



The Influence of WeChat Marketing on the Purchase Intention of Millennial Consumers— —The Mediating Role of Customer Trust

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Abstract

Based on the personal characteristics of WeChat opinion leaders, this paper analyzes their influence on consumers' purchase intention, and also introduces consumer trust as an intermediate variable. WeChat is one of the popular social media nowadays, and millennials are the main consumers in China's online shopping environment. 70% of millennials take social media as the main source of product information. Therefore, it is of great practical significance for enterprises to study the influence of WeChat opinion leaders on the consumer behavior of millennials. According to the results of literature research, variables and measurement scales were designed. Finally, this paper collected 202 respondents' relevant data using questionnaires and carried out reliability and validity analysis, descriptive statistical analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. In conclusion, firstly, the interaction, homogeneity, professionalism, product involvement and popularity of WeChat opinion leaders had a positive impact on the perceived trust of millennial consumers. Secondly, the interaction, homogeneity and professionalism of WeChat opinion leaders, product involvement and popularity had a positive impact on consumers' purchase intention. Third, consumer trust promoted the generation of purchase intention. Fourth, consumer trust played a positive moderating role between the influence of WeChat opinion leaders and their purchase intention.

Keywords: *Social media, WeChat opinion leaders, Trust, Purchase intention, Millennials*

1. Introduction

Opinion leaders are those who have the ability to influence other people's decisions. WeChat opinion leaders are users on the WeChat platform who can reach a large audience and persuade them by commenting and recommending brands and products on the platform. These opinion leaders can be anyone, such as fashion photographers, food, travel, or beauty videographers. These influencers spend time building relationships with their audiences, which makes them credible. As a new era of social media marketing, opinion leaders are becoming a bridge between consumers and products. Opinion leaders use their professional degree and popularity to influence consumers through various social media channels. After following the advice of opinion leaders, these consumers make purchase decisions.

Therefore, this paper believes that it is of very positive significance to analyze how the personal characteristics of opinion leaders, including professionalism, interactivity and popularity, affect consumers' trust and further promote the generation of purchase intention to help enterprises carry out better targeted marketing.

This paper mainly investigated the opinion leader marketing in the field of WeChat marketing.

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WeChat is a social media (messaging, commerce and payment services) mobile application launched in 2011. By 2015, the platform had about 600 million daily active users. By 2021, it was predicted to be one of the largest independent messaging apps by monthly active users, with more than 1.26 billion monthly active users. WeChat is equivalent to WhatsApp, Facebook, and PayPal, all of which are merged into one application (Kontsevaia & Berger, 2016). Widely regarded as one of the most innovative and versatile apps in the world, it is also China's all-purpose app, with numerous unique features and platforms ranging from "payments" to "social media" to "services" to "shopping" to "entertainment". Despite its usefulness as another social network marketing tool, little is known about how to use WeChat's opinion leaders for marketing. Meanwhile, as a representative of new media, WeChat differs from other media platforms, and WeChat's opinion leaders have distinctive characteristics.

First of all, they have a more distinct personality and better communication skills. WeChat opinion leaders are better at speaking out on product professionalism. They have perfect logical thinking and language expression ability. Opinion leaders of WeChat business and official accounts mainly rely on words and pictures to obtain fans, so they are required to be highly professional and use well-written language, and, at the same time, can arouse the desire to buy because a lot of people do not want to read words. However, in micro-videos, the language expression ability and professional experience of anchors are mainly relied on to demonstrate personal charm.

Second, they are better at interacting with users. Because WeChat has a very wide audience, it is the largest social media platform in China. Opinion leaders and fans can use private messages to communicate, more convenient and faster.

Therefore, this study provides suggestions and references for enterprises to make use of WeChat opinion leaders for marketing.

2. Objectives

- 1) To investigate the relationship between characteristics of WeChat opinion leader and consumer trust
- 2) To investigate the relationship between consumer trust and consumer purchase intention
- 3) To explore the mediating role of consumer trust between characteristics of WeChat opinion leader and consumers' purchase intention

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 This study adopted quantitative research methods for analysis, mainly using SPSS to conduct descriptive statistical analysis, reliability and validity analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. Data were obtained from the questionnaire survey.

