emergence principle, defined that identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural

phenomenon.

Drawing upon these insights, Chen (2013, 2018) proposed the concept of ‘pragmatic identity’, which is defined as an entirely discursively constructed achievement that can be adopted as a coherent set of illocutionary resources. This pragmatic identity represents a distinct social identity, either embodied, constructed, or even made up within the realm of actual communication. Hence, those pragmatic identities originate from one’s inherent identity, or default identity, which in essence is a certain reflection of the original one with a particular purpose, like interaction or transactional (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). In this paper, I consider the identities that e-commerce accounts built on social media are pragmatic ones for following three reasons: firstly, the primary motivation for crafting these identities within ASMM is promotional in nature, with a clear transactional objective; secondly, the presence of posts that diverge from the stereotypical image of an e-commerce entity underscores that these postings are not solely driven by their inherent social identity (i.e., being an e-commerce company), but rather by strategic considerations; thirdly, the prevalent practice of leveraging social media to engage customers virtually through the adoption of different relationally-oriented identities, which has garnered empirical support in recent literature (Huang & Li, 2023; Wang & Feng, 2022).

2.3 Rapport management theory and pragmatic identity

Combining the study of identity with interpersonal pragmatic theories, like relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005) and rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), is a recent prevailing approach. As identity construction has interpersonal pragmatic characteristics, identities should emerge during communication and require negotiation and co-construction between two or more parties to the conversation (Li & Ran, 2015). Hence, there is a natural link between relation and identity, as understanding the meaning of identity will also affect the construction of interpersonal relationships themselves (Arundale, 2010; Ran & Huang, 2019). Recognizing the intimate connection between identity and rapport management, communicators can adopt rapport strategies summarized by Spencer-Oatey (2008) to direct their establishment of harmonious relationships through identity construction. Therefore, particularly for this paper, I will employ this theory as the basic analytical framework to discover the pragmatic identities.

Within the framework of rapport management, multiple aspects of language use can affect the interlocutor’s interpretations of how bases of rapport — face, sociality rights, and interactional goals — are managed (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 20). The aspects of language use are summarized as the following five domains: illocutionary, discourse, participation, stylistic, and non-verbal, in which each domain contains several linguistic strategies. Meanwhile, several factors can influence the use of strategies: rapport orientations, contextual variables, and pragmatic principles and conventions. The results of choosing different strategies to manage different bases are the outcomes of rapport management, which are similar in type to rapport orientations.

In literature, the empirical studies on identity work under the guidance of rapport management are

limited. Zhu's (2022) research about how domains of rapport management can interpret the construction of conventional and non-conventional identity via emails of postgraduates revealed the connection between identity and interpersonal pragmatics. Huang and Li's (2023) paper on investigating identity construction in new media publicity on culture on WeChat specified how pragmatic identities are constructed and the subsequent interpersonal functions are implemented. However, the investigation of identity construction in marketing contexts is rare, not to mention pragmatic identity. Moreover, the former studies focused more on how strategies of rapport management help shape pragmatic identity but nevertheless neglected the retroactive impact for communicative purposes, like promotion, resulting in less practical implication.

Bearing these and the above gaps in mind, the present research is dedicated to exploring how e-commerce accounts construct their pragmatic identities in anthropomorphic social media marketing and then discussing what triggers these accounts to construct them. Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

- (1) What pragmatic identities do e-commerce accounts construct in their anthropomorphic posts on social media?
- (2) How are these pragmatic identities constructed through rapport management strategy?
- (3) Why is constructing pragmatic identities to facilitate promotion in anthropomorphic social media marketing feasible?

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Data collection

The first step in collecting the data is to find an appropriate social media platform, and the leading Chinese social media platform Weibo perfectly serves my research intention. Thanks to social media's high popularity and far-reaching influence on the cyberspace, increasingly companies also register their official accounts to promote themselves and their products (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Similar to Twitter, Weibo allows every registered user to share their moments of life under its rules and regulations. Moreover, it is such a privileged status among Chinese social media and the recurrence of rich pragmatic resources that contribute to an in-depth study of internet discourse (Liu & Chen, 2021). Particularly for this study, I chose the industry of e-commerce as an example to elucidate how pragmatic identities are constructed in ASMM. E-commerce is viewed as a flourishing industry in Chinese society, for it not only supports the economic development of individuals and SMEs¹ but also sets a good example on how to market on the Internet. In order to ensure the authority and authenticity of the data, only official accounts of each platform were taken into consideration. Three of the most influential e-commerce platforms in China were selected as the data sources: Taobao, Tmall and JD.

