

# The Impact of Story Type on Consumers' Brand Attitudes

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**Abstract:** As a communication tool between brands and consumers, stories can establish the uniqueness and attractiveness of a brand, and increase consumers' brand attitude. At present, existing researches mainly focuses on the validity of story marketing, while there is relatively little research on the effect of story type. In view of this, the research will focus on the effect of the interaction of story type and product type on consumers' brand attitude through two lab experiments. It is found that when the product is utilitarian, stories centered around the enterprise lead to higher brand attitudes; When the product is hedonic, stories centered around consumers bring higher brand attitudes. The conclusion of this research enriches existing story marketing researches and provides marketing insights for enterprises.

**Keywords:** Story Marketing; Story Type; Product Type; Brand Attitude

## 1. Introduction

As an important component of building bridges of communication between enterprises and consumers, stories have a significant impact on the psychology and behavior of consumers. Many companies establish the uniqueness and attractiveness of their brands by telling stories, thereby increasing consumers' purchasing desire and brand attitude. In enterprise marketing practice, they usually use two different types of stories. One way is to tell stories centered around the enterprise. For example, in 2023, Adidas launched a brand promotional video called "CHAPTER01: Return of Original Aspiration", which tells the story of Adidas' brand culture that combines retro and trendy sports, returning to the design language of the millennium, and helping it successfully overcome the sales slump of 2022; Another type is to tell stories that are centered around consumers. For example, Starbucks records and narrates heartwarming stories about the daily lives of its brand membership through the microfilms, viewing "stars" as the language of users, and connecting the emotional bond between the brand and the users.

Although numerous studies have shown that story marketing does indeed have an impact on consumers' attitudes toward brands, and some researchers have also explored specific story designs, such as the authenticity of the story, themes of the story, and their impact on consumers (Shen Mingyu et al., 2019), however, most of the studies have focused on the general effects of stories, but rarely exploring the effectiveness of different story types, as well as their boundaries of action, such as product types, brand characteristics, and so on Consumer characteristics (Shen Zhengshun and Li Huaibin, 2019).

Based on this, this study aims to explore the impact of the interaction between story types and product types on consumers' attitudes toward brands. This study is able to make up for the shortcomings of existing story marketing research and provide marketing reference and inspiration for enterprise marketing practices.

## 2. Literature review

### (1) Story Marketing and Brand Attitude

As an old-established communication and thinking mode of human beings, stories are important tools for storing memories, sharing experiences, and conveying emotions. They are also important tools for building communication bridges between storytellers and the target audiences (Tang Shan, 2019).

Story marketing, as a way of marketing through storytelling, is able to enhance consumers' awareness of products or services effectively. Woodside et al. (2010) proposed in their study that through story marketing, consumers are able to better understand the features and advantages of products, thereby improving their brand attitude. On the other hand, stories can also help consumers establish emotional connections with products or brands. Escalas (2004) found that story marketing is able to help consumers establish emotional connections with the brand by conveying its values and concepts, thereby enhancing their liking and loyalty to the product or to the brand. In addition, Van Laer et al. (2014) also found that story marketing has a significant positive impact on consumer attitudes and intentions.

In addition, some scholars have found that different types of stories may trigger different reactions from consumers. For example, Deighton, Romer, & McQueen (1989) found that stories with emotional connotations are more attractive to consumers than stories with pure information transmission, thereby improving their attitude towards brands. Chen Chunyan and Guo Weiwei (2020) found that stories with positive emotions can significantly improve consumer attitudes towards brands. On the other hand, Lundqvist et al. (2013) found that consumers react more strongly to real stories than to fictional ones.

The story of a company or a brand usually revolves around its history, culture, values, and how it provides high-quality products and services; through shaping its brand image, to improve consumer attitudes towards the brand (Sun Yuzhou, 2021; Lundqvist et al., 2013; Burt and Sparks, 2003). When the brand stories appear truthfully, transparently, and naturally, and when consumers do not consider them as a marketing activities, brand stories are the most influential (Walter and Gioglio, 2019). The real experience of consumers is often used as the content of the consumer centered stories, by telling how consumers use products or services to solve problems, meet needs, etc., in order to resonate with consumers. Delgadillo and Escalas (2004) found that when consumers hear stories similar to themselves, they develop a sense of identification, thereby improving their attitude towards the brand. Similarly, Woodside (2010) also found that consumers tend to purchase products that resonate with their emotions.