This paper reviewed literature related to the characteristics of opinion leaders from five dimensions and established a model of their influence on consumers' trust and purchase intention. In this model, the characteristics of opinion leaders belong to the independent variable, consumer trust belongs to the intermediary variable, and purchase intention belongs to the dependent variable.

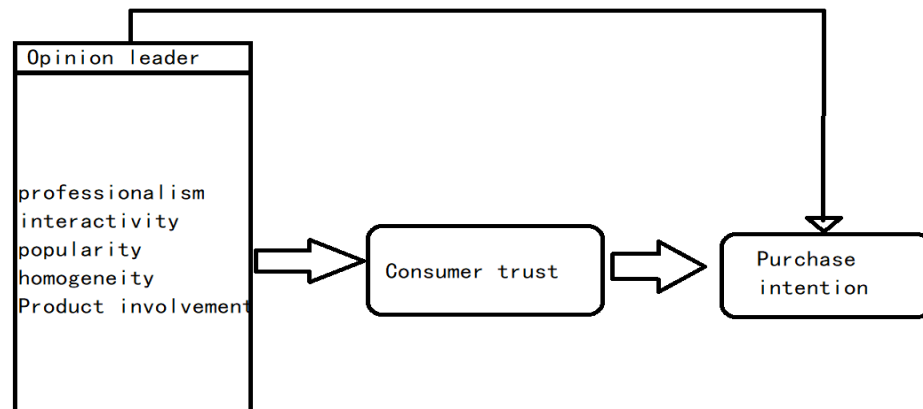


Figure 1 Research framework

3.2 Effects of opinion leader characteristics on consumers' trust and purchase intention:

Professionalism: Since opinion leaders have expertise in specific fields, they often cooperate with enterprises to make some professional comments or comments to attract more consumers and improve brand awareness (Li Qi, 2018).

Interactivity: Interactivity refers to the communication and exchange between people. Instant content sharing and community building by opinion leaders have a significant impact on consumers' willingness to buy (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

Popularity: Popularity refers to the degree to which a person or organization is familiar to the public. Popularity is a unique attribute of opinion leaders. Zhu and Zhang (2006) point out in his research that opinion leaders with celebrity aura will exert a great influence on the effectiveness of information dissemination and thus on consumer behaviors. To a certain extent, popularity will promote sales.

Homogeneity: The research of Li and Hitt (2010) shows that when the values of opinion leaders and consumers are consistent, consumers will establish emotional links with the opinion leaders, so that they are willing to believe the opinions of the opinion leaders and have purchase behaviors.

Product involvement degree: the higher the product involvement degree of opinion leaders, the higher the trust perception of consumers, the more they can reduce the sense of unease in the minds of consumers and improve their purchase intention.

The influence of trust on consumers' purchase intention: Zhang Bin (2018) believes that when consumers feel the goodwill information from opinion leaders, they will have a sense of trust and are willing to buy or recommend the products suggested by opinion leaders.

Based on the above information, it is proposed that the professionalism, interactivity, popularity, homogeneity and product involvement of opinion leaders will have an impact on consumers' purchase intention and trust



3.3 Scale design

The scale design included three variables: opinion leader value, trust, and consumer purchase intention. Among them, opinion leaders were subdivided into five indicators: professionalism, interactivity, popularity, homogeneity, and product involvement.

