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# THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON PURCHASE INTENTIONS THROUGH CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

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## Abstract

This study establishes a model of users' purchase intention in the context of social media marketing based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. It explores the effects of the five dimensions of social media marketing: entertainment, customization, interactivity, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and trendiness on the three different levels of user engagement: consumption-based participation, contribution-based participation and creation-based participation. Using an online survey with convenience sampling approach, the study collects data from 469 Chinese adults' consumers who are experienced Weibo social-media users. Structural equation modelling was used to test the links between social-media-marketing elements, consumer engagement and purchase intention. The results show that, first, interactivity and eWOM have significant positive effects on the three dimensions of user engagement, but entertainment, customization, and trendiness only have significant positive effects on consumption-based participation, contribution-based participation, and not on creation-based participation. Furthermore, both consumption-based participation and contribution-based participation have a significant positive effect on purchase intention, while creation-based participation has a non-significant effect. This research not only enriches theoretically the relationship between social media marketing, consumer engagement, and purchase intention, but also provides guidance for brand enterprise to improve their social media marketing in practice.

**Keywords:** Consumer Engagement, Purchase Intention, Social Media Marketing

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## **Introduction**

Advancement of mobile internet technology and social media lead individuals to shift their interactions to virtual platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Aladwani, 2018; Kongtraipop & Sakdapat, 2023). This trend has fostered increased user engagement on social media platforms. The number of Chinese social media users had surpassed 1.015 billion, with projections indicating that this figure would exceed 1.1 billion by 2024 (Statista, 2024a).

Numerous studies have indicated that social media marketing can bolster social media user engagement, thereby influencing consumer purchase intentions (Chan et al., 2014). The majority of research in this area tends to focus on popular social media platforms, neglecting Chinese platforms. Research by Vrontis et al. (2021) underscores this bias, revealing that Instagram garners the most attention in social media marketing research, accounting for 32% of studies, followed by YouTube at 19% and blogs at 13%. Conversely, platforms like Facebook, Sina Weibo, Twitter, and WeChat receive comparatively little attention, with Sina Weibo representing only 3% and WeChat a mere 1% of studies. Chinese social media platforms, in particular, are notably underrepresented in research, despite their significant user bases. As of September 2023, Sina Weibo boasted 260 million daily active users, reflecting a growth of approximately seven million from the previous year (Statista, 2024b). Positioned as a premier social media platform in China, Weibo holds considerable research value.

Against this backdrop, this study sets out to address the following research questions: (1) What factors influence social media marketing across different tiers of social media user engagement? (2) How does social media user engagement impact consumer purchase intentions? The objective of this study is to elucidate the mechanism through which social media marketing factors affect various levels of social media user engagement and subsequently influence consumer purchase intentions. Ultimately, the aim is to furnish brands with actionable recommendations pertaining to social media marketing strategies.

## **Literature Review**

### **Social Media Marketing**

Verma et al. (2012) characterize social media marketing as leveraging social media technology to facilitate direct communication with consumers, offering cost-effective means of engagement, fostering personal relationships, and facilitating product exchanges. Given the potential of social media marketing, establishing meaningful relationships between consumers and brands within the social media landscape has emerged as a crucial concern for enterprises (Ismail, 2017). An essential initial step in addressing this challenge is recognizing that the effectiveness of social media marketing can be evaluated across multiple dimensions. Scholars have developed a model of social media marketing effectiveness comprising five key dimensions: entertainment, customization, interactivity, online word-of-mouth, and trendiness (Cheung et al., 2020). This study is anchored in these five dimensions of social media marketing effectiveness.

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The Uses and Gratifications Theory serves as a prominent framework for exploring the motivations behind media usage (Gao & Feng, 2016). It proposes that individuals actively seek out specific media and content to satisfy particular goals or desires. This theory explains why people prefer certain media platforms over others and evaluates the satisfaction gained from consuming media content (Lariscy et al., 2011). The theory has found extensive use in social media research (Ngai et al., 2015). Since the surge in popularity of social media, the Uses and Gratifications Theory has been applied across various studies to explore the motivations and purposes driving the usage of social networking platforms. Its aim is to identify the factors influencing user engagement on these platforms (Oliveira et al., 2016) and to develop models for investigating the behavioral drivers for active participation, as well as the mechanisms

affecting brand utility, including intensity of use, brand commitment, and brand loyalty (De Vries & Carlson, 2014). Thus, it suggests that consumers actively seek out media to fulfill their needs, leading to gratification, which in turn encourages continued use of social media platforms. Consequently, consumers' media preferences are seen as outcome-oriented and value-driven (Dahl, 2015).