¹ For a further detailed introduction of the performance of Chinese e-commerce and the representative e-commerce platforms from the perspective of non-Chinese institutions, please refer to: <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/china-ecommerce> .

The second step is to collect the posts under the category of anthropomorphic messages. Obviously, not every post on the three accounts is in the form of anthropomorphism. Referring to the framework for identifying anthropomorphic messages by Kwon and Sung (2011), I manually excluded the posts without anthropomorphic features in order to collect relevant and comparatively representative data. To name a few features of anthropomorphic posts, one is to seek interaction with their followers through speech acts like directive and commissive (Searle, 1979). The time span of the collected data is from March 1st to March 31st in 2023, during which the following but not limited events may facilitate the creation of posts: the arrival of spring, International Women's Day and other important festivals within March, sales promotion by companies and brands, et al. To ensure the validity and objectivity of the data, only original posts were taken into consideration, thus leaving out posts like reposts and messages about drawing lots. And posts with the same or almost the same content would be counted only once. In total, 264 Weibo posts (137 for Tmall, 95 for JD, and 22 for Taobao) under the category of ASMM were collected and served further as the basis for data analysis. The original language of posts is Chinese, so all the analysis was conducted directly in the Chinese texts. In the discussion part, every example will be represented in both Chinese and English (translated by the author). All the posts were saved in the form of text, and thus a corpus of about 43000 Chinese characters was established and analyzed with the help of a corpus research tool.

In terms of ethical issues concerning data taken from social media, with respect to *AOIR internet research ethics*², I consider the use of marketing posts as not problematic because they are publicly available messages produced on social media platforms. What's more, as my study investigates the linguistic features of messages and does not involve a classified issue of marketing, I consider the outcome of this research not harmful to these platforms.

3.1 Data analysis

To analyze the data, I adopt a discursive content approach to identify pragmatic identities and then analyze how they are constructed. Specifically, the pragmatic identities that e-commerce accounts have constructed were identified by virtue of a powerful qualitative data analysis tool, NVivo 12. Within the bottom-up approach to retrieving the identities, I first conducted a statistic of word frequency in order to get the first insight on relevant topics in my corpus, which is actually the key criterion for distinguishing the pragmatic identities. Leaving out function words and unrelated components, the most frequently appearing topics were recognized, such as 'live ('生活')', 'new products ('新品')', 'material benefits ('福利')', 'spring day ('春日')'.

As the initial approach only shows a certain tendency of topics, a more detailed analysis of all posts would then be conducted. In the second step, a three-tier node coding of the posts was established to identify the types of pragmatic identities. Within the coding, I first manually examine all of the posts to check the multiple aspects of their language use under the guidance of Spencer-Oatey's (2008)

² For more information about AOIR internet research ethics, please check: <https://aoir.org/ethics/>.

rapport management domains. The framework consists of five domains of language use, yet two of them, namely the participant domain and the non-verbal domain, were not considered in the analysis as elements of face-to-face interaction, like turn-taking and non-verbal expressions, can be rarely noticed in my data. Altogether, three domains were examined: the illocutionary domain (like speech act components, directness-indirectness), the discourse domain (topic selection, topic management), and the stylistic domain (like tone, genre-appropriate lexis, and syntax). As soon as the first-tier coding was finished, the second- and third-tier coding would be conducted based on further refinement and generalization. The third-tier of pragmatic identities is what I will elucidate in the following discussion.

4. Results: Types of pragmatic identities and their realization rapport domains

4.1 Overview

Based on an exhaustive analysis of 264 Weibo posts, three distinct pragmatic identities have emerged: the good bargain promoter, the beautiful life sharer, and the e-commerce media introducer. It is acknowledged that a minority of posts do not align with any predefined category and are thus classified under “Others”, which will be excluded from subsequent discussions. Notably, the total count of identified pragmatic identities surpasses the number of posts, owing to the presence of multiple identities within a single post (especially those of longer length), highlighting the dynamic nature of pragmatic identity construction.

The good bargain promoter identity is adopted by e-commerce entities when they collaborate with or impersonate specific brands to actively promote products or discounts, with the ultimate goal of encouraging consumers to make purchases. In contrast, the beautiful life sharer identity presents followers with strategies for enhancing their lifestyles, including lifestyle tips, shopping advice, and examples of fulfilling lives, while implicitly promoting e-commerce platforms and associated products. Lastly, the e-commerce media introducer identity involves the platforms themselves recommending various media channels relevant to the platform, such as live streaming, short-video advertisements, and localized promotions, to promote their offerings in an indirect and interactive manner.