## **(2) Product type and brand attitude**

Hedonic products mainly meet the sensory and psychological needs of consumers, such as music, movies, art, and food. The purchase of such products is usually influenced by consumer emotions and values. Research has found that consumers' willingness to purchase hedonic products is greatly influenced by factors such as sensory appeal, novelty, personalization, and brand image (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Voss et al., 2013). Functional products mainly meet the practical and functional needs of consumers, such as household appliances, electronic products, and automobiles. The purchase of such products is usually influenced by consumer needs, budget, and product performance. Research has also found that the performance, price, quality, and brand reputation of products have a significant impact on consumer willingness to purchase functional products (Zeithaml, 1988; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001).

Scholars have found that the effectiveness of story marketing is influenced by the type of product. For example, Delgado Ballester et al. (2016) found that for practical products, consumers pay more attention to product information, while for hedonic products, consumers pay more attention to their story.

Considering that story types centered around enterprises tend to publicize their products/companies/brands more, which leads to more rational consumer judgments on their functionality and utility, therefore will match easily with functional products; On the other hand, consumer centered story types tend to publicize stories which more resonance with consumers and stimulate their senses, making them more suitable for hedonic products. In view of this, this study proposes the following 3 hypothesis:

H1: Product type moderates the impact of story type on consumer brand attitude.

H1a: When the product is hedonic, stories centered around consumers is able to bring higher brand attitudes;

H1b: When the product is functional, a story centered around the enterprise is able to bring a higher brand attitude.

In summary, the research model of this article is shown in Figure 1:

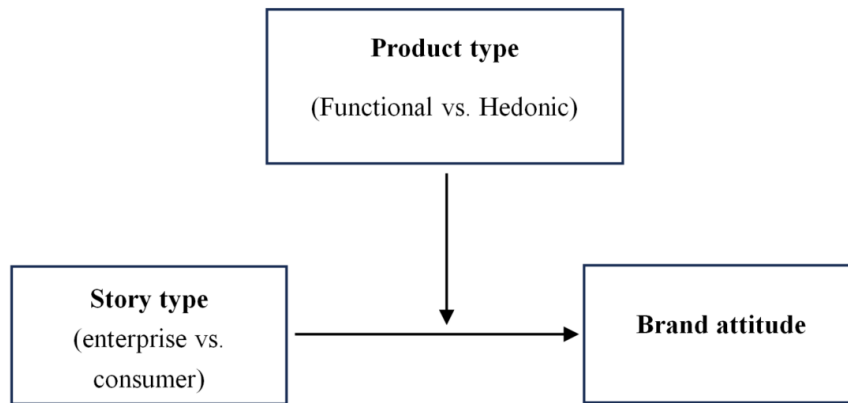


Figure 1: Research conceptual models

### 3. Research design and result analysis

This study will explore the interaction between story types and product types through two laboratory experiments. Experiment one uses high-value products, while Experiment two uses low value products to further validate the experimental results.

#### (1) Experiment 1

##### 1) Experimental design

105 participants (54 males, 51 females, M age=24) participated in this experiment.

Experiment 1 adopts the between-groups design in  $2 \times 2$  (story type: enterprise centered story vs. consumer centered story)  $\times$  (product type: functional vs. hedonic).

##### 2) Experimental process

All participants were informed that company L recently posted a story on its website, and we invite you to evaluate the story. Subsequently, all participants were randomly assigned to read a story. This experiment manipulates story types and product types by describing different products and different storytelling subjects in the story.

The enterprise story of functional products is: X, the founder of Company L, was originally the owner of a small insole workshop, specializing in providing customized insole services for door-to-door customers. After years of providing customized services to consumers, X discovered a market gap in the insole market. Most international brand shoe lasts are only divided into narrow lasts and wide lasts, and consumers with normal foot shapes find it difficult to obtain a comfortable wrapping experience. X chose to solve the pain points of consumers and decided to focus on developing insoles suitable for various foot shapes. Through years of accumulated insole data, X is seeking professionals while operating small workshops. From sketching to modeling, to selecting materials, and finally to the final product, adaptive insoles gradually take shape. After multiple revisions, adaptive insole technology has matured and received widespread praise. The former small workshop has also become an international brand.

The consumer story of functional products is: X is a basketball fan and has purchased various brands of basketball shoes. Among the basketball shoes he had purchased, he found that many of the shoe lasts did not match his foot shape, resulting in a poor wearing experience. After learning about L Company's adaptive insoles, X purchased this product with a trial mentality. After trying it out, it was found that basketball shoes that originally didn't fit well, when fitted with adaptive insoles, eliminated a lot of the original foreign body sensation. Shoes that were previously purchased but not wanted to be worn now have a place to use. The adaptive insole eliminates various concerns caused by X's discomfort on the court, allowing X to focus more on court performance and achieve good results again and again.

