

The Mechanism of Social Media Influencing Effect on Consumer Purchase Pathways: An Intermediary Perspective Based on Recommendation Credibility

Yuqiao Cheng¹, Xiyuan Cui² and Ruike Jin^{3, *}

¹Chengdu Foreign Languages School, Sichuan, China

²Shanghai Experimental Foreign Language School, Shanghai, China

³Changwai Bilingual School, Jiangsu, China

*Corresponding author: jinruike@lsu.edu.gn

Abstract. Social media platforms now serve as crucial channels for obtaining product information and making purchasing decisions, significantly influencing consumer groups. The terms “influence” and “deinfluence” have become high-frequency expressions in everyday consumer discourse. Although some scholars have gradually turned their research focus toward the “influence” phenomenon in recent years, concentrating on its impact on consumer purchasing behavior and brand perception, the academic community still lacks a comprehensive and systematic in-depth exploration of the underlying mechanisms through which “influence” influences consumer behavior. This study employs a case analysis approach, selecting representative corporate operation cases from the RedNote platform as subjects of analysis. It investigates how “influence” content in the social media environment influences consumer trust formation and purchase intent through emotional contagion and rational persuasion. Simultaneously, we will conduct an in-depth examination of whether recommendation credibility plays an intermediary role in the process where “influence” content impacts consumer purchasing behavior. Furthermore, we will analyze how three key factors—platform operational strategies, UGC content types, and user psychological characteristics—interact to establish recommendation credibility and shape consumers' purchasing decision pathways. This study ultimately identified and validated the key mediating role of recommendation credibility in the emotional contagion pathway of “influencer marketing” content and consumer purchasing behavior.

Keywords: Social media influence; consumer purchase path, purchase intent; recommendation credibility; influence mechanism.

1. Introduction

As the global social media user base continues to expand, social platforms have evolved from mere communication tools into vital channels for obtaining product information and making purchasing decisions [1]. For instance, the influencer model enjoys immense popularity among consumers. Compared to traditional business models, its commercial operations exhibit characteristics such as persuasiveness, integration, and personalization, with persuasiveness being particularly prominent. This is mainly manifested when netizens browse and experience influencer-endorsed products, becoming fully immersed in the enjoyment they offer. Under the influence of these influencers, consumers continually pay for their own consumption [2]. Especially among Gen Z consumers, the influence of social media is highly pronounced, with “influence-deinfluence” becoming an integral part of their everyday consumer vocabulary.

According to the *2023 China E-commerce Market Data Report by NetEase Research Institute*, China's social e-commerce transaction volume exceeded 3 trillion yuan in 2023 [3]. Therefore, this study focuses on the phenomenon of “influence-deinfluence”. This research fills a gap in understanding the mechanisms of “influencing purchases” within the fields of consumer psychology and content marketing. It also provides consumers with a reference for making rational purchasing decisions, offers theoretical support for platforms to optimize recommendation systems and advertising design, and holds significant practical social implications. This study examines how social

media “influence” content shapes consumer trust and purchase intent through emotional contagion and rational persuasion. It investigates whether recommendation credibility mediates the relationship between influencer content and purchasing behavior, and explores how platform strategies, UGC content types, and user psychological traits collectively influence recommendation credibility and the purchase journey. The literature and case study approach was employed to locate and review relevant materials and literature. This method excels at analyzing existing research findings, summarizing scholars' core perspectives and research progress on aspects such as “influence” content, emotional contagion, rational persuasion, consumer trust, and purchase intent. Through systematic analysis, common conclusions and divergent perspectives across different research contexts can be revealed, providing a solid theoretical foundation for this study. At the same time, literature analysis enables researchers to identify gaps and limitations in existing studies, thereby facilitating the formulation of more targeted research questions and hypotheses in subsequent research designs, which is conducive to advancing the research. The ultimate objective of this study is to investigate the mediating role of recommendation credibility. To achieve this goal, a case analysis of enterprises on the rednote platform was conducted.

2. Literature Review

Current research indicates that “influence” as a highly contextual and emotionally driven approach to product promotion, is reshaping consumers' traditional decision-making pathways. Han Weijuan noted that “influence” content on short video platforms significantly boosts users' purchasing intent [4]. Yan Hua emphasized that user-generated content (UGC) exerts extensive influence within the “influence” model, serving as a key driver for monetizing platform traffic [3].

Furthermore, regarding the factors influencing consumer purchase intent, most current studies focus on perceived value and perceived risk. Among these, some research has confirmed that customers' perceived value during online shopping positively influences their purchase intent, while also finding that the presence of perceived risk reduces the promotional effect of perceived value on purchase intent [5]. Yu Fenfen and Liu Yu analyzed the content-side influences on “influence” effectiveness from the perspectives of information source professionalism and consumer psychological needs [6]. However, most of these studies have focused on superficial variables such as content presentation formats and publisher types, with insufficient research on the psychological mechanisms by which consumer groups assess information credibility and make purchasing decisions based on it.