#### **The Impact of Social Media Marketing Entertainment on User Engagement**

Entertaining social media marketing content not only provides interesting information to consumers (Hollebeek et al., 2014) but also reinforces their emotional connection with the brand. Brand pages featuring games, stories, contests, giveaways, animations, graphics, and videos are perceived as enjoyable and exhilarating, satisfying consumers' desires for aesthetic pleasure and emotional gratification, thus enticing them to engage with brand-related content (De Vries et al., 2012). The hedonistic perspective acknowledges that social media users seek pleasure and enjoyment, and brand pages capitalize on this by transforming entertainment value into positive consumer experiences (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Consumers are inclined to both enjoy and share these experiences with like-minded peers through likes, comments, and shares on social media platforms. Consumers' intentions to post on social media platforms are often driven by hedonic motives, making them more inclined to upload content (Piehler et al., 2019). This underscores the significance of perceived entertainment value in driving users' intention to participate. Based on these observations, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:  
**H1:** Social media marketing entertainment significantly and positively influences the three dimensions of user engagement.

#### **The Impact of Social Media Marketing Customization on User Engagement**

Social media marketing has the capability to deliver personalized brand messages tailored to individual customer preferences (Rohm et al., 2013). Customized messages hold greater sway in capturing consumer attention and satisfaction compared to traditional media messages, as consumers are more inclined to engage with content on social media platforms that align with their interests (Schulze et al., 2015). Consequently, consumers are more inclined to prioritize the brand during the decision-making process (Harrigan et al., 2018). Enhanced interaction between consumers and brands is facilitated through the delivery of personalized information to consumers (Wang et al., 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis is posited in this study:  
**H2:** Social media marketing customization has a significant positive impact on three dimensions of user engagement.

#### **The Impact of Social Media Marketing Interactivity on User Engagement**

Branded social media platforms serve as catalysts for consumers to disseminate brand-related content and engage in various interactive activities such as sharing stories, posting comments, and following brand pages (Dessart et al., 2015). Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) highlight that social interactions are pivotal in stimulating user-generated content. The innate need for consumers to interact with others on social media platforms drives their intention to engage in content creation. Consumers actively seek out brand-related information to augment their knowledge and share insights with like-minded individuals, thereby satisfying their need for social recognition (Vale & Fernandes, 2018). Based on these premises, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

**H3:** Social media marketing interactivity has a significant positive impact on three dimensions of user engagement.

#### **The Impact of Social Media Marketing eWOM on User Engagement**

eWOM has demonstrated a positive influence on consumer evaluations of goods and services, prompting consumers to invest more effort in consuming eWOM information (Krishnamurthy & Kumar, 2018). The accessibility and utilization of eWOM on social media platforms contribute to creating a positive brand experience and fostering favorable sentiments towards

the brand, thereby enriching the interaction between consumers and the brand (Brodie et al., 2013). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H4:** Social media marketing eWOM has a significant positive impact on three dimensions of user engagement.

#### **The Impact of Social Media Marketing Trendiness on User Engagement**

Consumers actively seek out popular brand information on social media platforms to stay abreast of brand developments and trends (Gallaughner & Ransbotham, 2010). Brand shapes consumers' perceptions, motivate them to seek the latest brand information on social media platforms, and foster a positive brand experience. Thus, the more current the brand's social media messages, the more effective they are in capturing consumers' attention and evoking positive sentiments, ultimately fostering brand loyalty (Dessart et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2021). Consumers actively engage with social media content when seeking information, with research indicating a positive relationship between consumers' information-seeking motivation and their intention to engage on social media platforms (Qin, 2020). Additionally, consumers' motivation to seek information drives their willingness to participate on social media channels by engaging with brand-related content through actions like liking, commenting, and sharing (Ki et al., 2020). Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

