

# ***Consumer Attitudes and Brand Development in WeChat Group Buying: An Analysis Using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)***

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the role of consumer attitudes in shaping brand development within WeChat group buying, a unique social commerce model in China. By applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the research explores how factors like perceived value, social influence, trust, convenience, and entertainment influence consumer attitudes through both peripheral and central processing routes. Using a multi-dimensional survey, the study finds that initial consumer engagement often begins with peripheral cues, such as social influence and price advantages, which later transition to central-route engagement centered on product quality and service satisfaction. This transition fosters brand loyalty and encourages repeat purchasing behavior, highlighting the critical role of social influencers (group leaders) in facilitating these shifts. However, the study's focus on Chinese consumers presents a limitation in generalizability, with future research suggested to include longitudinal data and cross-cultural comparisons. These findings offer valuable insights for businesses looking to strengthen brand loyalty within social commerce platforms like WeChat.

**Keywords:** Consumer Attitudes, Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Social Commerce, WeChat Group Buying, Brand Loyalty.

## **1. Introduction**

The rise of mobile internet and social media in China has reshaped consumer commerce, leading to the emergence of group buying as a prevalent model. Initially popularized by platforms like Meituan and Lashou around 2010, the group-buying model capitalizes on collective purchasing to secure lower prices, focusing on local lifestyle services such as dining, entertainment, and travel [1]. In recent years, WeChat, China's dominant social platform with over 1.67 billion users, has transformed this model into a social commerce phenomenon through its mini-programs and payment integration, significantly influencing consumer habits in China. The platform's expansive social network and integrated payment functions enable WeChat group buying to thrive, blending social influence with commercial transactions.

Group buying on WeChat enables users to purchase discounted goods or services by joining a group purchase, facilitated through WeChat's mini-programs, official accounts, and social groups. Recently, a prototypical business model—community-based group buying—has emerged, especially popular during the COVID-19 pandemic [2]. This model initially took root in smaller cities, where

logistics limitations prompted residents to form WeChat groups led by influential group leaders who curated and organized bulk purchases of fresh goods, aiming to reduce delivery costs and secure lower prices.

Despite the popularity of WeChat group buying, there is limited understanding of the mechanisms through which consumer attitudes are formed and their impact on brand loyalty and development within this context [3]. Many group-buying platforms have succeeded in attracting users but fall short in fostering long-term brand loyalty, a gap that presents both a challenge and an opportunity for brands in social commerce. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how consumer attitudes, shaped by WeChat's social and commerce features, contribute to brand development.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) offers a dual-route framework—central and peripheral—that explains how consumer attitudes are shaped and changed based on the depth of information processing. In WeChat group buying, the peripheral route often initially engages consumers through price incentives or social influence (e.g., recommendations by group leaders), while the central route emphasizes sustained engagement based on product quality and service satisfaction. The current study leverages ELM to analyze how these routes interact to influence consumers' loyalty and purchasing behaviors in WeChat group buying.

This study highlights the influence of social factors and convenience on consumer decision-making, providing insights into how businesses can foster brand loyalty through community-based marketing. Insights gained from this study can guide brands in structuring their group-buying strategies to enhance consumer trust and foster long-term engagement.

## 2. Literature Review

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is selected as the theoretical framework for this study due to its dual-process theory in psychology, which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how attitudes are formed and changed through two primary routes: the central route, involving careful consideration of information, and the peripheral route, driven by heuristics and cues without deep cognitive processing [4]. We have chosen the ELM over other consumer behavior models, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) because it offers a more nuanced understanding of the social influences and cognitive elaboration that occur in social commerce settings like WeChat group buying [5]. While TAM is valuable for understanding the acceptance and usage of technology, ELM is better suited for capturing the impact of social influence and perceived value on consumer attitudes and behaviors, which are central to our research objectives.