Table 1 Professional variable content

Professionalism (PR)	Questionnaire content	References
PR1	Opinion leaders are specially trained in this product area.	Xing (2018)
PR2	Influencers have extensive hands-on experience in this product area.	Xing (2018)
PR3	The influencers have extensive expertise in this product area.	Xie (2020)

Table 2 Popularity variable content

Popularity (PO)	Questionnaire content	References
PO1	Influencers are very popular on social media.	Li & Zhang (2020)
PO2	Opinion leaders are very well-known in their field.	Qiu (2020)
PO3	Opinion leaders have a high influence in this product area	Qiu (2020)

Table 3 Interactivity variable content

Interactivity (IN)	Questionnaire content	References
IN1	The influencer responds positively to consumer questions.	Zhang (2020)
	The opinion leader shares ideas frequently.	
	This influencer communicates frequently with consumers.	
IN2	The influencer responds positively to consumer questions.	Djafarova & Bowes (2021)
	The opinion leader shares ideas frequently.	
	This influencer communicates frequently with consumers.	
IN3	The influencer responds positively to consumer questions.	Zhang (2020), Djafarova & Bowes (2021)
	The opinion leader shares ideas frequently.	
	This influencer communicates frequently with consumers.	

Table 4 Homogeneity variable content

Homogeneity (HO)	Questionnaire content	References
HO1	The opinion leader is very similar to my personality.	Brown & Hayes (2008)
HO2	The values of this opinion leader are similar to mine	Brown & Hayes (2008)
HO3	The opinion leader's interests are similar to mine	Brown & Hayes (2008)
HO4	The product recommended by this influencer is in line with my preferences.	Brown & Hayes (2008)

**Table 5** Product involvement variable content

Product involvement (PRI)	Questionnaire content	References
PRI1	The influencer will focus on the recommended product.	Chinomona & Maziriri (2015)
PRI2	I can sense that the product recommended by this influencer is very important to them.	Chinomona & Maziriri (2015)
PRI3	I think the opinion leader is very concerned about the recommended products.	Chinomona & Maziriri (2015)

Table 6 Consumers trust variable content.

Consumer trust (CT)	Questionnaire content	References
CT1	I believe this influencer has the expertise to recommend this type of product	Irshad & Soomro (2018)
CT2	I believe that the product information recommended by this opinion leader is unbiased	Irshad & Soomro (2018)
CT3	I believe this influencer recommended this product to better help people become familiar with the product	Irshad & Soomro (2018)

Table 7 Purchase intent variable content

Purchase intent (PI)	Questionnaire content	References
PI1	I would buy the product recommended by the influencer	Li & Wei (2020).
PI2	I would recommend my friend to buy the product recommended by this influencer if my friend needs it	Li & Zhang (2020).
PI3	If I want to shop in the future, I will carefully consider the advice provided by this opinion leader	Li & Zhang (2020)
PI4	This influencer had a big influence on whether or not I bought such products	Li & Zhang (2020)

Use the above questionnaire to obtain sample data of millennials.

This paper investigated the behavior of millennial consumers. The tool was a questionnaire posted on WeChat. The samples obtained through convenient sampling were anonymous users of WeChat aged 22-41 years who were recruited to complete the questionnaire. The study was designed to generalize its results to the population. The manner in which the convenient sampling was employed could determine the respondents' representation of the target population, which will affect external validity. Kelman (1958) outlined the procedure for sample selection.

In the first step, the target demographic was defined., However, due to the limited resources, some WeChat users with online shopping experience in China were selected. Second, Convenient sampling was

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used and a sample size of 202 WeChat users was recruited., Fourth, since the paper aimed to study their behaviors on social media to obtain as correct results as possible, data were also obtained from natural environments.

4. Results and Discussion

After posting the questionnaire, 202 respondents completed it.

As can be seen from Table 8, this paper took IN, HO, PRI, PO and PR as independent variables and PI as a dependent variable for linear regression analysis. The final model was $PI = 0.157 + 0.165*IN + 0.296*HO + 0.213*PRI + 0.202*PO + 0.077*PR$, and R was 0.809, indicating that IN, HO, PRI, PO, PR could explain 80.9% of the variation of PI. In addition, the model passed the F test ($F=165.691$, $p=0.000<0.05$), indicating that at least one of IN, HO, PRI, PO and PR had an influence relationship with PI. VIF<5 in the model indicated no collinearity problem. Moreover, the D-W value was approximately equal to 2, indicating that the model had no autocorrelation.