Table 2 provides an overview of the linguistic forms employed to construct these pragmatic identities within the context of rapport management, which will be elaborated upon in subsequent sections. Focusing specifically on the stylistic domain, it is evident from the data that the predominant tone of the posts is intimate and humorous, driven by the objective of fostering harmonious relationships with customers in the realm of marketing.

Table 1: Pragmatic identities identified in posts of ASMM by three e-commerce accounts

<i>Third-tier node</i>	<i>Second-tier node</i>	<i>First-tier node</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Total number</i> (N=279)	<i>%</i>
<i>Pragmatic identities</i>	<i>Domains</i>	<i>Contents of topics</i>			
Good bargain promotor	Good products	new products (‘新品’), trend (‘趋势’), material benefits (‘福利’), brand (‘品牌’)	92	142	33.0
	Good discounts	subsidy (‘补贴’), VIP, material benefits (‘福利’), super (‘超级’)	50		17.9
Beautiful life sharer	Personal life	life (‘生活’), spring (‘春天’), spring days (‘春日’), health (‘健康’)	76	86	27.2
	Group life	health (‘健康’), life (‘生活’), ideal (‘理想’), female (‘女性’)	10		3.6
E-commercial media introducer	/	live streaming (‘直播’), celebrities (‘名人’), live scene (‘现场’)	/	41	14.7

Others	/	/	/	10	3.6
Total	/	/	/	279	100

Table 2: Domains of rapport management of the identities construction made relevant in ASMM

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Realized language form in the research</i>
Illocutionary	Speech act components	directive, expressive, commissive
	Directness-indirectness	mainly indirectness
	Upgrades-downgrades	a synergic adoption
Discourse	Topic choices	(See ‘ <i>Contents of topics</i> ’ in Table 1)
	Topic management	inclusion of personal topics
Stylistic	Tone	intimate, humorous
	Genre-appropriate lexis	personal pronouns, anthropomorphic expressions

4.2 Good bargain promoter

As the nature of e-commerce is to inspire customers to purchase products, the first type of pragmatic identity, good bargain promoter, appearing most frequently in the result comes as no surprise. Two domains of this pragmatic identity are further classified: good product promoter and good discount promoter. The former one is to directly introduce products, while the latter one provides followers with discount information, aiming to tempt customers to purchase the product as it is a good bargain. Example (1) from Tmall provides a case for constructing a good bargain promoter in terms of sharing products:

(1) (English) Meow ~ I heard today is PI Day!

Ben meow collects many round-shape treasured good things, taking you make friends with those good ‘rounds’

(Chinese) 喵~听说今天是圆周率日! [doge]

本喵集结诸多圆滚滚宝藏好物，带你广结良“圆”

The post is premised on the celebration of PI Day (14th, March), narrowing the scope of the post and then relating it to the topic of introducing products which have round shape. The original post is attached with a long picture where it lists those “round-shaped treasured good things” for followers’ reference. Typically, in my data, all three platforms preferred to exploit festivals and special events as the background to activate their actions of promotion (Kolter et al., 2017). In order to advocate followers’ actions, an indirect speech act of expressive was adopted here in the form of indirectness. Rather than overtly promoting products, it adopts a first-person narrative, showing its personal preferences, and tactfully incorporates a Chinese linguistic pun to subtly encourage viewers to explore further, thereby fostering humor and fostering an intimate rapport with customers.

However, in Example (2), a different organizing strategy was observed to recommend discounts compared to Example (1):

(2) *(English) Take a glance at ‘Universal money saving strategies for human being’, this wave of operation is highly recommended, really practical ~!*

(Chinese) 速来看《人类通用省钱攻略》，这波操作强烈推荐，真的实用~！

In the illocutionary domain, a direct speech act of directive was used to actively attract followers to browse the so-called “universal money-saving strategies for human beings.” As the name suggests, the strategies are attractive because they are “universal money saving”. Nevertheless, in the latter half of the sentence, two upgrades, “highly” and “really” boost the degree of the recommendation. With several powerful language expressions occurring in one post, it is indeed difficult for followers to reject such material benefits.

In the following Example (3), the post constructed both domains of a good bargain promoter. The first half of the post introduced a new watch brand available on JD, and the second half shared some privileges that customers have in a comparatively neutral degree of expression. Thus, this kind of construction may suggest that the actual need for followers’ attention to the brand is not so prevalent, as the demand for luxurious watches is limited.