Recent studies have highlighted the relevance of ELM in the context of social commerce, particularly in community-based group buying (CGB) [6]. For example, a study titled "A Trust Model for Consumer Conversion in Community-Based Group Buying: The Dual Roles of Group Leaders" investigates how trust, mediated by group leaders, shapes consumer attitudes and decisions, aligning with the ELM's peripheral route [1]. Another study, "Product Assortment and Online Sales in Community Group-Buying Channel: Evidence from a Convenience Store Chain," explores how product quality and after-sales service—factors associated with the central route in ELM—drive satisfaction and brand loyalty in CGB [2].

The literature reveals that consumer behavior in social commerce is influenced by various factors integral to both the central and peripheral routes of ELM, such as perceived value, trust, and social influence [3]. Consumers may initially be drawn to a group-buying opportunity through peripheral cues, like social endorsements or price advantages, and over time, this initial interest may evolve into a central-route engagement as consumers focus more on product quality and service reliability [4].

In the specific context of WeChat group buying, the literature emphasizes the role of social influence as a critical peripheral cue, with trust in group leaders acting as a mediator that guides consumer decision-making and fosters repeat purchasing behavior [7]. The transition from peripheral

to central processing, facilitated by positive experiences, is instrumental in brand development, as it helps build long-term consumer loyalty [8]. However, research on WeChat group buying remains limited, particularly regarding how different pathways in ELM affect brand loyalty over time. This study addresses this gap by examining the central and peripheral routes in WeChat group buying and exploring the interplay between social influence, trust, and brand loyalty.

The ELM provides a theoretical foundation that aligns with our research objectives, which aim to understand how consumer attitudes in WeChat group buying impact brand loyalty and development. By focusing on the central and peripheral processing routes, our study will offer insights into how initial peripheral cues can lead to more enduring central-route engagement, ultimately influencing brand loyalty. This understanding is crucial for brands looking to leverage social commerce platforms effectively and foster long-term engagement with their consumers.

### 3. Methodology

This study employed a survey-based approach to analyze consumer attitudes towards WeChat group buying, with a specific focus on examining the influence of social influence, trust, convenience, and perceived value through the ELM framework. To capture a representative sample of WeChat group-buying users, the survey was distributed via the WeChat mini-program “Questionnaire Star,” targeting active users familiar with group buying and social commerce.

The survey included 40 questions formatted on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Questions were designed to assess four main dimensions relevant to consumer attitudes in group buying: perceived value, social influence, trust, convenience, and entertainment. In total, 80 questionnaires were distributed, and 80 valid responses were collected within a week, reflecting an enthusiastic response rate and ensuring data reliability. Participants were informed of the study’s purpose, assured of confidentiality, and provided with informed consent.

The survey structure was informed by previous studies in social commerce and ELM research, with items adapted to capture both peripheral and central route processing in WeChat group buying.

The perceived value construct assessed the extent to which consumers evaluated the benefits derived from participating in group-buying deals, emphasizing both the monetary savings and the utility of the products. This dimension captured the consumer's assessment of the value proposition offered by such deals, highlighting the financial and functional benefits that they perceived as important. The social influence dimension measured the extent to which group leaders and peer recommendations influenced consumer behavior. It was identified as a key peripheral cue that played a significant role in shaping initial consumer engagement with group-buying platforms. This aspect underscored the power of social proof and the influence of group dynamics on consumer decision-making. The trust construct evaluated the level of confidence consumers had in the group leaders and the platform itself, WeChat, for facilitating group buying. Trust was seen as a critical factor in the success of group-buying initiatives, as it influenced consumer willingness to participate and their overall satisfaction with the process. Lastly, the convenience and entertainment dimension explored the role of ease of use and the enjoyment derived from the group-buying experience on WeChat. This dimension was crucial in understanding how the user experience contributed to consumer engagement and the likelihood of repeat purchases. It highlighted the importance of a seamless and enjoyable shopping experience in fostering customer loyalty and repeat business.

Descriptive statistics were computed to capture the general tendencies of the sample regarding each dimension. Factor analysis was used to validate the survey structure and ensure the internal consistency of the dimensions. The data was analyzed using statistical software to confirm reliability and validity, with subsequent correlation and regression analyses applied to examine the relationships among perceived value, trust, social influence, and brand loyalty.