A foreign study indicates that the core of digital marketing lies in designing content to enhance user trust and emotional resonance [7]. In recent years, users have shown significantly heightened concern for content authenticity and transparency, making information discernment and trust assessment critical prerequisites influencing purchasing decisions. For instance, the timeliness and volume of reviews, along with the credibility of reviewers as measured by review credibility, positively influence consumers' purchasing decisions [8]. Recommendation credibility—specifically, consumers' subjective assessments of the authenticity, objectivity, and alignment with their interests of “influence” content on social media—likely serves as a crucial mediating mechanism between such content and consumers' purchasing actions. Although some relevant literature has indirectly suggested the existence of this intermediary mechanism in their research, current studies still lack systematic empirical analyses centered on recommendation credibility as a core entry point. Therefore, this paper will focus on recommendation credibility as its core research entry point. Through targeted analysis and validation, it will delve into the intrinsic pathway relationships among each link in the chain of “influencer content—recommendation credibility—purchasing behavior.” This approach aims to fill existing gaps in research regarding the interplay between consumer psychological mechanisms and platform operational strategies, thereby enhancing the research framework in this field.

3. Content Structure and User Reactions in Rednote's "Product Promotion" Incident

Social platforms like Rednote have become the quintessential arena for the "influencer economy." In the digital age, social media platforms are experiencing explosive growth. Official data from Rednote's business metrics reveals that the platform currently boasts 300 million monthly active users, with women accounting for 70% of its user base. The user demographic is predominantly young, with those born after 1995 comprising 50% and those born after 2000 making up 35%. Users from first- and second-tier cities constitute 50% of the total. The platform hosts over 80 million community contributors, achieving a daily user search penetration rate of 60% [8]. As a leading platform in this field, Rednote's "influence" notes profoundly influence consumer decision-making processes through text, images, videos, and other formats [4]. In early 2024, a skincare brand launched a series of "user-generated reviews" on Rednote, supplemented by short videos and reposting tasks. This strategy leveraged user word-of-mouth to drive growth in brand search volume and sales.

In today's marketing landscape, brands actively expanding their presence on social platforms commonly adopt a three-pronged strategy: micro-KOL + authentic experiences + image-text distribution. The content produced will emphasize core elements such as "visual before-and-after comparisons of product use," "detailed experiences during actual application," and "unedited, authentic skin condition demonstrations." By presenting these relatable, everyday scenarios, it creates a strong sense of authenticity and emotional connection for consumers, rapidly sparking their desire to emulate the results and follow the trend.

In social media marketing practices, brands closely monitor user responses to "influential" content. Observations reveal that user interactions and decision-making processes in comment sections typically follow a distinct path: emotional projection → identification → inquiry → conversion. The subsequent imitative behavior and conversion among users fundamentally reflect how recommendation credibility influences their purchasing path decisions. However, other scenarios also arise during this process: some users may later question the initial "deinfluence" content in follow-up "influence" posts, pointing out potential issues such as excessive marketing, exaggerated claims, or inaccurate evaluations. When examining how recommendation credibility influences purchase path decisions through case analysis, the study found that for recommendation credibility to impact purchase path decisions, it must rely on the preliminary mechanisms of emotional contagion and trust formation. This mechanism effectively reaches and influences consumer psychology, playing a pivotal role throughout the entire decision-making process. Specifically, the "influencer" content on the platform must first evoke emotional responses from users. This is achieved by sharing authentic user experiences and immediate impressions after product use, thereby reducing consumers' inherent defensiveness toward marketing messages. This approach helps content creators quickly bridge the psychological gap with consumers by building emotional resonance. Once consumers establish this emotional connection, they develop initial trust based on the information presented in the content that sparks their interest. Notably, most consumers particularly favor content that feels relatable and authentic, as such material more readily fosters a sense of immersion and trust. Additionally, when verifying the mediating role of recommendation credibility, it was found that consumers often actively or passively assess the credibility of recommendations during the process of forming conversion intent. For instance, they evaluate whether the account posting the content is a genuine user, whether the reviews contain specific details, and whether the content bears obvious signs of commercial promotion. By comprehensively considering these details and information, they ultimately decide whether to trust the "influence" content. Therefore, this "credibility assessment" stage becomes the key mediating variable determining whether "influential content" can successfully convert into consumers' "purchase motivation." Regarding the moderating mechanisms of content type and platform attributes, research indicates that short-video-based 'influential' content more readily stimulates users' emotional engagement. However, on the "credibility" dimension, it is often constrained by issues like filter enhancements and editing techniques, which can easily raise users' doubts about content authenticity. In contrast, image-text-based "grass-planting" content holds

advantages in showcasing product details and usage processes, offering stronger persuasive power. However, it also suffers from the drawback of lower dissemination efficiency [9]. Beyond content types, a platform's tone also influences users' expectations for “influencer-driven content.” For instance, Rednote has long emphasized a community atmosphere centered on “authentic sharing,” leading users to place relatively higher trust in its content. In contrast, Weibo's rapid information dissemination and strong topicality mean its influencer-driven content is more readily interpreted as reflecting current public opinion or trending topics. These differences in platform attributes directly influence users' cognitive structures regarding the “credibility of recommendations,” thereby affecting their decision-making judgments. Consequently, channel attributes significantly impact consumers' search intent and purchase intent [10].

