The Impact of Life-Sharing Social Media on Users' Consumption Behavior in the New Media Environment

Xinjie Pang[1,a,*]

[1]*Faculty of Broadcasting and Hosting Arts, Communication University of Zhejiang, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 310000, China*
a. 19927623798@163.com
**corresponding author*

Abstract: In today's digital age, life-sharing social media has become an important part of an individual's daily life. These platforms, such as Instagram and Twitter, are not only places where people share their lives but also important influencers and disseminators of consumer culture. With the popularity of social media and the development of technology, consumers' purchasing behaviour and consumption awareness have also been affected in an unprecedented way. However, although it is known that these platforms play an important role in consumer behavior, the specific mechanisms of their influence and the actual impact on consumer behavior are still worthy of in-depth study. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact mechanism of life-sharing social platforms on consumer behaviour and their significance in digital marketing. Through the research method of comprehensive literature analysis, this paper analyzes the role of life-sharing social media platforms in consumer decision-making, brand cognition, and purchasing behaviour. The research finds that the development of social media platforms expands consumers' social networks and information access channels, which in turn affects their purchasing decisions and brand preferences. This finding has important academic and practical implications for optimizing social media marketing strategies and driving progress in the field of consumer behavior research.

Keywords: Media consumption, social media marketing, new media advertising, consumer psychology

1.   Introduction

In recent years, with the rapid development of the new media industry, product content on social media platforms has become one of the most important reference factors when young people consume. Life-sharing social media with young users as the main body, such as Instagram, TikTok, and China's Red, have an increasing influence on consumption nowadays. In many ways, these platforms have rewritten the consumption behavior of the public. Users increasingly treat social media platforms as important sources of information for different types of products and services. Moreover, due to the highly interactive nature of social media, advertisements in social media are also not limited to officially published content but also include user-generated content. [1] Life-sharing social platforms connect users with life and consumption-related topics. This promotes the deepening of media consumption and also deepens symbolic consumption as well as its influence. The purpose of this

study is to explore the impact mechanism of life-sharing social platforms on young people's consumption behavior and its significance in the field of digital marketing. Through the research method of comprehensive literature analysis, this paper deeply analyzes the role of life-sharing social platforms in consumer decision-making, brand cognition, and purchasing behavior. In the past, the research on social media mainly focused on the political and cultural fields, but relatively little was involved in how social media affects consumption. The finding from this report has important academic and practical implications for deepening the understanding of digital marketing mechanisms, optimizing social media marketing strategies, and advancing the research field of consumer behavior.

2.   A "Weak Relationship" Social Platform Where Life and Consumption Topics Converge

Lifestyle-sharing social media refers to online platforms that provide a platform for users to share their daily lives, experiences, hobbies, travel, food, etc, such as Instagram, TikTok, and China's Red. Compared with Twitter, WeChat, Line, and other social platforms, the content of life-sharing social media is more diversified and relaxed. And it shows a kind of "weak relationship" social. The following aspects also make such platforms bring users different experiences and satisfaction from Facebook and WeChat.

2.1.   Broader Social Networks

Most of these platforms use "follow" rather than "add", which means a wider range of social networking. Users can not only interact with family or friends but also pay attention to more public accounts to get more information resources, such as some social media influencers or celebrities. This expanded social network structure allows users to reach out to content creators from different fields and backgrounds, not just their existing social circle, thus enriching their access to information and their social interactions. In addition, the platform itself uses an optional anonymity mechanism. Users can choose not to reveal their real identities and do not necessarily need to know the real identities of others. In such a social situation, users can express themselves more freely, show a more authentic mentality, and thus have more desire to express their attitude and show their life.

