

Theoretical Research on the Impact of Social Media Influencer Characteristics on Consumers' Purchase Intention

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Abstract. With the development of the Internet, social media influencer marketing is one of the common marketing methods used by businesses. This article mainly analyzes the mechanism by which the personal traits of social media influencers affect consumers' purchase intentions. Based on social cognitive theory, credibility theory and social influence theory, a theoretical model of how social media influencer traits affect consumer purchase intention is proposed. Influencer characteristics include four aspects: professionalism (professional knowledge, industry experience), credibility (honesty, reliability), attractiveness (physical charm, personal charm), and fit (brand/product fit). Through a review of the literature and a summary of theories, it is concluded that influencer professionalism can enhance consumers' trust in product information and thereby promote their purchase intention. Credibility can reduce the perceived risk of consumers, thereby promoting their purchasing behavior. Attractiveness can inspire emotional identification in consumers and influence their attitudes. Matching can increase the relevance and persuasiveness of information, thereby influencing consumers' willingness to purchase. In addition, consumers' personal attributes (such as age, gender, education level) and product types (hedonic vs. practical) can also affect the relationship. The significance of this study lies in sorting out the pathways through which influencer characteristics affect consumers' purchase intentions, providing theoretical support for enterprises to select appropriate influencer marketing plans, and also laying a good foundation for future research.

Keywords: Social media influencers, Consumer purchase intention, Influencer characteristics, Social cognitive theory, Influencer marketing.

1. Introduction

With the development of the digital economy and the widespread use of social media platforms, influencer marketing has become one of the ways for businesses to market. According to the "2023 China Influencer Economy Insight Report" released by iResearch, the market size of China's influencer economy was 288 billion yuan in 2022 and is expected to reach 400 billion yuan by 2025. In this context, social media influencers, as the link between brands and consumers, are gradually drawing attention to the role of their own characteristics in consumers' purchasing behavior. The key to influencer marketing is to use influencers to deliver brand information to the target audience through social media platforms, thereby influencing consumers' perception and behavior.

There are many problems with influencer marketing at present, such as unclear criteria for influencer selection, difficulty in measuring marketing effectiveness, and reduced consumer trust. Companies often lack a reasonable basis when choosing influencers to collaborate with. They tend to focus more on superficial factors such as the number of followers and exposure, while ignoring the influence of the influencers' own characteristics on consumers' [1] purchase intentions. Therefore, it is necessary and important to explore the impact of social media influencer attributes on consumer purchase intention, and it can also provide reference opinions for enterprises on how to carry out influencer marketing more effectively. Based on social cognition theory, credibility theory and social influence theory, this paper presents a model of the impact of influencer characteristics on consumer purchase intention, and elaborates on the influence process in four aspects: professionalism, credibility, attractiveness and interactivity.

2. The Theoretical Basis of Social Media Influencer Characteristics

2.1. Definition and Classification of Social Media Influencers

A social media influencer is someone who has a certain number of followers on a specific social media platform and can use the content they post and their influence to influence their followers' thoughts, opinions, and purchasing decisions. The greatest advantage of influencers is that they can use the trust and emotional connection they have built with their fans to effectively convey brand messages to their fans and prompt consumers to take action. Influencers are generally classified as top influencers (with more than 1 million followers), mid-tier influencers (with 100,000 to 1 million followers), and long-tail influencers (with 10,000 to 100,000 followers) based on the size of their followers. In terms of content domains, they can be further subdivided into different types of influencers [2] such as fashion and beauty, tech and digital, lifestyle, fitness and health. Different types of influencers have different effects on consumers' purchasing desire due to factors such as professional level, audience group, and content form. Therefore, understanding the classification characteristics of influencers is very important for studying the influence effect of individual attributes of influencers.

2.2. Theoretical Framework of Influencer Characteristics

The mechanism by which influencer characteristics influence consumer purchase intention can be understood from different perspectives. Social cognitive theory suggests that people learn and imitate the actions of others and their consequences. Influencers, as objects of learning for consumers, have characteristics that influence consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions. Credibility theory holds that the credibility of information sources is an important factor influencing persuasiveness, and the professionalism, honesty, etc. of influencers will affect the degree of trust consumers have in the information they recommend. Social influence theory explains the mechanism of influencer characteristics in terms of normative influence and informational influence. Normative influence refers to consumers imitating influencer behavior in order to gain social recognition, while informational influence refers to consumers using influencer recommendations as information references for decision-making. These theories provide a good theoretical framework [3] for studying the impact of influencer traits on consumers' purchase intentions.