(3) *(English) Longines' official flagship store in JD has elegantly launched and landed on @Jingdong @Jingdong new department store. From now until March 8th, you can enjoy multiple privileges, such as free interest and membership rights. Please go visit and start your new shopping journey...*

(Chinese) 浪琴表京东官方旗舰店优雅启幕，现已重磅登陆 @ 京东 @ 京东新百货。即刻起至3月8日，入店奢享限时免息与会员权益等多重礼遇，前往开启全新购物之旅...

To sum up, for constructing good bargain promoter, two specific topics can be further divided depending on the nature of a product or a discount. This promotional identity explicitly extends an invitation to followers to engage in purchasing activities on e-commerce platforms, emphasizing either the quality of products or the value of discounts. To embody this identity, indirect speech acts, personalized expressions, humor tone, and other strategies are frequently adopted. Moreover, to elicit an action that followers have particular interests in, direct speech acts, upgrades, et al. can be utilized. By tailoring these approaches to the specific nature of the promotion, e-commerce can enhance the persuasiveness and appeal of their campaigns.

4.3 Beautiful life sharer

The beautiful life sharer refers to the pragmatic identity that accounts present themselves as experts or enthusiasts in sharing daily events, tips, and advice that can help their followers lead a more fulfilling and enjoyable life. The topics covered under this identity encompass a wide range, from practical household hacks and fashion tips to strategies for enhancing overall life quality. In some instances, the sharers directly showcase exemplary models of living a beautiful life, providing inspiration and guidance. This identity can be further divided into two sub-categories based on the scope of influence: personal life and group life. Under personal life, the focus is on enhancing the quality of life for individuals, offering tips and advice tailored to their personal needs and aspirations. In contrast, the group life aims to have a broader impact, extending beyond the individual to influence entire communities or even nations. The ultimate goal is to improve the overall quality of human life on a societal level.

While the construction of this pragmatic identity appears to be primarily focused on offering valuable suggestions and building rapport with followers, it is essentially an indirect form of promotion for the e-commerce platforms and products featured within. The implicit message is that acquiring the products sold on these platforms is a crucial step towards achieving the ideal way of living portrayed by the beautiful life sharers. In this way, the sharers are not only offering advice but also subtly encouraging their followers to make purchases on the recommended platforms. A typical example is shown in the following (4):

(4) *(English) Meow! Let Ben Meow see who's not smearing sunscreen today? [meow] Young without sun protection, skin aging can only be sad [cry]! The road to repair & whitening is a long-term plan ~ Quickly follow Ben Meow and start from the simple daily sunscreen...*

(Chinese) 喵~ 让本喵看看谁今天没涂防晒? 年少不防晒, 肌肤老化只能徒伤悲了! 修复&美白之路是长久大计~ 快跟着本喵一起, 从日常简单的防晒开始...

In this example from Tmall, the beautiful life sharer employs a strategic approach to engage and persuade their followers. By highlighting the importance of early sunscreen use to protect skin from premature aging caused by sun exposure, the sharer creates a sense of urgency and fear around the

consequences of neglecting this crucial step in skincare. The use of the word “only” serves to amplify this message, emphasizing that lack of sun protection is the sole cause of skin aging in these circumstances. The directive speech act in the final sentence directly guides followers on how to combat this issue by blocking the sun, implicitly suggesting that the first and most important step is to purchase suitable sunscreens. By seamlessly integrating this recommendation with the conversation, the sharer cleverly promotes Tmall’s sunscreen products without being overtly salesy. Furthermore, the use of a famous Chinese proverb and emojis adds a layer of humor and intimacy to the post, making it more relatable and engaging for the followers. This approach helps to strengthen the credibility and trust between the account and its audience, as it shows that the sharer cares about their well-being and is using humor to convey an important message in a lighthearted manner (Zayts-Spence et al., 2023).

As earlier mentioned, there are some cases where more than one pragmatic identity was constructed. In my data, they are mainly the combination of beautiful life sharer at first and good bargain promoter at second, as notified in Example (5):

(5) (English) [Today's Spring Equinox] Spring breeze carries the message of flowers, warblers and swallows fly and dance everywhere with fragrance. Don't forget to take good care of yourself while soaking in the warm spring sun and having fun. Today is # World Sleep Day, go to JD and search 'Sleep Day'. JD home sleep Day helps you sleep well anytime and anywhere!