**H5:** Social media marketing trendiness has a significant positive effect on the three dimensions of user engagement.

#### **The Impact of User Engagement on Consumer Purchase Intentions**

Consumer engagement behaviors with brands on social media are driven by motivational factors and yield a wide array of branding effects, including increased sales, customer satisfaction, and overall brand competitiveness (Rohm et al., 2013). Given that consumers increasingly rely on their social networks for decision-making, brand-consumer interactions exert a significant influence on purchase intentions (Hinz et al., 2011). Purchase intention represents the psychological inclination of consumers to act toward a product or brand, constituting a primary objective of branded social media campaigns (Hutter et al., 2013). Moreover, user engagement is a pivotal concern for online retailers, as highly engaged consumers tend to generate more revenue, spend more per purchase, and exhibit greater lifetime value, thus reducing the cost of acquiring new consumers. Conceptually, these engaged consumers are more likely to influence their family and friends to make purchases (Barhemmati & Ahmad, 2015). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H6:** The three dimensions of user engagement have a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

In summary, this study proposes a conceptual framework of the impact of social media marketing on purchase intention (Figure 1).

### Social Media Marketing

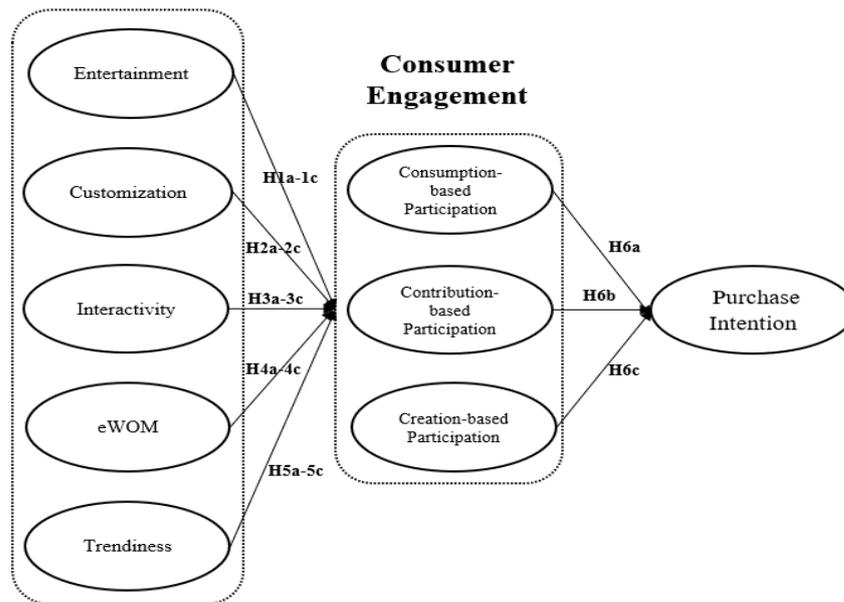


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

## Research Methodology

### Sample, Sampling, and Data Collection

The study focused on Chinese adult consumers who possessed a Weibo social media account and had followed a specific brand's Weibo account within the preceding two years. The primary research method employed was a questionnaire survey passed HREC079/2024 certified. A self-administered structured questionnaire was distributed online using an electronic platform, utilizing a convenience sampling approach to gather data. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula, with a confidence level of 95% and an error term of 5%, resulting in a calculated sample size of 385 (Cochran, 1977). However, a total of 490 questionnaires were received. Following data filtering to eliminate insincere or incomplete responses, a final sample of 469 usable responses was included in the analysis.

### Data Analysis Methods

In this study, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the collected data and evaluate the proposed hypotheses. SEM integrates confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis into a unified framework. It is a multivariate statistical technique utilized to estimate a series of interconnected dependent relationships concurrently (Hair et al., 2013; Sakdapat, 2023).

## Results

### Descriptive Analysis

Among the 469 valid questionnaires collected, there were 291 female users (62.05%) and 178 male users (37.95%), indicating a higher proportion of female respondents. Additionally, the respondents predominantly fell within the young age bracket, with approximately 94% of respondents aged between 18 and 40 years old, aligning with the typical user demographics of Internet social media platforms. Furthermore, the majority of respondents were identified as middle- or low-income students and office workers, with a bachelor's degree or higher education level. Moreover, the study revealed that a significant portion of respondents (82%) reported spending between 60 and 120 minutes per day on social media.

### Reliability and Validity Assessment

According to Table 2, the Cronbach’s alpha values for all constructs exceeded 0.7, indicating satisfactory reliability of the constructs. Validity, on the other hand, focuses on the accuracy of representing the research concept by the measures (Hair et al., 2013). Construct validity was evaluated through convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity was assessed using Composite Reliability (CR), Factor Loadings, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). A CR value of 0.7 or higher, along with factor loadings and AVE values of 0.5 or higher, indicate good convergent validity (Hair et al., 2013). As indicated in Table 2, all indicators met these standards, suggesting that the measurement model in this study exhibited good convergent validity. Discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing the square root of AVE of each construct with the squared correlations of other constructs.

