

The Shaping of Users' Consumption Behaviour by Social Media in the Digital Era - The Case of rednote Beauty Products

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ABSTRACT

Under the background of rapid development of digitalisation, social media has gradually become an important bridge connecting information dissemination and consumption behaviour, profoundly influencing users' cognition, emotion and decision-making path. This paper takes beauty products on rednote platform as the research object, focusing on young female users, the algorithmic recommendation of big data and the social attributes of social media, to study how social e-commerce shapes the new consumer behaviour model. The study found that rednote, through the emotion-driven "grass-planting" culture, the trust of opinion leaders, and the closed-loop mechanism of content and e-commerce conversion, has achieved a full-process infiltration from content influence to consumption decision-making, and significantly changed users' consumption habits and paths. The research in this paper not only enriches the theory of consumer behaviour in the era of digital consumption, but also provides practical references for brands to formulate precise marketing strategies and optimize the operation of social e-commerce platforms.

KEYWORDS

Social commerce; Social media; Big data; Beauty products

1 Introduction

1.1 Research background

In the digital era, driven by advancements in the Internet, mobile technology, big data, and AI, digital and social media platforms have become primary channels for consumers to discover products. User-generated content (UGC) increasingly influences purchasing decisions, while big data analytics and algorithmic recommendations shape user experiences. E-commerce has surpassed traditional retail, with China's market continuing rapid growth. The convergence of social and e-commerce is accelerating, with the social e-commerce market in China projected to reach US\$475.5 billion in 2024 and exceed US\$745.3 billion by 2029, sustaining a near double-digit annual growth rate.

1.2 Research purpose

Against the backdrop of the digital era, this study shifts focus from traditional to social e-commerce by examining personalized marketing on social media. As an interactive and real-time platform, social media more directly influences consumption decisions. By analyzing user data and building profiles, it enables precise personalized marketing. Additionally, this study explores how social media's interactive features—such as recommendations and reviews—enhance user engagement and consumption loyalty, emphasizing the social attributes of consumer behavior through the lens of social networks.

1.3 Research significance

This study deepens the understanding of consumer decision-making under the combined influence of "grass-planting culture," opinion leaders, and algorithmic recommendations, promoting the integration of communication studies and consumer behavior. In the context of rising social e-commerce, it provides a theoretical foundation for constructing new consumer behavior models, expanding the scope of research on consumer psychology in the digital age. By exploring how social media shapes users' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses, the study offers valuable insights for brands in developing precise marketing strategies and effective user engagement models, holding significant academic and practical value for understanding digital consumption trends and advancing social e-commerce.

2 Literature review

Social commerce, as the inevitable trend in the current field of the integration of media and e-commerce, has attracted extensive research efforts from many scholars and yielded rich results. Foreign scholars have made fruitful research in the field of e-commerce. Shamim Komal(2024) focuses on the factor of trustworthiness in the context of social commerce in his research ^[1]. Sijin Liu(2024) explored the relationship between social media and digital marketing through case studies and data analysis ^[2]. Coloma Álvarez Santamaría(2024) Studied the effect of IWOM on purchase intention ^[3]. Ivan Ventre (2024) Take facebook and instagram for example, use partial least squares structural equation model, explained the role of trust, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use on s-commerce intention ^[4].

In recent years, the domestic aspects of e-commerce research has also developed rapidly. In terms of precision marketing behaviour, a number of scholars have achieved rich research results through specific analysis, Sun Zehong

(2023) believes that we should strive to build a perfect precision marketing system, accurate targeting of customer groups to carry out precision marketing, and the same reason ^[5], Wang Beihua (2025) also pointed out that we should first accurate audience and then accurate push, through the optimization of the marketing push in order to achieve customized services ^[6]. As a new trend in the development of e-commerce, there are many research results on this emerging phenomenon. Zhong Hai Yun (2024) takes private domain traffic as the entry point of the study and emphasises the social relationship and interaction in social platforms, which makes social e-commerce platforms shift to user-based marketing strategies ^[7]. rednote, as a typical representative of social e-commerce platforms nowadays, the current research on it focuses on its unique personalised push mechanism. Cui Qing'an (2020) collected data from rednote users and proved through empirical analysis that social willingness, information quality, and service quality all positively affect consumption willingness ^[8]. A review of current research at home and abroad reveals that scholars have proposed various concepts regarding how social media shapes user consumption behavior. While existing studies explore media influence through digital marketing, live streaming, and other means, increasing attention has been given to social e-commerce, which presents notable differences from traditional e-commerce. However, many gaps remain—most research focuses on platform-level factors such as algorithm-driven personalized recommendations, with limited exploration of the deeper mechanisms behind the integration of big data and social attributes. Therefore, this paper will emphasize the “social” dimension of social e-commerce, specifically examining how user opinions and attitudes within social circles influence the consumption behavior of others on platforms like rednote and also explore the dissemination and progressive nature of this influence.

