The Impact of SNS Characteristic Elements on Customer Purchase Intention: Focusing on Chinese Beauty Industry Consumer

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Abstract

With the development of the Internet and smart terminal technology, Social Networking Service (SNS) has gradually developed into the most important channel for consumers to obtain information. Users are more willing to search and share information on SNS. Consumers will search and share experiences on SNS before and after purchase, and consumer feedback will effectively supplement the information already available on SNS. In situations where consumers do not have sufficient information and attributes over a product, brand trust as a signal to infer the product can largely influence consumer purchase intention. The characteristics of SNS are the underlying factors that influence brand trust and consumer purchase intention. This study examines the impact of SNS features on Chinese consumers’ purchase intentions, by reviewing and analyzing prior research, interactivity, access convenience, and recency. 200 questionnaires were distributed on the Internet and 167 valid questionnaires were returned. The study was empirically analyzed through SPSS 22.0 and Smart PLS2.0 (Structural Equation Package) to test the hypotheses. The findings of this study are as follows: Firstly, the interactivity of SNS positively influences brand trust. Secondly, the access convenience of SNS positively influences brand trust. Third, the recency of SNS has a positive impact on brand trust. Fourth, brand trust positively influences consumer purchase intention.

Keywords: SNS characteristics, Interactivity, Access convenience, Recency, Brand trust, Purchase intentions

1. Introduction

With the continuous improvement of Internet infrastructure and the rapid development of mobile terminal technology, mobile Internet is playing an increasingly important role in public life. According to the Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China published by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in February 2021, the Internet access rate of Chinese people reached 70.4%, with the total number of people accessing the Internet being about 989 million, of which 99.7% of the mobile phone users were online on
mobile terminals, with the number reaching 986 million. And also, the latest CNNIC report data points out that the number of Chinese online shopping users is about 782 million, accounting for 79.1% of the overall number of Internet users, of which mobile phone online shopping users are about 781 million, accounting for 99.9% of the total number of online shoppers [1].

The popularity of mobile Internet and smartphones has made it possible for people to exchange and interact with information online anytime and anywhere. This has greatly changed the way people interact and communicate with each other socially, while also bringing about a revolutionary change in traditional social media, and mobile social media was born. As an emerging information exchange platform, mobile social media uses big data and deep learning technology to achieve mobile location-based services, personalized search, personalized recommendations, and instant messaging, greatly catering to users' needs for social entertainment and information communication in different scenarios. Based on this, users of traditional online social networking sites have started to migrate to mobile social media applications in large numbers, and the mobile social industry has flourished, with mobile social media platforms becoming a mainstream online communication and information exchange tool for people [2].

With the development of the Internet and smart terminal technology, Social Networking Service (SNS) not only supports the use of computers but also allows users to access SNS using their mobile phones, making it more convenient and freer for users to share information, such as text, images, and videos. SNS has developed into an important channel for consumers to obtain and share information. At the same time, traditional marketing has begun to transform. By using mobile internet, SNS has begun to gather a large number of useful resources, and the way consumers obtain information has shifted from passive acceptance to active acquisition. Chinese consumers' consumption attitudes have shifted from survival to enjoyment, and the Chinese market has thus reached a new level of consumption. Under the new consumption model, consumers are getting more information from social interaction channels, using various social media, social software, and social platforms such as SNS and Weibo to interact socially with unfamiliar consumers, so that users' comments and posted information can influence other consumers' perceptions of products [3].