### Measurement and Structural Model Analysis

The appropriateness of the model was assessed based on the goodness of fit index (GFI), where a higher value indicates a better fit between the implied covariance structure of the model and the sample data (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). The authors initially verified and evaluated the measurement model before proceeding to analyze and fit the structural model. According to the data presented in Table 1, all indices of the model met the evaluation standards, suggesting that the theoretical model proposed in the study was consistent with the actual survey data. This indicates that the implied covariance structure of the model closely resembled that of the sample data, thereby affirming the appropriateness of the model.

**Table 1** Fit Indices of structural models

Fit indices	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	AGFI	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
<b>Recommended</b>	<3	>0.9	>0.8	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.05
<b>Structural Model</b>	2.904	0.926	0.898	0.962	.953	0.962	0.045

### Hypotheses Testing

Table 2 presents the standardized path coefficients and their significance for each hypothesis. For hypotheses H1a and H1b, it was found that entertainment had a significant positive effect on consumer engagement, including consumption-based participation ( $\beta = 0.347, p < 0.001$ ) and contribution-based participation ( $\beta = 0.293, p < 0.001$ ). However, no significant relationship was observed between entertainment and creation-based participation ( $\beta = 0.081, p > 0.05$ ), resulting in the rejection of H1c. Similarly, hypotheses H2a and H2b were supported, showing that customization was significantly positively correlated with consumption-based participation ( $\beta = 0.465, p < 0.001$ ) and contribution-based participation ( $\beta = 0.245, p < 0.001$ ). However, no significant relationship was found between customization and creation-based participation ( $\beta = 0.130, p > 0.05$ ), leading to the rejection of H2c. Furthermore, hypotheses H3a, H3b, and H3c were all supported, indicating that relationship interactivity had a positive effect on consumption-based participation ( $\beta = 0.216, p < 0.05$ ), contribution-based participation ( $\beta = 0.171, p < 0.01$ ), and creation-based participation ( $\beta = 0.349, p < 0.001$ ). Regarding hypotheses H4a, H4b, and H4c, it was found that eWOM was positively correlated with consumption-based participation ( $\beta = 0.213, p < 0.01$ ), contribution-based participation ( $\beta = 0.188, p < 0.01$ ), and creation-based participation ( $\beta = 0.197, p < 0.01$ ), supporting all three hypotheses. For hypotheses H5a and H5b, trendiness had a significant positive effect on consumption-based participation ( $\beta = 0.784, p < 0.001$ ) and contribution-based participation ( $\beta = 0.347, p < 0.001$ ). However, no significant relationship was observed between trendiness and creation-based participation ( $\beta = 0.111, p > 0.05$ ), resulting in the rejection of H5c. Lastly, hypotheses H6a and H6b were supported, indicating that consumption-based participation ( $\beta = 0.485, p < 0.001$ ) and contribution-based participation ( $\beta = 0.523, p < 0.001$ ) had significant positive effects on purchase intention. However, no significant effect was found

between creation-based participation and purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.141$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), leading to the rejection of H6c.

**Table 2** Result of Hypothesis Tests

No.	Path	$\beta$	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
H1a	ENT→CSP	.347	.307	.088	3.469	***	Supported
H1b	ENT→CTP	.293	.261	.048	5.414	***	Supported
<b>H1c</b>	<b>ENT→CRP</b>	<b>.081</b>	<b>.089</b>	<b>.107</b>	<b>.830</b>	<b>.407</b>	<b>Rejected</b>
H2a	CUS→CSP	.465	.532	.089	5.952	***	Supported
H2b	CUS→CTP	.245	.208	.056	3.699	***	Supported
<b>H2c</b>	<b>CUS→CRP</b>	<b>.130</b>	<b>.131</b>	<b>.094</b>	<b>1.395</b>	<b>.163</b>	<b>Rejected</b>
H3a	INT→CSP	.216	.187	.093	2.002	.045	Supported
H3b	INT→CTP	.171	.184	.066	2.771	.006	Supported
H3c	INT→CRP	.349	.325	.099	3.292	***	Supported
H4a	eWOM→CSP	.213	.248	.080	3.109	.002	Supported
H4b	eWOM→CTP	.188	.236	.075	3.133	.002	Supported
H4c	eWOM→CRP	.197	.194	.073	2.672	.008	Supported
H5a	TRE→CSP	.784	.852	.065	13.092	***	Supported
H5b	TRE→CTP	.347	.307	.088	3.469	***	Supported
<b>H5c</b>	<b>TRE→CRP</b>	<b>.111</b>	<b>.117</b>	<b>.098</b>	<b>1.196</b>	<b>.232</b>	<b>Rejected</b>
H6a	CSP→PI	.485	.460	.068	6.756	***	Supported
H6b	CTP→PI	.523	.617	.069	9.005	***	Supported
<b>H6c</b>	<b>CRP→PI</b>	<b>.141</b>	<b>.158</b>	<b>.115</b>	<b>1.369</b>	<b>.171</b>	<b>Rejected</b>