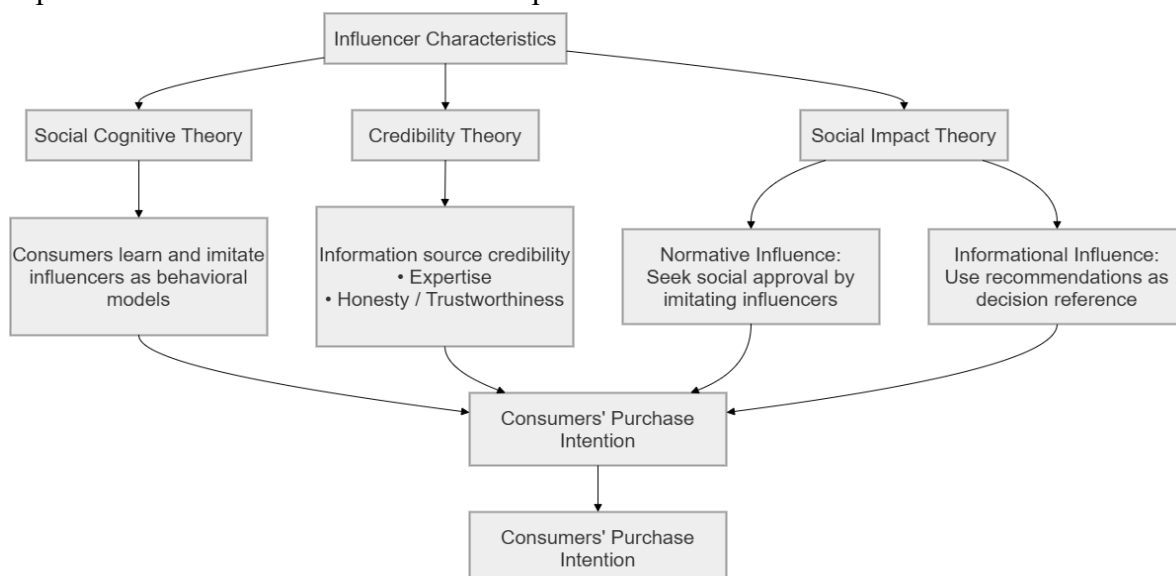


Figure 1. Overview of big data technologies

2.3. Conceptual Definition of Consumer Purchase Intention

Consumer purchase intention refers to the likelihood of consumers making a purchase for a certain commodity or service under certain conditions, and it is an important prerequisite for purchasing behavior. Consumer purchase intention reflects the degree of the consumer's desire to buy and serves

as a bridge between the consumer's attitude and the actual purchase behavior. In the context of social media influencer marketing, consumer purchase intention refers to the desire to purchase a product or service after seeing the influencer's recommendation. This purchase intention is influenced by many factors, such as the influencer's own traits, the product's features, the consumer's own characteristics, and environmental factors, etc. The level of consumers' purchase intention directly affects the effectiveness of influencer marketing and is an important criterion for evaluating the success of a marketing campaign.

3. The Influence Mechanism of Influencer Characteristics on Consumer Purchase Intention

3.1. The Relationship Between Professional Characteristics and Purchase Intention

Influencers' professionalism refers to their expertise, skills, and experience in a particular field, which have a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions [4]. Professional influencers can provide more detailed and accurate product information, allowing consumers to have a more comprehensive understanding of the product's performance, uses, and advantages, thereby reducing consumers' hesitation time and sense of risk. When influencers demonstrate a thorough understanding of the product and unique insights, consumers are more likely to believe the authenticity and effectiveness of their recommendations. Professionalism influences consumer attitudes through cognitive processes, and information with high professionalism is more likely to be perceived by consumers as a reliable source of information. At the same time, professionalism enhances the sense of authority of influencers. In the minds of consumers, professional influencers are experts in the field, and their recommendations are more persuasive. In vertical fields, the influence of professionalism is more pronounced, and consumers are more willing to trust and follow the advice of professional influencers. But professionalism also needs to be expressed appropriately. Content that is too technical may make it difficult for consumers to understand and instead weaken their willingness [5] to purchase.