2.2.   Sharing Content for Value

In such platforms, users can not only browse product-related posts but also further transition from consumers to contributors to branded content by commenting on or "liking" related posts. [2] In other words, they create unique content by sharing their lives, hobbies, or expertise to build a personal profile that attracts wider attention and interaction, thus turning their account into a public account. The widely used social network and the interaction mechanism on life-sharing social platforms enable individuals, brands, or products to gain greater exposure and influence through social communication. For many creators, sharing content can be both financially and psychologically rewarding. When creators themselves have influence and become "KOLs" (Key Opinion Leaders) to some extent, they can not only gain a subjective sense of achievement from the support of followers but also create their brands or cooperate with brand parties to obtain actual benefits.

2.3.   Self-Expression and Cross-Reference of Life Experience

In life-sharing social media, users can freely share their life experiences, including but not limited to professional experience, personal growth, emotional experience, and consumption experience. The demands behind this are also various, such as showing their success, gaining the admiration of others, seeking comfort from others, and releasing the pressure of life. At the same time, users can also read,

share, and comment on other people's content to learn about others' lives and use it as a reference. They learn from or pursue other people's life attitudes, life experiences, and life quality, so as to reshape their own values, consumption outlook, and outlook on life.

2.4. Group Sense of Belonging

In addition, such platforms can usually display content and advertisements that meet users' personalized needs according to their interests, habits, and social relationships through algorithmic recommendations and personalized customization functions. Or they can provide a place of social identity and belonging. On the platform, users can share their lives and interact with people who have the same experiences or hobbies, thereby establishing new social relationships and communities, and receiving recognition and support from others.

The main theme of social media is about sharing and social interaction in daily life; however, with the frequent sharing of personal experiences, interests, and life views by users on the platform, these life topics often and inevitably turn into consumption topics. In this case, the life experiences and experiences shared by users are often closely related to consumption behaviors. These include shopping experiences, brand preferences, consumption decisions, etc. Therefore, life-sharing social media platforms are not only places for users to share their lives but also become important platforms to influence consumer behaviour and shape consumer culture.

3. The Symbol Consumption under Filter

3.1. Goods Endowed with Symbolic Meaning

Users can selectively display the products they have purchased or used on social media. In general, they are more likely to choose products that highlight their personal taste, lifestyle, or identity, rather than simply showcase the functionality or value of the product itself. At the same time, they will also add tags and descriptions to the content they share to highlight the product's features, brand, price, and other information. Additionally, they may add a personal point of view, emotional experience, or life story that gives symbolic meaning to the product beyond the product itself. Scholar Denish Shah et al. suggested the idea of "social media-centric consumption (SMCC) behavior".[3] In all SMCC instances, displaying consumption on social media is an integral part of the consumption experience. The need to seek attention, identity signals and social value becomes the primary motivation for SMCC. For this type of consumer, consumer satisfaction is determined by social media response rather than the quality of the consumer experience.

In addition, sharers often make use of filters, post-editing, and beautification tools to process the content they want to post on social media platforms. These filters not only enhance the beauty of the photo but also give the product a specific emotional color or cultural symbol. Then, through social interactions such as likes, comments, and re-posts on social media platforms, the symbolic meaning of the product is further strengthened and spread. The participation and feedback of other users will also affect the symbolization process of the product, further strengthening the social recognition and influence of the product.

In the social media of life sharing, the filtered life and consumption are often seductive, which often triggers people's pursuit and purchase desire. The presentation of individual consumption behavior is often selected and beautified, making the platform present a beautiful ideal world that surpasses reality. This leads to a sense of disappointment when people face reality under the guidance of such content. To some extent, the filtered world deepens individual anxiety, including appearance anxiety, body anxiety, financial anxiety, etc. When witnessing the beautified state and life of others, individuals tend to be more dissatisfied with themselves or jealous of others, even though they understand that the lives shared by others have been filtered.

3.2. Media Consumption under the Meaning of Commodity Symbols

Consumers may pursue utilitarian interests and hedonic interests when shopping online. [4] Utilitarian value and hedonic value are positively correlated with consumers' purchase intention respectively. In many cases, the utilitarian value of a product has an important impact on consumers' consumption experience. [5] And life-sharing social media just provides users with a platform to obtain both purposes. In this kind of platform, users can not only refer to, understand, and compare various products through others' sharing but also show their consumption as a sharer.