Nowadays, consumers no longer single-handedly shop on traditional shopping sites but open up active exploration mode. Consumers will get their path to purchase through online search engines, search for desired products on SNS, and check the information posted by other consumers on SNS, e.g. text, pictures, short videos. Consumers can make purchase decisions based on information posted by other users. Consumers use SNS to connect with other consumers and exchange post-purchase experiences, experiences in gathering information, and experiences in communicating with unfamiliar users on SNS. Consumers will judge the value of products based on the information posted by other consumers and eventually make purchasing decisions. It is also possible for companies to get feedback from users in a cost-effective way so that they can obtain some valuable suggestions.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 System characteristic

Scholars have studied and defined the characteristics of SNS in a variety of ways. The particularity of SNS is that it goes beyond the concept of simple information acquisition and becomes a place for people to gather and communicate since information or content can be
generated through interaction and conversation between SNS users. In addition, SNS is based on human-centered principles, allowing users to communicate with each other. And, everyone can become friends through SNS offline. During communicating online, SNS can be a source of information while people can feel socialized, empathetic, and emotional, which allows networking between companies and customers (including those around them) without the constraints of time and space [4].

Interactivity refers to all the various actions of two-way communication that take place between the sender and the receiver of a message [5]. The more frequently users communicate with each other, the more the bond between users rises, the more individual views and suggestions are recognized by the group, and the more frequently users use the service, which is a factor in increasing the length of time spent online. Interactivity in SNS is based on communication, where people can exchange conversations online by commenting, replying, and sharing. Through SNS, companies can deliver marketing messages directly to consumers, while having the advantage of getting feedback from consumers in a cost-effective manner [6].

This interactivity allows consumers to autonomously customize content to suit their needs and provides more advanced personalization through data analysis. These services make consumers more likely to make purchases and have a positive impact on product acquisition and business performance [7].

Accessibility refers to effective navigation, search, and easy interface structures on website pages that allow users to find the information they need efficiently and accurately. In addition, accessibility can also be defined as ensuring that SNS are accessible to everyone, even if users do not have specialized skills [8].

Shim & Mahoney [9], in their study on customer’s intention to use online shopping, showed that users who are easy to access are more likely to use online shopping. Therefore, the access convenience of users to SNS can be justified by the same logic. Since SNS requires very few clicks to easily perform most operational functions, many users maintain a lasting relationship with SNS. The easier it is for users to access the SNS, the more positive the customer’s relationship with the product and the greater the customer’s confidence in the product.

Recency refers to the ability to quickly handle downloading, updating, and modifying content on a website or mobile device, with the ability to provide information, one-way communication with immediacy on a mobile device [9]. The greater the amount of information updated on the SNS, the more quickly it is updated, representing the majority of consumers who buy the product, creating a social impact that makes the mass of consumers recognize the quality of this product and attracts them to make a purchase.

The fundamental purpose of a website is to deliver information and depending on the quality of the information, users will naturally give feedback on how they feel about using the website [10]. Recency information influences consumer behavior. The quicker and more reliable information increases consumer acceptance the more perceived value it would have, which in turn influences consumer behavioral tendencies [9].

2.2. Brand trust

Spence said that the essence of a brand is the signal that a good send to consumers, a mechanism by which a company communicates information about its goods to consumers. Here, the signal refers to observable actions taken by a company that can convince consumers of the quality or value of its products [11].

Brand trust is an important factor in encouraging customers to spend money, while at the same time providing comfort and satisfaction. Especially in an online shopping environment,
customers may feel various risks and anxieties, but trust reduces negative customer emotions [12]. If customers are dissatisfied because the brand does not perform as expected, customer confidence and trust in the brand will be diminished [13].

2.3. Purchase intention

Purchase intention is a mediating variable between attitudes and behavior and is a frequent predictor of consumer behavior in research in the marketing field [14]. The consumer's purchase intention can be seen as the willingness to buy a product and is a decisive factor that directly influences purchase behavior and can therefore be said to be the consumer's expected planned future behavior [15]. Purchase intention indicates the consumer's willingness to perform a specific act of purchasing a product in the future and is an important variable in measuring a company's performance [16].

Purchase intention is a measure of consumer willingness to buy by identifying consumer demand for a product [17]. Most consumers learn about the products they need based on their personal needs and conduct an information search, and the search process is highly likely to elicit purchase intentions through the influence of advertising [18]. Therefore, in this study, a research model with purchase intention as the final variable is proposed.