The enterprise story of hedonic products is: X, the founder of Company L, was once a professional esports player. A few years ago, at an important international competition, he unfortunately lost the game due to a cooling problem with his gaming handheld's hardware. From then on, X decided to form its own professional technical team and focus on developing high heat dissipation gaming handheld

devices. Through years of research and innovation accumulation, the X team ultimately developed high-performance thermal conductive materials and successfully developed a brand new high-performance heat dissipation gaming handheld device. Once this product was launched, it caused a huge response in the gaming industry, and many players realized their career dreams through Company L's game console.

The consumer story of hedonic products is: X is a gaming handheld lover who lost an important game in an international gaming competition due to hardware issues, which made him very frustrated and increased his pursuit of gaming handheld performance. He found that the heat dissipation performance of game consoles in the competition was relatively mediocre, and the battery was not long-lasting enough. In just half an hour, the body would heat up and the amount of electricity would rapidly decrease, which seriously affecting the gaming experience. Recently, X learned about L Company's new model and found that it solved most of the common problems in the gaming handheld market. The body is not as hot as other brands of handheld phones, and the power consumption problem has been solved. Giving X a brand new gaming experience, In the second year's game competition, helped X win in the new round of game competition.

Finally, measure the brand attitude of the participants, including two questions: (1) I like this brand (1-7 points, 1 represents completely disagree, 7 represents completely agree); (2) I would have a preference for this brand because of this story if in cases the brands in the story were similar in all other situations. (1 means completely disagree, 7 means completely agree). Then measure the basic personal information of the subjects, including age and gender.

### 3) Experimental results

Covariance analysis of brand attitude. Analysis of covariance (with story type and product type as independent variables, brand attitude as dependent variable, and gender and age as covariates) showed that the interaction between story type and product type had a significant impact on consumer brand attitude ( $F(1, 99)=76.93, p<0.001$ ), while the main effects of other variables are not significant ( $ps>0.1$ ). Simple effect analysis shows that when the product type is functional, stories centered around the enterprise will lead to higher brand attitudes ( $M$  consumer story=2.67,  $SD=0.27$  vs.  $M$  corporate story=5.23,  $SD=0.25$ ;  $F(1, 99)=47.37, p<0.001$ ); On the contrary, when the product is hedonic, presenting a consumer centered story will lead to a higher brand attitude ( $M$  Consumer Story=5.12,  $SD=0.25$  vs.  $M$  Corporate Story=3.06,  $SD=0.26$ ;  $F(1, 99)=31.80, p<0.001$ ), as shown in Figure 2. Therefore, it is assumed that H1, H1a, and H1b are supported.

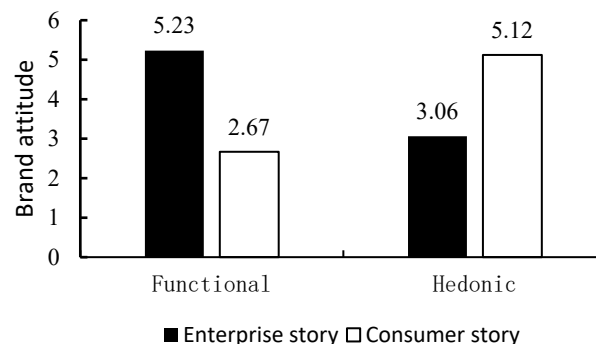


Figure 2: The interaction effect between story types and product types

## (2)Experiment 2

### 1) Experimental design

107 participants (50 males, 57 females,  $M$  age=24) participated in this experiment. Similarly, Experiment 2 also adopts the between-groups design in  $2 \times 2$  (story type: enterprise centered story vs. consumer centered story)  $\times$  (product type: functional vs. hedonic). Experiment one uses products with relatively high value, while Experiment two will further verify the stability of the experimental results by using products with low value.

### 2) Experimental process

All participants were informed that company L recently posted a story on its website, and we invite you to evaluate the story. Subsequently, all participants were randomly assigned to read a story. This

experiment manipulates story types and product types by describing different products and different storytelling subjects in the story.

The enterprise story of functional products is: X, the owner of brand L, was born in a mountainous area and founded brand L through his own efforts. X is well aware that children living in mountainous areas are not easy, and there are many children who want to break out of the mountains, but their living conditions cannot support them to achieve their dreams. After establishing the brand L, X initiated the "Moving Mountains" public welfare activity, providing free stationery for children in mountainous areas. At present, L brand stationery has spread throughout countless mountainous areas in China, helping countless children step out of these areas and achieve their dreams.