The symbolization of goods on social media is often closely related to the shaping of an individual's image. With the symbolization of goods on social media, individuals often pursue social identification associated with some specific brand, product, or lifestyle. They hope to gain social identity by buying and displaying these symbolized goods and being associated with a particular social group or social class. Individuals demonstrate their personal taste, attitude toward life, or social status by choosing a particular brand, product, or style. Create an image of yourself on social media and get noticed and recognized by others.

In addition, in media consumption under the meaning of commodity symbols, the sharing of others on social media will also stimulate the purchase demand of individuals for commodities. Even if the individual has no demand for the product in daily life, or is not interested in it. However, under the filter effect shared by others, an individual's consumption choice will often be affected, and then the purchase interest and demand for the product will be generated. This influence mechanism of sharing by others on social media further intensifies the utilitarian tendency of individual consumption behavior. As a result, individuals continue to follow the trend, chasing new and unique goods, while ignoring the actual demand and long-term impact of consumption. This utilitarian tendency of consumption behavior further intensifies the social consumption culture.

3.3. Commodity Display under "Life Sharing"

Media consumption is not only dependent on commerce, social networks are also very important, and online social media can promote the sale of goods or services both online and offline. [6] Life-sharing social media is a good example. It not only provides a platform for users to share their lives but also becomes an important part of business and consumer culture. On these platforms, the content shared by users seems to be a snippet of life, but behind it is often presented a large amount of commodity information. The life scenes shared by users are often interspersed with the display of various commodities or brands. These displays are presented implicitly or explicitly, thus indirectly or directly advertising and promoting a particular product or service. For example, when sharing a photo of a meal, a user may specifically label the brand of kitchenware or ingredient used. Additionally, when sharing a video of an outdoor activity, they might bring a specific brand of sports gear or outdoor equipment. Some common tags, such as "Outfit of The Day", "Room tour", "make up with me", etc., all of which contain a lot of potential consumption information. This phenomenon shows the close connection between life and consumption topics and encourages users to include their consumption behaviors in the scope of life sharing, forming a mode of linking life and consumption.

Secondly, the users on the life-sharing social platform are not only the showers of life but also the participants and disseminators of consumption. By sharing their consumption experience, brand preference, and shopping experience, users incorporate their consumption behavior into the scope of social interaction and communicate and share their consumption concepts and shopping mood with other users. The dissemination and sharing of such consumption content further introduces the topic of consumption into the social circle. This makes consumption not only an individual behavior but also a part of social relationships. Therefore, users' life-sharing content spreads commodity information and promotes commodity display, making consumer behavior a part of life and

promoting the dissemination and socialization of consumer culture. This pattern of interaction between life and consumption reflects the new characteristics of consumption in the digital age and the new trend of socialized consumption.

4. Group Consumption Under Social Interaction

Zygmunt Bauman once argued that consumption, unlike the enterprise of collective production, is a thoroughly individual, independent, and even solitary activity, driven primarily by individual needs and preferences. [7] However, with the rise of new media, especially the popularity of e-commerce platforms and life-sharing social platforms. These platforms collect people's consumption behaviors and further create a group consumption atmosphere and group consumption culture through social communication.

4.1. Group Interaction Stimulates Consumption Desire

In today's age of social media, group interaction plays an important role in stimulating the desire to consume. In social media platforms, products that are recommended by the masses, especially by social influencers, tend to generate widespread attention and discussion. The public opinion direction of social media content directly affects consumers' perception of the product. [8] In many cases, the emergence of new consumption hotspots is often through group interaction to shape a certain product into a sought-after consumption object, so as to arouse consumers' desire to buy. This phenomenon reflects a new type of consumption dynamic, in which the consumption tendency is often cultivated and strengthened through group interaction and social sharing.