3. Research model and research hypothesis

3.1. Research model

The purpose of this study is to focus on Chinese consumers' intention to buy in the beauty industry based on the characteristic elements of SNS, which can be classified as interactivity, access convenience, and recency. Based on prior research the brand trust and purchase intention can be derived from the research model shown in [Figure 1].

3.2. Research hypothesis

3.2.1. Features of SNS and brand trust

In this study, the characteristic elements of SNS will influence Chinese consumers' trust in products and intention to purchase. The characteristics of SNS are interactivity, access convenience, and recency, which enable consumers of beauty products to share product information and service information, thus helping consumers to make rational choices [19]. Based on prior research, this study establishes the following hypotheses to test how the characteristic elements of SNS affect consumers' trust in brands.

Hypothesis H1-1: The interactivity of SNS has a positive (+) impact on brand trust.
Hypothesis H1-2: The access convenience to SNS has a positive (+) effect on brand trust.
Hypothesis H1-3: The recency of SNS has a positive (+) effect on brand trust.

3.2.2. Brand trust and purchase intention

Consumer trust in a brand is an important determinant of purchase intentions because consumers first have to trust the brand before deciding to buy the product [20]. Based on prior research, this thesis establishes the following hypotheses to verify how brand trust affects consumers' purchase intentions.

Hypothesis H2: Brand trust has a positive (+) impact on consumers' purchase intentions.

4. Empirical analysis

4.1. Collect data

This study was empirically analyzed using a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire survey was conducted in collaboration with a Chinese questionnaire company and targeted Chinese consumers online. The survey started on 1 March 2021 and lasted 11 days. 200 questionnaires were distributed, 33 invalid questionnaires were deleted and 167 valid questionnaires were returned.

Of the 167 valid questionnaires I returned, 29.94% were male and 70.06% were female, which is an unbalanced ratio between men and women, as people who consume on SNS are general users who have a strong need for product information and are willing to actively spread and share information, so female consumers are generally in the majority.

4.2. Data analysis method

For the survey analysis, SPSS 22.0 and Smart PLS2.0 (Structural Equation Package) were used for the basic statistics. In this study, the measurement model was analyzed first before the structural equation analysis was conducted to carry out the reliability and validity analysis of the research model as shown in [Table 2].

Table 2. Reliability and internal consistency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>Composite Reliability</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT1</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.690</td>
<td>0.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT2</td>
<td>0.894</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>INT3</td>
<td>0.785</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT4</td>
<td>0.826</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access Convenience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.647</td>
<td>0.879</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACC2</td>
<td>0.840</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACC3</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACC4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recency</td>
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<tr>
<td>REC1</td>
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<td>REC2</td>
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<td>REC3</td>
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<td>Brand Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRT1</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRT2</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRT3</td>
<td>0.859</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchase Intention</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUI1</td>
<td>0.729</td>
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<td>0.680</td>
<td>0.894</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUI2</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUI3</td>
<td>0.876</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUI4</td>
<td>0.836</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The result of the analysis is that the AVE value for all variables is the correlation of each variable. It is greater than the square and therefore all variables can be considered to have discriminant validity [Table 3].

Table 3. Correlation and discriminant validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>INT</th>
<th>ACC</th>
<th>REC</th>
<th>BRT</th>
<th>PUI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access Convenience</td>
<td>0.647</td>
<td>0.473</td>
<td>0.805</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recency</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>0.279</td>
<td>0.406</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Trust</td>
<td>0.686</td>
<td>0.326</td>
<td>0.391</td>
<td>0.389</td>
<td>0.828</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intention</td>
<td>0.680</td>
<td>0.291</td>
<td>0.364</td>
<td>0.517</td>
<td>0.589</td>
<td>0.825</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3. Verification of the structural model

In this study, PLS was used as the data analysis method, taking into account the characteristics of the study (e.g., theoretical robustness, sample size, and self-development of the questionnaire). The fit is high if the R2 value is 0.26 or more, medium if it is 0.26 to 0.13, and low if it is less than 0.13. Brand trust (0.234) can be evaluated as medium and purchase intention (0.347) can be evaluated as high.