The consumer story of functional products is: "Moving Mountains" is a public welfare activity organized by X, the founder of Company L, in order to help children in mountainous areas step out of the mountains and achieve their dreams. Every time consumers purchase Company L's products, they contribute a solid force to building the dreams of children in mountainous areas. Consumers purchase a pen, and children in mountainous areas receive the key to opening a new world; By purchasing a ruler, children in mountainous areas can depict their own future. Every consumer can become a beam of light for their dreams.

The enterprise story of hedonic products is: X runs a herbal tea shop in Guangzhou. In recent years, he has found that the business of herbal tea shops has declined significantly. He has found that young people nowadays enjoy drinking a beverage called "milk tea". So he began to study whether milk tea could be integrated with Cantonese herbal tea. While managing the store, he constantly adjusted the formula and sometimes gave the adjusted finished products to the neighbors, from which he received many suggestions for improvement. In the end, he concocted three new types of milk tea that blended milk tea and Cantonese herbal tea, which received high praise.

The consumer story of hedonic products is: X is a young person who loves to try and always likes to try various new types of milk tea. One day, she discovered a newly opened milk tea shop on the street - brand L, and tried a milk tea that combines Cantonese herbal tea. X was immediately attracted by this unique taste. Every time X drinks this milk tea, he shares his feelings on social media. His friends were also attracted by her description and came to try it out. They all felt that this milk tea had a taste they had never tried before and fell in love with it.

Finally, use the same scale as Experiment 1 to measure the brand attitude of the participants, followed by measuring their personal basic information, including age and gender.

### 3) Experimental results

Covariance analysis of brand attitude. Analysis of covariance (with story type and product type as independent variables, brand attitude as dependent variable, and gender and age as covariates) showed that the interaction between story type and product type had a significant impact on consumer brand attitude ( $F(1,101)=20.43, p<0.001$ ), while the main effects of other variables are not significant ( $p>0.05$ ). Simple effect analysis shows that when the product is functional, presenting a story centered around the enterprise will lead to a higher brand attitude ( $M$  Consumer Story=2.88,  $SD=0.25$  vs.  $M$  Corporate Story=4.09,  $SD=0.28$ ;  $F(1,101)=10.49, p<0.01$ ); On the contrary, when the product type is hedonic, presenting a consumer story will lead to a higher brand attitude ( $M$  Consumer Story=3.97,  $SD=0.26$  vs.  $M$  Corporate Story=2.79,  $SD=0.27$ ;  $F(1,101)=9.82, p<0.01$ ), as shown in Figure 3. Therefore, it is assumed that H1, H1a, and H1b are further supported.

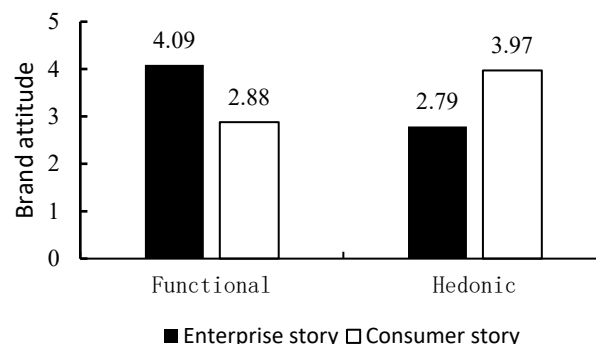


Figure 3: The interaction effect between story types and product types

#### 4. Research conclusions and discussions

##### (1) Research conclusion

This study takes story marketing as the research scenario and explores the impact of story types on consumer brand attitudes through two laboratory experiments. Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 discovered the interaction between story types and product types by using products with different values. Specifically, when the product is functional, stories centered around the enterprise can bring higher brand attitudes; When the product is hedonic, stories centered around consumers can bring higher brand attitudes.

##### (2) Research significance and management insights

This study focuses on story marketing and explores the impact of matching story types and product types on consumer brand attitudes, which has certain value in both theory and marketing practice:

① Most existing research has focused on the general effects of stories, with little exploration of the effectiveness of story types and their boundaries of action. Therefore, based on the previous research, this study explores the impact of different story types (stories centered around the enterprise vs. stories centered around consumers) and finds the moderating effect of product types (functional vs. hedonic), filling the gaps in existing research.

② The conclusion of this study also provides a certain reference for the practice of enterprise story marketing. Specifically, when a company's product is a functional product, it should spread the story of the company as the main body; On the contrary, when a company's products are hedonic, they should spread stories centered around consumers in order to effectively improve their brand attitude.

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