Firstly, group interaction and social sharing provide consumers with a channel to access information and build trust. When a product is recommended and praised by multiple people or groups, consumers tend to feel that the product is trustworthy. This group recognition and resonance strengthen consumers' confidence in the product, thus promoting the formation and enhancement of consumption desire.

Secondly, group interaction and social sharing strengthen consumers' social identity and group belonging. When consumers share and discuss specific products with others, they are not only passing on information but also expressing their preferences and values. This strengthens social bonds and a sense of identity with one another. When users are in a self-defined community, consumption is often influenced and inspired by others in the community, thus forming a group consumption tendency and behavior pattern.

4.2. The Generation of Consumption Desire under Big Data Algorithm

Big data and algorithmic technologies play a crucial role in the operation of today's social media platforms. These platforms use algorithmic models to recommend personalized content to users by analyzing their behavioral data and interests and preferences. This personalized recommendation mechanism not only improves user experience but also serves as an important channel for users to interact with brands. This is despite research showing that some consumers are averse to big data tracking because of privacy concerns. This can exacerbate their negative attitudes toward social media advertisements and make them less willing to buy products. However, it is undeniable that when consumers are inundated with multiple types of digital information, they begin to see it as a social reality, leading to a more relaxed attitude towards privacy. [9]

Under the personalized recommendation mechanism, the platform strengthens the user's interest and purchase desire by continuously pushing similar products or content to the user. This recommendation mechanism enables users to immerse themselves in a personalized information environment and continuously receive product information that is in line with their interests and

preferences, thus strengthening their curiosity and purchase desire for these products. Under this mechanism, users can only be satisfied through the acquisition and consumption of the corresponding products. Even though sometimes it brings satisfaction and sometimes it brings disappointment.

The personalized recommendation mechanism reinforces the user's interest in and desire to buy a particular product. It promotes the actual consumption behavior of consumers and also provides huge business opportunities for product marketers. In the big data environment, product marketers analyze users' behavioral data and interests, and preferences through scientific and technological means, and use personalized recommendation algorithms to accurately position and promote products. In this way, they can control and guide consumers' purchase desires to a certain extent.

4.3. Follow Opinion Leaders

Studies show that consumers are increasingly using social media to identify product needs. When consumers become aware of a problem, they are forced to search for solutions to the problem through social media. [10] For the majority of consumers, celebrities are trusted sources of information online. Especially the smaller-scale "Instafamous" and blogger-type celebrities, are more trustworthy and reliable than traditional celebrities. Consumers are more likely to identify with these celebrities and perceive them as more approachable and trustworthy. [11] They can be summarized as the "KOL" (key opinion leader) mentioned below. These KOLs provide consumers with information, reviews, and advice about a particular product or service through content creation and sharing on the Internet. There is therefore a clear relationship between consumer sentiment and posts made by social media influencers. It is even said that social media users' judgments of products are more likely to favor the actual content shared by social influencers than the relevant posts published by the official product company on the media platform. [12]

In addition, according to the different transmission methods of product information, it can be regarded that the product information expressed by influencers on social media platforms is story news, while officially sponsored commercial advertisement posts are informational news. For users, Non-sponsored content with a strong story will tend to have a longer online attention duration (viewing time) because it resonates more with users. [13]

KOLs on media platforms have attracted a large number of fans and followers by sharing life experiences, shopping experiences, product reviews usage tips, etc. They provide product information and reviews in the content they create, helping consumers more accurately understand and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of specific products. Although sometimes their sharing is not completely objective, but mixed with subjective interests, lacking truth and credibility. However, by inspiring consumers' inspiration and passion, they can still motivate consumers to make positive purchases. [14] KOLs' recommendations and suggestions tend to enhance consumers' confidence in specific products and facilitate the formation of purchase decisions. At the same time, KOLs can also promote the dissemination and promotion of specific products through their influence on social media, which brings exposure to brands and merchants and enhances the visibility and market competitiveness of products.