3 Methodology and analysis

3.1 Doctrinal

In this paper, we will take the “s-o-r model” as the theoretical basis, i.e. the “stimulus-organism-response” model. The rich and varied information posted by users on social media platforms, such as the evaluation of the use of products and product recommendations, forms a stimulus to the consumption desire of other users. Other users, as the organism receiving the stimulus, due to their own circumstances, the perception and interpretation of these stimuli are also different. Users through the processing of the stimulus, the corresponding consumer behaviour intention, and then into the actual purchase action, but also may include secondary sharing and other subsequent behavior, further expanding the social media information dissemination chain. In the digital era, rednote, as a platform for the deep integration of social media and e-commerce, can be used as a typical case for the study of “social media's shaping of users' consumption behaviour”, and my next study is to conduct a specific research and analysis on the e-commerce sales of cosmetics in rednote as a social media on the basis of this research.

3.2 Research target

Founded in 2013, rednote has evolved from a cross-border shopping community into a comprehensive social platform covering beauty, fashion, and lifestyle. By mid-2025, it had 380 million monthly active users, over 70% of whom were post-90s and post-00s, with about 80% being women. These young female users possess strong purchasing power, value personalization and trends, and show high engagement with beauty content. As the main group of online cosmetic consumers, they heavily rely on rednote for product information and are influenced by grassroots content, blogger recommendations, and user feedback—demonstrating a shift from emotional resonance to rational consumption. Focusing on this demographic, the study explores how social media reshapes consumer cognition and purchasing behavior through emotional identification, community interaction, and trust mechanisms. This not only deepens understanding of digital consumer culture but also offers practical insights for brand marketing, product positioning, and user engagement. On the other hand, it will also further expand the coverage of the sor model, providing a new perspective and giving it new practical significance in the field of social commerce.

3.3 Research methodology

The questionnaire designed for this study is mostly for women between the ages of 18-25, and the main questionnaire is a content survey of users affected by rednote's beauty marketing, according to the data, most people think that rednote accurately pushes the beauty content they are interested in. This is exactly the role of algorithms in the era of big data. The platform analyses users' browsing, liking, commenting and collecting behaviours through big data, outlines a clear and accurate user profile, pushes content that meets their interests, stimulates the user's desire to consume with personalised and customised information, and the user as an organism transforms it into specific consumption behaviours.

At the same time, we can see that the biggest influence on the consumption of beauty products is the feedback of bloggers and other users, and the data show that users are more willing to believe in the sharing of experiences between people, and we can find that the attribute of “social” plays a huge role in the mode of social e-commerce.

For emotional consumer goods like beauty and makeup, users rely heavily on social circles for information validation and emotional resonance. Social e-commerce amplifies the role of interpersonal influence, with users tending to trust the real experiences of bloggers or peers who share similar identities, skin types, or aesthetics. The highly trusted consumption decision scenarios on Xiaohongshu have stimulated users' desire to purchase. Through interactions such as

following, liking, and commenting, a trust system rooted in shared experiences gradually forms. Instead of traditional brand-driven marketing, consumption decisions are shaped by user-generated content and authentic sharing. Bloggers' recommendations, framed as "real-life experiences" rather than overt promotions, enhance intimacy and relatability, triggering empathy and increasing purchase intent. On rednote, social attributes transform content from one-way marketing into emotional storytelling—through life narratives and genuine feedback—prompting users to act on the emotional connection sparked by the feeling of "she's just like me." The active community interaction atmosphere on the platform enables users to exchange beauty tips and consult product issues at any time. Brands can also use this opportunity to collect feedback, optimize products and promotion strategies, further enhancing user retention and product repurchase rates, and promoting the continuous popularity of beauty products in the social e-commerce ecosystem.

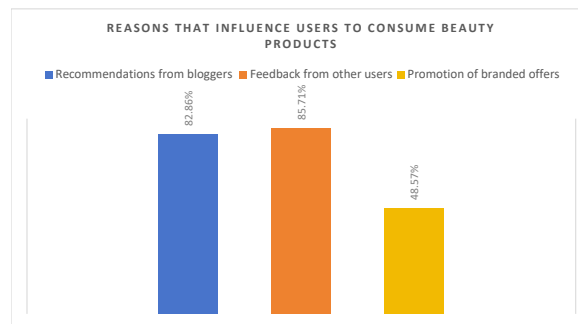


Figure 1

4 Results

Taking the consumption of beauty products on the rednote platform as an entry point, this study delves into the mechanism by which social media shapes users' consumption behaviour in the digital era. With its unique platform characteristics, rednote plays an important role in all aspects of beauty product consumption behaviour, forming a complete chain of shaping consumption behaviour from stimulating users' latent needs, providing rich information, influencing purchase decisions, to facilitating purchasing behaviour and promoting post-purchase sharing. Data capture, algorithmic calculation, and user-generated content (UGC) not only satisfy the need for information acquisition, but also strengthen consumption motivation through emotional resonance and trust endorsement. It has broken through the one-way supply model of merchants to consumers. By means of user-generated content production and creative co-creation, it has transformed consumers from passive recipients into participants and contributors of commercial value, forming a new form where social interaction comes first, followed by consumption behavior. The social attributes of the platform enable users to build a decentralised trust network in their interactions, which, under the s-o-r model, empowers the closed loop of transformation of consumer behaviour from "seeing" to "believing" to "buying". Under the s-o-r model, it gives a new understanding of the transformation loop of consumer behaviour from "seeing" to "believing" to "buying". The study shows that social media is no longer a single information dissemination channel, but has deeply intervened and reshaped users' consumption path and psychological structure. The analysis in this paper provides theoretical support and practical insights for understanding the development logic of social e-commerce, the trend of user behaviour and the adjustment of brand marketing strategies.

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