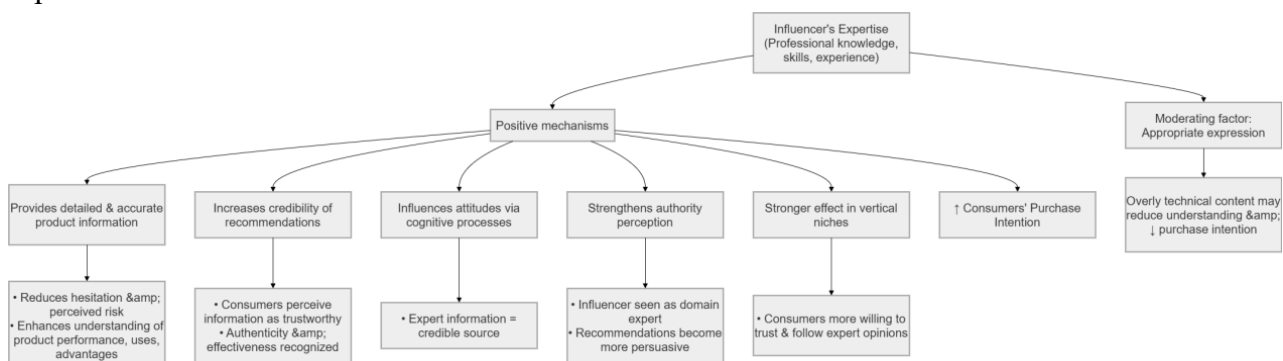


Figure 2. The mechanism by which influencers' professional characteristics affect consumers' purchase intention

3.2. Relationship Between Credibility Profile And Purchase Intention

Credibility is one of the key factors for influencers to gain consumer trust, including aspects such as honesty, reliability, and transparency. High credibility influencers can earn consumers' trust, and that trust is the psychological basis that prompts consumers to make a purchase. Credibility reduces the perceived risk of consumers and thus affects their willingness to purchase. When consumers consider the recommendations of influencers to be genuine, objective and responsible, their concerns about product quality and after-sales service will be greatly reduced. Honesty refers to whether an influencer truly reflects their opinion of a product, including both its pros and cons, rather than just saying nice things. Reliability is the accuracy and coherence of the products previously recommended by the influencer. If consumers find that the products previously recommended by the influencer are

in line with their usage experience, they will trust the products recommended by the influencer in the future. Transparency means that influencers should be clear about their relationship with the brand and not hide the fact [6] that they are being advertised by the merchant. While transparency may lead to a decline in promotion effectiveness for a certain period of time, it helps to build stronger trust in the long run. Credibility takes time to build up, but once lost, it's hard to regain, which requires influencers to be highly self-aware in content creation and brand collaboration.

3.3. The Relationship Between Attractiveness Features And Purchase Intention

Influencers' attractiveness traits include physical charm, personal charm, and lifestyle charm, which promote consumers' purchase intention through emotional and social identification. Physical attractiveness is the most likely factor to catch consumers' attention and leave a good first impression on them in a short time, especially on image-related products such as fashion and beauty, the effect of physical attractiveness is more obvious. Personal charm refers to the personality traits, speaking style and interaction style of the influencer. Influencers with their own unique personal charm are more likely to win the favor of consumers and make them have the urge to imitate. Lifestyle charisma refers to the attitude towards life, values, and quality of life that an influencer shows. When consumers are attracted by the influencer's lifestyle, they will purchase such products to achieve the purpose [7] of lifestyle imitation. Attraction features mainly influence consumer attitudes and behaviors through the emotional path, which is more direct and intense than the cognitive path, but also more susceptible to the external environment.

3.4. The Relationship Between Interactivity Features And Purchase Intention

Interactivity refers to the frequency of communication, the quality of responses, and the degree of interaction between influencers and their followers, which is a distinct feature on social media compared to traditional media. Highly interactive influencers can have a closer connection with consumers, and this interaction can increase consumers' engagement and sense of belonging, thereby enhancing their recognition of the products recommended by the influencers. Interactivity affects purchase intention by influencing consumers' psychological distance. Regular, sincere interaction can shorten the psychological distance between influencers and consumers, making consumers feel that influencers are friends and can be trusted and close to them. Interactivity can also provide personalized information. Consumers can get product suggestions and usage methods that suit them through interaction with influencers, and such personalized information is more in line with consumers' needs. Good interaction can also bring a sense of community. By participating in discussions or activities organized by influencers, consumers gain a sense of being recognized and a sense of community, which also prompts consumers to be more supportive of the products recommended by influencers [8]. But maintaining good interaction also requires a lot of time and effort, and influencers need to strike a balance between the frequency and quality of interaction.