## Conclusion and Discussion

First of all, the study reveals a significant positive relationship between social media marketing entertainment and both consumption-based participation and contribution-based participation. This aligns with prior research findings by Dolan et al. (2016). The results indicate that heightened levels of entertainment in social media marketing correspond to increased engagement from consumers. Specifically, when consumers perceive social media marketing content as entertaining, they are more inclined to engage in activities such as searching for information, reading, liking, and sharing content. Conversely, lower levels of entertainment in social media marketing diminish consumers' willingness to engage in these behaviors.

Secondly, the study further demonstrates that customization in social media marketing exerts a significant positive influence on both consumption-based participation and contribution-based participation. This finding is in line with previous research conducted by Wang et al. (2019). It suggests that consumers exhibit higher levels of engagement when they encounter content that is tailored to their individual interests and preferences or when they receive personalized services. In such instances, consumers are more inclined to participate actively by consuming and contributing to social media content, underscoring the importance of customization in driving user engagement on social media platforms.

Thirdly, the study reveals that social media marketing interactivity has a significant positive impact on all three categories of user engagement: consumption-based participation, contribution-based participation, and creation-based participation. This finding indicates that as brands engage in more positive interactions with consumers on social media platforms, there is an increase in consumer participation across all levels. This result aligns with previous research by Dessart et al. (2015).

Fourthly, the study demonstrates that social media marketing electronic word-of-mouth significantly influences all levels of user engagement: consumption-based participation, contribution-based participation, and creation-based participation. eWOM plays a crucial role

in encouraging consumers to actively engage with brand-related content on social media platforms. It stimulates users to not only search for and consume brand-related information but also to generate original content themselves, thereby fostering a positive cycle of engagement. This finding is consistent with prior research by De Vries et al. (2012) and Brodie et al. (2013). Additionally, the study reveals that social media marketing trendiness positively influences both consumption-based participation and contribution-based participation on social media platforms. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted by Hughes et al. (2019) and Ki et al. (2020).

Finally, the study finds a significant positive relationship between social media consumption-based participation and contribution-based participation with consumers' purchase intention. This aligns with previous findings by Hinz et al. (2011) and Hutter et al. (2013). The results indicate that even lower levels of engagement can have a substantial impact on consumers' willingness to make a purchase. Brands can leverage this insight by implementing social media marketing strategies that encourage both consumption-based and contribution-based engagement among users. By fostering engagement through various social media campaigns, brands can ultimately influence consumers' purchase decisions, whether directly or indirectly, by increasing exposure to brand-related content and messages.

### **Theoretical Implication**

This study contributes to the existing literature on the influence of social media marketing on consumers' purchase intention concepts. It further subdivides social media marketing and categorizes user participation variables into three dimensions based on varying levels of participation. The study provides valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying consumer behavior in the context of social media marketing. The study enhances theoretical understanding and confirms the applicability of previous research across diverse cultural contexts and social media platforms.

### **Practical Implication**

The study contributes to first, by prioritizing, brands will increase user engagement on social media platforms, consumption-based participation, contribution-based participation, and creation-based participation. Secondly, establishing official brand accounts across multiple platforms can expand brand visibility, while targeted advertising can reach specific user groups effectively. Brands enhance the effectiveness of social media marketing in terms of entertainment, customization, interactivity, electronic word-of-mouth, and trendiness. In addition, video can create an anthropomorphic image of the brand then using the anthropomorphic tone of voice to release the content also reduce the distance between the consumers and enhance the fun. Finally, brands help create an environment for eWOM to allow users to learn and share their experience, comments, and topics on the brand's official accounts.

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