This new type of Internet group consumption model promotes interaction and socializing among people from a social point of view and enhances social connection and a sense of belonging. From an economic point of view, it drives the demand for goods and services and promotes the active market. However, at the same time, group consumption also brings a series of challenges and problems, such as the group pressure of consumers and the phenomenon of following the trend, as well as the social comparison and the distortion of value concepts brought by group-oriented consumption behavior.

5.   Conclusion

Life-sharing social platforms play a vital role in today's digital age. It is not only the medium of information transmission, but also the shaper and disseminator of consumer culture. Through group interaction and social sharing, these platforms promote consumers' purchase desire and consumption behavior and strengthen the spread and strengthening of consumerist culture. The influence of personalized recommendation algorithms and KOLs has also further promoted consumers' purchase decisions and behavioral choices, bringing more business opportunities for brands and merchants. However, it can also be noticed that the process of group consumption is also a process in which consumers are continuously domesticated by the totality of consumption. It is necessary to balance the relationship between individual interests and social responsibility and strengthen the protection and supervision of consumers' rights and interests. Therefore, it is significant to study more deeply the impact mechanism of life-sharing social platforms on consumer behavior to explore sustainable consumption patterns and promote the healthy development of consumption culture and the sustainable progress of society.

References

[1]   Alalwan, A.A. (2018). Investigating the Impact of Social Media Advertising Features on Customer Purchase Intention. International Journal of Information Management, 42, pp.65–77.

[2]   Cao, D., Meadows, M., Wong, D. and Xia, S. (2021). Understanding Consumers' Social Media Engagement behaviour: an Examination of the Moderation Effect of Social Media Context. Journal of Business Research, 122, pp.835–846.

[3]   Shah, D., Webster, E. and Kour, G. (2023). Consuming for content? Understanding social media-centric consumption. Journal of Business Research, 155(113408), p.Part B.

[4]   Bridges, E. and Florsheim, R. (2008). Hedonic and utilitarian shopping goals: The online experience. Journal of Business Research, 61(4), pp.309–314.

[5]   Zhang, W., Zhang, W. and Daim, T.U. (2023). Investigating consumer purchase intention in online social media marketing: A case study of Tiktok. Technology in Society, 74(102289).

[6]   Liao, S.-H., Widowati, R. and Hsieh, Y.-C. (2021). Investigating online social media users' behaviors for social commerce recommendations. Technology in Society, 66(101655).

[7]   Bauman, Z. (2004). Work, Consumerism and the New Poor. Maidenhead ; New York: Open University Press, , Cop.

[8]   Zheng, Y.-H., Xu, T., Shi, G. and Jiang, L. (2023). I want to go there too! Tourism destination envy in social media marketing. Heliyon, 9(e22889).

[9]   Gutierrez, A., Punjaisri, K., Desai, B., Syed Alwi, S.F., O'Leary, S., Chaiyasoonthorn, W. and Chaveesuk, S. (2023). Retailers, don't ignore me on social media! The importance of consumer-brand interactions in raising purchase intention - Privacy the Achilles heel. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 72(103272).

[10] Mason, A.N., Narcum, J. and Mason, K. (2021). Social media marketing gains importance after Covid-19. Cogent Business & Management, 8:1(1870797).

[11] Djafarova, E. and Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the Credibility of Online celebrities' Instagram Profiles in Influencing the Purchase Decisions of Young Female Users. Computers in Human Behavior, 68, pp.1–7.

[12] Zhang, Z., Keasey, K., Costas Lambrinoudakis and Mascia, D.V. (2024). Consumer Sentiment: The Influence of Social Media. Economics Letters, 237(111638), pp.111638–111638.

[13] Stubb, C. (2018). Story versus info: Tracking blog readers' online viewing time of sponsored blog posts based on content-specific elements. Computers in Human Behavior, 82, pp.54–62.

[14] Andonopoulos, V., Lee, J. (Jiyeon) and Mathies, C. (2023). Authentic isn't always best: When inauthentic social media influencers induce positive consumer purchase intention through inspiration. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 75(103521).