The research result model is shown in [Figure 2].

This study uses the CR statistic (t value) as the basis for the validity of the test. If the absolute value of the critical ratio of the CR test statistic is greater than 1.96, it indicates that the path relationship corresponding to the test statistic reaches the 0.05 significance test probability value. The corresponding path relationship in the structural equation model is retained, and the corresponding assumption is established. If the absolute value of the CR test statistic is greater than 1.96, indicating that the path relationship used by the test statistic does not reach the 0.05 significance test probability value, the corresponding path relationship in the structural equation model is deleted, and the corresponding hypothesis is invalid.

The results of the model analysis are presented below.

Hypothesis H1-1 "Interactivity has a positive (+) effect on brand trust" is statistically significant at the 95% significance level (H1-1; β=0.153, t=2.158, p<0.05) and therefore hypothesis H1-1 is valid, therefore the higher the interactivity of the SNS, the higher the brand trust will be higher.
Hypothesis H1-2 "access convenience has a positive (+) effect on brand trust" This hypothesis was statistically significant at the 95% level of significance (H1-2; $\beta=0.214$, $t=2.821$, $p<0.05$) and therefore hypothesis H1-2 is valid. Therefore, the easier the accessibility of SNS, the higher the brand trust would be.

Hypothesis H1-3 "Recency has a positive (+) effect on brand trust" This hypothesis was statistically significant at the 95% level of significance (H1-3; $\beta=0.260$, $t=3.353$, $p<0.05$) and therefore hypothesis H1-3 is valid, therefore, the more recency the SNS is, the higher the brand trust is high.

Hypothesis H2 "Brand trust has a positive (+) effect on consumers' purchase intentions" was statistically significant at the 95% level of significance (H2; $\beta=0.589$, $t=10.655$, $p<0.05$), therefore hypothesis H2 is valid. As a result, the higher brand trust is the higher the purchase intentions are.

5. Conclusion

This study focused on Chinese consumers and in this study, a sample of Chinese people of all ages was surveyed. To facilitate a comprehensive study of the impact of the characteristic elements of SNS (interactivity, access convenience, recency) on the purchase intentions of Chinese consumers in the beauty industry.

The findings of this study are as follows.

Hypothesis 1 was accepted which is base on the characteristic elements of SNS and brand trust. The characteristic elements of SNS such as interactivity, access convenience, and recency all have a positive (+) effect on brand trust. Hypothesis 2 on brand trust and consumer purchase intention was also accepted, which means brand trust has a positive (+) effect on consumer purchase intention.

Based on the results of the data analysis, the following conclusions were drawn.

First of all, interactivity, access convenience, and recency among the characteristic elements of SNS have a positive (+) effect on brand trust. In other words, based on the interactivity of SNS, brands and businesses maintain timely communication and interaction with consumers on SNS, and users communicate with each other about their products on SNS. Based on the easy accessibility of SNS, users can easily register, login, and operate SNS, and can easily search for product information. And Based on the recency, SNS timely pushes relevant product content according to users' preferences and updates product information in real-time, all of which can improve users' trust in the brand.

Second, brand trust has a positive (+) effect on consumers' willingness to purchase. In other words, online shopping can make consumers feel anxious and uneasy when they cannot fully understand the information and attributes of the products, and brand trust can largely eliminate consumers' negative emotions, thus prompting consumers' willingness to purchase or purchase behavior.

The limitation of this study is that it only starts on the characteristics of SNS, and there are many other elements of SNS characteristics that affect Chinese consumers' purchase intention. In addition to interactivity, access convenience, and recency, which are proposed in this paper, other scholars have also studied SNS characteristics such as entertainment, usefulness, and information provision, which are not considered in this study. In the future, we intend to research consumer orientation.

References
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