4. Construction of a Theoretical Model of How Influencer Traits Work

4.1. Basis for Building the Theoretical Model

Based on the previous analysis and the actual situation of the social media marketing industry, the theoretical model proposed in this paper is mainly based on three fundamental theories. First, the social cognition theory plays a role in understanding how influencers use demonstration and modeling to influence consumer behavior, because people learn, imitate and form their own opinions by observing the behavior of others, and influencers, as opinion leaders, the product usage experiences and evaluations they present play a role in consumers' cognition. Second, the credibility theory can be used to explain how consumers judge whether an information source is trustworthy, and the professionalism and credibility of influencers have a significant impact on the information they send out. Third, social influence theory explains how people are influenced by others in society and how they change their behavior. Influencers play a normative and informative role for consumers through

their social status and influence. The three theories complement each other and jointly lay the foundation for the influence of influencer characteristics on consumers' purchase intentions, and also lay a good foundation [9] for the subsequent model establishment.

4.2. Influence Path Analysis

The influence of influencer characteristics on consumers' purchase intention is diverse. Professionalism is one of the important factors that works at the cognitive level. When consumers believe that influencers have rich expertise and sufficient experience, they trust the information about the products recommended by the influencers more, thereby reducing consumers' purchase hesitation and increasing their desire to buy. Credibility is also an important factor influencing consumers' willingness to purchase and plays a role in risk perception. Influencers with high credibility can significantly reduce consumers' concerns about product quality, service, and the security of transactions, thereby increasing consumers' desire to purchase. Attractiveness is also a factor that affects consumers' willingness to purchase, and it works emotionally. The beauty or personal charm of an influencer can evoke consumers' emotional resonance and sense of identity, and consumers will purchase because they want to have something like their idol. Matching is also a factor that affects consumers' purchase intention, and it works in terms of information relevance. When an influencer's image, values, and lifestyle are in line with the brand or product, consumers' attention and acceptance of the information recommended by the influencer increase, thereby enhancing persuasiveness. These four paths are interrelated and together form the process [10] by which influencer characteristics influence consumer purchase intention.

4.3. Mechanism of Moderating Variables

In the process of the influence of influencer characteristics on consumers' purchase intention, individual consumer differences and product features play a key role as important moderating variables. Age as an important moderating variable, younger consumers are more sensitive to the attractiveness of influencers, while older consumers value the professionalism and credibility of influencers more. Gender differences also have a significant impact. Among female consumers, influencers' physical attractiveness and emotional expression are more compelling, while among male consumers, influencers' professionalism and product functionality information are more persuasive. Education level plays a moderating role in consumers' information processing ability. Well-educated consumers have higher critical thinking skills and therefore attach more importance to the professionalism and credibility of influencers, while less educated consumers are more likely to be attracted by attractiveness or social influence. Product type is also an important moderating factor. In the case of hedonic products, influencer attractiveness and fit play a greater role, and consumers pay more attention to the pleasure and social recognition that the product can bring. For practical products, professionalism and credibility are more important factors, and consumers are more concerned about the functionality and practicality [11] of the products.

5. Conclusions

By reviewing and summarizing relevant literature, this paper presents a model of the impact of social media influencer characteristics on consumers' purchase intention. The research shows that the four aspects of influencers - professionalism, credibility, attractiveness, and fit - influence consumers' purchasing decisions from different perspectives and through different channels. Professionalism mainly affects consumers' purchases by enhancing the credibility of the information. Credibility promotes purchase by reducing consumers' perceived risk. Attractiveness has an impact on consumers' attitudes through emotional identification with them. Match is about how it affects [12] consumers' attitudes through information relevance to them. And consumers' personal traits and the nature of the product also affect the process, with different consumers responding differently to different influencer traits.

This theoretical framework not only offers a new way of thinking about consumer behavior in the digital age, but also provides some reference value for the precise influencer marketing strategies of enterprises. Companies should choose influencers that match their target consumers and the characteristics of their products to achieve the best marketing results. In future research, empirical studies based on this theory can be conducted to enrich and refine it and promote the development of influencer marketing theory.

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