(Chinese) 【今日春分】风传花信·莺飞燕舞处处香。沉浸在春日的暖阳和快乐出游的同时，也别忘了照顾好自己哦！今天是#世界睡眠日#，逛京东搜“睡眠节”，京东居家睡眠节·随时随地好睡！

In the first part of the post, the sharer kindly reminded us to take care of ourselves when taking spring outings in the background of a special Chinese day - Spring Equinox. Moreover, in the second part, it told us that one way of doing that is to sleep well, as that day is also World Sleep Day. Furthermore, it suggested us to visit JD for a better sleep with the related products on the platforms. As this post indicated, such a combinatio directly links the way of good life to the purchase of good products.

Lastly, appearing less frequently, beautiful group life sharer can be constructed in a relatively ethical way with less commercial purpose, as shown in Example (6):

(6) (English) Meow ~ Happy # Women's Day #! The most beautiful days in the world is in March, and Ben Meow wishes every 'she' in her own exclusive field can shine. To answer what is the ideal new life, your own say! [Flowers]

(Chinese) 喵~ #妇女节# 快乐！[心]人间最美三月天·本喵祝福每一位“她”，在自己专属的领域里都能闪闪发光·理想新生活的答案·自己说了算！[鲜花]

In this post, the account adopts a more subtle and empathetic approach to engage with its followers, particularly focusing on celebrating and supporting women. By offering best wishes for success in both professional and personal endeavors, the account fosters a sense of community and appreciation for women's contributions to society. This approach not only resonates with followers but also positions the account as a supportive and inclusive entity. While the promotional aspect of the post is less overt than in previous examples, the mention of "ideal new life" implicitly hints at the platform's advocacy of enhancing one's lifestyle through purchasing new and high-quality products. For those familiar with Tmall's branding, this slogan serves as a subtle reminder of the platform's offerings.

To sum up, in this pragmatic identity, the account employs a mix of expressive and directive speech acts, directly addressing personal topics that are relevant to followers' lives. The use of humor and intimacy, as well as personal pronouns, helps to mitigate potential threats to followers' quality face and identity face (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). By framing the discussion around the aspiration for a better life and positioning products as prerequisites for achieving this, the account invites followers to explore and potentially purchase items on the e-commerce platform without feeling pressured or manipulated. Overall, this approach demonstrates a deep understanding of customer psychology and the ability to balance promotional messaging with genuine support and empathy. By focusing on the shared values and aspirations of its followers, the account fosters a stronger connection and encourages engagement with the platform's offerings.

4.4 E-commerce media introducer

The e-commerce media introducer identity showcases the adaptability and creativity of digital marketing in the streaming media landscape. This identity is characterized by its role in promoting and introducing various digital marketing channels within streaming platforms, such as live streaming, short-video advertisements, and sponsored entertainment content. By leveraging the power of streaming media, this pragmatic identity effectively bridges the gap between e-commerce and its target audience. A typical example is shown below:

(7) (English) *Meow ~ I feel bad that you're not watching the grandma live*

Refuse to bad! At 7:00 PM tonight, go to the official livestream room of Tmall # we always have fun #. You can watch grandmas' elegant cheongsam opening show with charm, vitality and experience, and there is also an opportunity to send you to Disneyland! Don't you come???

(Chinese) 喵~.....你不来看奶奶直播, 我感觉很糟糕

拒绝糟糕! [开学季]今晚7:00锁定天猫官方直播间#我们老有意思了# , 奶奶们优雅旗袍开场·魅力、活力、经验全齐了·更有机会送你去看迪士尼·这还不来???

In the Example (7), the account employs humor and a sense of urgency to engage followers and encourage them to participate in the recommended livestreaming event. By framing the invitation as a personal request and using phrases like “I feel bad” if followers don't watch, the account fosters a sense of intimacy with its audience. This approach not only helps to build a positive relationship with followers but also activates their curiosity and interest in the livestreaming content. Furthermore, the post's second part strategically lists compelling reasons why followers should tune in to the livestreaming event. This tactic strengthens the invitation and makes it more persuasive, effectively balancing transactional goals (promoting the livestreaming) with interactional goals (forging a rapport with followers).

Overall, the e-commerce media introducer identity demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of audience engagement and the power of streaming media in digital marketing. By leveraging humor, urgency, and compelling content, this identity effectively promotes digital marketing channels while fostering a sense of community and connection with followers. While the primary goal of the e-commerce media introducer identity is to promote various digital marketing channels within streaming media, it indeed serves a dual purpose. By introducing and promoting these channels, e-commerce platforms are not only attracting more viewers to engage with the content but also indirectly promoting themselves and their products.