4. Theoretical Refining

Based on the systematic integration of case studies and relevant theories, this research ultimately proposes a three-stage path model for the influence of social media: “emotional arousal—evaluation of recommendation credibility—activation of purchasing behavior.” First, in terms of model construction, the overall focus consistently revolves around shifts in consumer psychology and behavior. The initial phase centers on the emotional dimension, where platforms and merchants employ diverse content strategies to stimulate consumer sentiment. Once released content successfully captures consumer attention, it further triggers emotional resonance. The second stage shifts focus to consumer perception. After encountering “influencer-driven content,” consumers actively evaluate its credibility and assess potential risks based on their personal experiences before making decisions. Therefore, for businesses, building consumer perception through high-quality content is a critical and pivotal step. The final third stage pertains to customer behavior. When consumers, guided by emotion and cognition, perceive content credibility that meets their psychological expectations, it generates purchase motivation for the product, ultimately converting into actual purchasing actions. Therefore, the three-stage model proposed in this study holds significant theoretical value: on one hand, it extends traditional consumer decision models by introducing “recommendation credibility” as a core element within the social media consumption pathway and clarifying its role as a mediating variable; on the other hand, it enriches empirical research in the field of social media marketing regarding “content credibility” and “consumer psychological trust mechanisms.” Simultaneously, the introduction of this model provides a crucial cognitive foundation for businesses to optimize content strategies, platforms to refine recommendation mechanisms, and brands to enhance the precision of their communications. Additionally, this study offers practical recommendations from three distinct perspectives: From the platform perspective, partner merchants and administrators can establish content evaluation mechanisms by enhancing transparency in content sourcing and strengthening labeling management for promotional content, thereby ensuring the authenticity of information accessible to users. For brands, the focus should be on designing authentic content, minimizing exaggerated claims and excessive marketing of product effects. By conveying genuine, valuable information, brands can enhance consumer trust. For individual consumers, it is essential to proactively improve their ability to identify and evaluate “influence” content. When encountering various trending recommendations, they should remain vigilant against the potential consumer manipulation posed by “low-credibility, high-visibility” content, making rational purchasing decisions.

5. Conclusion

This study delves into and reveals the three-stage influence mechanism within the “influencing” effect of social media, clearly confirming that recommendation credibility plays a crucial mediating role between emotional contagion and consumer purchasing behavior. Ultimately, it constructs a complete and clear pathway: “influencing content—psychological cognition—consumption

behavior.” This study provides valuable insights for future academic research on the “influencer effect” in social media, particularly offering significant inspiration for subsequent scholarly efforts to explore the underlying mechanisms and clarify the pathways of influence in this field. For future research directions, it is recommended to further expand the scope: on one hand, quantitative research methods such as questionnaires and behavioral experiments can be introduced to validate the identified mechanism pathways with greater precision; on the other hand, comparative analyses can be conducted on the recommendation algorithm logic and user profiling characteristics across different social platforms to delve deeper into the root causes of users' differing perceptions regarding “recommendation credibility.” Additionally, research can be conducted on the potential impact of AI-generated content on user trust mechanisms, exploring adaptive strategies for the “Influencer Marketing 2.0” era and providing new avenues for investigation in this field.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

References

- [1] Mo W. Research on “influencer-driven” marketing strategies in social media UGC: A case study of Rednote. *Business Economics*, 2025, (06): 58-61.
- [2] Tao J., Zi Y. Factors influencing consumer purchase intentions in the influencer economy. *Journal of Nanjing University of Finance and Economics*, 2017, 204(2): 89-95.
- [3] Yan H. A study on counter-marketing strategies against fake user-generated content in social commerce: Based on crisis communication theory. *E-Commerce Review*, 2025, 14(5): 2504-2511.
- [4] Han W. Research on Rednote's “influence” community marketing strategy based on the new 4Cs theory. *E-Commerce Review*, 2025, 14(6): 1143-1148.
- [5] Wang X., Chen S., Wu J. Analysis of factors influencing consumer purchasing behavior under online presale. *Nankai Management Review*, 2020, 23(5): 4-15.
- [6] Yu F., Liu Y. A multi-factor psychological analysis of factors influencing consumers' channel selection. *Modern Commerce and Industry*, 2011, 23(10): 2.
- [7] Venkatesh V., Agarwal R. Turning visitors into customers: A usability-centric perspective on purchase behavior in electronic channels. *Management Science*, 2006, 52(3): 367-382.
- [8] Mo Z., Luo M. The influence of online reviews on consumer purchase decisions: Mediating and moderating effects of reliability perceptions and trust propensity. *Journal of Guangdong University of Technology*, 2019, 36(2): 54-61.
- [9] Zhang M. The interactive effects of form and product type in Xiaohongshu “recommendation” notes on consumer purchase intentions. *E-Commerce Review*, 2025, 14(7): 1931-1936.
- [10] Guo Y., Wu J., Wang C., Lu K. A study on the formation mechanism of consumer channel choice intentions in a multi-channel retail environment: The moderating role of product category characteristics. *Chinese Journal of Management Science*, 2018, 26(9): 158-169.