Table 8 Linear regression analysis results

	B	standard error	Beta	t	p	VIF	R ²	Adjust R ²	F
Constant	0.157	0.132	-	1.190	0.236	-	0.809	0.804	F (5,196) =165.691, p=0.000
IN	0.165	0.060	0.171	2.764	0.006**	3.910	/	/	/
HO	0.296	0.074	0.290	4.006	0.000**	4.374	/	/	/
PRI	0.213	0.063	0.217	3.406	0.001**	4.155	/	/	/
PO	0.202	0.063	0.209	3.214	0.002**	4.332	/	/	/
PR	0.077	0.064	0.084	1.216	0.026*	4.909			

Note: Dependent variable: PI. D-W: 2.113. * $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

As can be seen from Table 8, the value of PR was 0.077($t=1.216$, $p=0.026<0.05$), indicating that PR had an impact on PI. The value of IN was 0.165($t=2.764$, $p=0.006<0.01$), indicating that IN had a significant positive effect on PI. The value of HO was 0.296($t=4.006$, $p=0.000<0.01$), indicating that HO had a significant positive effect on PI. The value of PRI was 0.213($t=3.406$, $p=0.001<0.01$), indicating that PRI had a significant positive effect on PI. The value of PO was 0.202($t=3.214$, $p=0.002<0.01$), indicating that PO had a significant positive effect on PI.

This indicated that the professionalism, interactivity, homogeneity, popularity and product involvement of WeChat opinion leaders had an impact on consumers' purchase intention

Table 9 Impact of trust on purchase intention

	B	Standard error	Beta	T	P	VIF	R ²	Adjust R ²	F
constant	0.881	0.158	-	5.562	0.000**	-	0.650	0.648	F (1,200) =370.954, p=0.000
CT	0.782	0.041	0.806	19.26	0.000**	1.000	/	/	/

Dependent variable: PI, D-W: 1.889, * $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

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CT is the independent variable and PI is the dependent variable. The linear regression model obtained by the two was $PI = 0.881 + 0.782 \cdot CT$, and R^2 is 0.650, indicating that CT could explain 65.0% of the change of PI. The model passed the F test ($F = 370.954$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), which means that CT had an impact on PI. The value of CT was $0.782 (t = 19.260, p = 0.000 < 0.01)$, indicating that trust had a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention.

Table 10 The impact of opinion leaders' opinions on consumer trust

	B	Standard error	Beta	t	p	VIF	R ²	Adjust R ²	F
constant	0.057	0.141	-	0.402	0.688	-	0.796	0.791	F (5,196) = 153.237, p = 0.000
PR	0.177	0.068	0.187	2.622	0.009**	4.909	/	/	/
PO	0.218	0.067	0.219	3.266	0.001**	4.332	/	/	/
PRI	0.210	0.067	0.207	3.145	0.002**	4.155	/	/	/
HO	0.165	0.079	0.157	2.097	0.037*	4.374	/	/	/
IN	0.196	0.064	0.197	3.093	0.002**	3.910	/	/	/

Dependent variable: CT, D-W: 1.774, * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

After linear regression analysis with PR, PO, PRI, HO and IN as independent variables and CT as a dependent variable, the model obtained: $CT = 0.057 + 0.177 \cdot PR + 0.218 \cdot PO + 0.210 \cdot PRI + 0.165 \cdot HO + 0.196 \cdot IN$, $R = 0.796$, indicating that PR, PO, PRI, HO, IN could explain the change of 79.6% of CT. The model passed the F test ($F = 153.237$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), indicating that at least one item of PR, PO, PRI, HO and IN had an influence on CT. The VIF values of PR, PO, PRI, HO, and IN in the model were 4.909, 4.332, 4.155, 4.374, and 3.910, respectively. If both values were less than 5, no collinearity problem existed.