5. DISCUSSION

In the last section, three pragmatic identities that e-commerce frequently constructed have been found: the good bargain promoter, the beautiful life sharer, and the e-commerce media introducer. Through discursive content analysis, it is observed that the construction of pragmatic identities exhibits a dynamic and contextual nature, aligning with the interactive objective aimed at achieving diverse promotional goals. This dynamicity in identity formation mirrors the subjectively guided choices of interlocutors, as outlined by Locher (2013), which are intricately managed through rapport management strategies. Notably, identity construction significantly influences participants' perceptions of social rights and obligations (Ran & Huang, 2019), as evidenced in the examples above, where strategies such as employing indirect speech acts with mitigated force, integrating personal topics to foster intimacy, and frequent utilization of personal pronouns, contribute to enhancing the perceptual impact and fostering harmonious interpersonal relationships.

Given that identity serves as a navigational tool for individuals in their social worlds (Spencer-Oatey, 2007), the establishment of various pragmatic identities encourages followers to immerse themselves in specific contexts tailored to their preferences and needs. This immersion is particularly evident in the construction of the beautiful life sharer identity. Moreover, a pivotal aspect of identity construction lies in the strategic management of interactions aimed at engaging followers through each post. Many instances showcase the employment of directive and expressive speech acts, inviting followers' participation or eliciting questions that stimulate conversations among them. While the discussion does not delve into the analysis of comments, responses, or the impact of absent followers on interpersonal

dynamics (Ran & Liu, 2015), it underscores the e-commerce accounts' pursuit of rapport-building with followers to fulfill their promotional objectives, which constitutes the core focus of constructing identities.

When it comes to the feasibility of constructing pragmatic identity in ASMM, the features of social media marketing can be taken into consideration. Scholars have summarized four distinct features of social media marketing: interactivity, entertainment, perceived relevance, and informativeness (Kotler et al., 2017; Hanaysha, 2022), which guide the construction of pragmatic identity directly and/or indirectly to realize its purpose of promotion. The core feature of interactivity enables brands to engage consumers via networks, fostering relationships through rapport management strategies like indirect speech acts and questions. Besides, entertainment in social media marketing emphasizes its construction of playful content, aligning with users' desire for leisure (Sharma et al., 2021). My study highlights entertainment's role in pragmatic identity construction, fostering consumer engagement through humor and informal tone. In terms of informativeness, it presents itself in all three identities with different paths but the same goal to inform followers of information about brands, products, daily life, and other stream media in both an implicit and explicit way. Therefore, the appropriate management of certain topics to meet the various needs of promotion determines, to some extent, what pragmatic identity they try to build on.

6. CONCLUSION

In this study, through rapport management theory, I have investigated the construction of pragmatic identities in anthropomorphic marketing posts by three e-commerce platforms on Weibo, a popular Chinese social media site. Based on the combination of a bottom-up approach to retrieving the identities and discursive content analysis, this study has found three main types of pragmatic identities, namely good bargain promoter, beautiful life sharer, and e-commerce media introducer. All three pragmatic identities are constructed with the ultimate goal of inducing more followers to purchase products on e-commerce platforms, which is required by the institutional or default identity. Rapport strategies for constructing these identities are also found. The choices of topics are contextual and personalized: the illocutionary use of speech acts triggers various interactions, and the stylistic tone of language is humorous and intimate.

This study has both practical and theoretical implications in the areas of internet and interpersonal pragmatics and marketing. Overall, this study provides new insights into the study of social media marketing by analyzing it from the perspective of pragmatics to elucidate how marketing strategies are realized through the construction of various identities. This paper thus provides a new insight into how customer-company relationships can be interpreted from linguistics. Besides, the current study will offer practical guidance for companies on social media platforms to construct identities for the sake of promoting and communicating with customers.

Admittedly, there are some limitations to this research. To begin with, as a case study, the coding of the data is limited and somewhat subjective because the author was the only annotator to analyze the data, so more coders and subsequently the reliability test will be employed in the future. Second, the analysis of the content of pragmatic identities and the categorization, though based on pragmatic theories, were still carried out largely from the researchers' perspective. In the future, retrospective interviews or marketing expert consultations can be conducted to shed further light on the posters' rationales, so as to have a better understanding on the mechanism of constructing identities. Last but not least, it is hoped that a comparative study of identity construction on Chinese and Western social media can be conducted in the future, so a cross-cultural and more holistic understanding can be achieved.

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