The value of PR was $0.177 (t = 2.622, p = 0.009 < 0.01)$, indicating that professionalism had a significant positive impact on consumer trust. The value of PO was $0.218 (t = 3.266, p = 0.001 < 0.01)$, indicating that popularity had a significant positive impact on consumer trust. The value of PRI was $0.210 (t = 3.145, p = 0.002 < 0.01)$, indicating that product involvement had a significant positive impact on consumer trust. HO value was $0.165 (t = 2.097, p = 0.037 < 0.05)$, indicating that homogeneity had a significant positive impact on consumer trust. The value of IN was $0.196 (t = 3.093, p = 0.002 < 0.01)$, indicating that interactivity had a significant positive impact on consumer trust.

The results showed that professionalism, popularity, homogeneity, interactivity and product involvement all had significant positive effects on consumer trust.

Consumer trust for experts was very high, and the reason why professional advertisers are hired, especially in the field of medicine, is to eliminate the consumer heart distrust and worry and to enhance the production of their purchase intention. Ma Liting, & Guo Meiling (2022) showed that the larger the knowledge reserve of products consumers/opinion leads have, the more experience they will accumulate and the more familiar they will be with the products, the more likely they will attract their followers and the more consumers will buy related products recommended by the opinion leaders.

The online interaction of WeChat opinion leaders can send a signal to consumers, which will lead to



consumers' different attitudes towards product purchase through their psychological processing and judgment. Li Ruirui & Luo Yidan (2020) believe that when customers' opinions or feedback are accepted and adopted by opinion leaders, customers will feel happier and more satisfied, thus promoting the generation of purchase intention.

People tend to make friends with those who have similar personality and values. Kwornik & Han (2011) pointed out that when there is homogeneity in thinking between opinion leaders and consumers, products recommended by opinion leaders will be recognized and consumers' purchase intention will be promoted.

Studies have shown that when a well-known person publishes an opinion, under the halo of celebrity effect, consumers are more willing to believe the truth of the news and make purchase decisions. That is to say, the more famous people are on social media, the more influential they are and the more they can influence others' purchasing behavior.

5. Conclusion

The professionalism, interactivity, popularity, homogeneity and product involvement of WeChat opinion leaders all had a significant impact on consumers' purchase intention. The influence coefficients were 0.077, 0.165, 0.202, 0.296, and 0.213, respectively, showing that they were significantly correlated. In addition, WeChat opinion leaders also had an impact on consumer trust.

This study showed that the attributes of WeChat opinion leaders had a positive impact on consumers' purchase intention. It is beneficial for enterprises to use WeChat opinion leaders to publicize their products. It was suggested that brands should deeply cooperate with WeChat opinion leaders in various consumption areas. WeChat opinion leaders with professional knowledge and high reputation are the best choice. For example, brands can utilize opinion leaders who share personal and aesthetic attitudes on WeChat social media to inspire consumers' purchase intentions, as their lifestyle has permeated the productivity of the content. Consumers believe that WeChat opinion leaders are experts and credible people in the field, so they are more likely to pay attention to the products or brands promoted by opinion leaders, thus bringing confidence to consumers. Consumers' credibility with WeChat's opinion leaders comes from their expertise, not their number of followers. The more followers famous WeChat opinion leaders have, the more ability they will have to promote their professional content and opinions to a wider audience and influence the purchase intention of these audiences.

In today's communication world, consumers have a natural resistance to advertising communication, which has always been the traditional form of brand communication. Consumers believe that WeChat opinion leaders are independent from the company and they are not advertising spokespeople for the company.

WeChat opinion leaders often communicate in the form of personal discussions or through interesting online methods such as videos and blogs. The content is also easier for consumers to read and can even be shared through consumers' social media networks.

It is easier for WeChat opinion leaders to connect with customers. WeChat opinion leaders are regarded as real people with personal opinions and comments on specific products and services. By sharing personal opinions and comments, WeChat opinion leaders can connect with potential customers more intimately and



authentically than any mass media. Causing people to think that what they say is more reliable and trustworthy.

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