While the survey captured important dimensions of consumer attitudes in WeChat group buying, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response biases. Additionally, the study's sample size and focus on Chinese consumers limit the generalizability of findings across broader demographic or cultural contexts. Future studies could address these limitations by conducting longitudinal research and exploring cross-cultural dynamics in social commerce.

The preliminary nature of this study implies that the selection of sample size was aimed at capturing the main trends and patterns of consumer attitudes towards WeChat group buying. In preliminary exploratory research, the focus is typically on understanding the basic conceptual framework of the phenomenon rather than conducting parametric estimation or precise prediction. Therefore, 80 responses were deemed sufficient to provide us with a preliminary understanding of consumer behavior and to reveal key dynamics within WeChat group buying.

During the data collection process, we observed that responses to the survey questions displayed consistent trends and patterns, indicating that theoretical saturation had been reached, where additional data would be unlikely to significantly enhance our comprehension of the research questions. Furthermore, we referred to previous studies conducted in similar social commerce settings, which also employed a similar sample size to identify key factors in consumer behavior.

Although our sample size was influenced by resource limitations, including time, funding, and accessibility to specific populations, we conducted a power analysis to ensure that the chosen sample size could detect significant statistical differences under common effect sizes and significance levels (typically set at 0.05). Considering the low variability in the data, we believe that 80 responses are adequate to provide profound insights into the current research questions.

Lastly, the results of this study are intended to lay the groundwork for future larger-scale and more in-depth research. As our understanding of consumer attitudes in WeChat group buying continues to deepen, subsequent studies can utilize the findings of the current study to guide broader data collection and analysis efforts.

#### 4. Results

In the quantitative study of consumer attitudes in WeChat group buying, a structured questionnaire survey method was employed to reveal the key factors influencing consumer purchasing psychology and how these factors interact through intermediary and peripheral routes to accelerate brand effect formation. Through statistical analysis of the collected data, meaningful findings were obtained.

When asked about their main motivation for participating in WeChat group buying, the majority of respondents indicated that price advantages and social influence were two key factors. Data showed that approximately 65% of respondents considered price discounts as the primary reason for their participation, while 58% mentioned that friends' involvement significantly increased their willingness to buy. Additionally, product reviews and recommendation algorithms were found to significantly influence consumer purchasing decisions, with 42% and 39% of respondents, respectively, indicating that these factors often guided them to discover and purchase new products.

The attitude transformation process during group buying was also analyzed in detail. It was found that as consumers gained a deeper understanding of the products, their purchasing attitudes became more positive. Specifically, over 70% of respondents stated that they would carefully compare different options in WeChat group buying, and 55% believed that when product prices matched their expectations, they were more inclined to give positive evaluations. Furthermore, problem-solving efficiency and user experience design were also considered significant factors influencing consumer attitudes, with 48% and 45% of respondents, respectively, indicating that these two elements significantly impacted their group buying attitudes.

The outcomes of group buying experiences have also garnered widespread attention. Survey results revealed that 83% of respondents reported increased satisfaction with group buying products

after participation, and 74% indicated that their positive experiences increased the likelihood of continued use of the service in the future. Notably, product quality and after-sales service experience had a particularly significant impact on consumer trust, with 67% and 60% of respondents, respectively, stating that these factors altered their trust in group buying services.

In exploring the barriers to attitude transformation, it was found that uncertainty regarding product quality and inadequate after-sales service were the primary concerns for consumers, with 52% and 49% of respondents, respectively, indicating that these factors hindered their frequent participation in group buying. Additionally, delivery delays and complex payment processes were cited as barriers to consumer involvement, with 36% and 33% of respondents, respectively, stating that these factors negatively affected their attitudes.

Lastly, the role of intermediary factors in attitude transformation was confirmed. Social interaction and group leader recommendations were identified as key intermediary factors that enhanced consumer positivity, with 47% and 44% of respondents, respectively, indicating that these factors significantly influenced their group buying decisions. Moreover, personalized recommendations and fast delivery services were also found to increase consumer satisfaction and trust, with 41% and 38% of respondents, respectively, stating that these factors changed their purchasing attitudes.

## 5. Discussion

This study aimed to conduct an in-depth analysis of the key factors influencing consumer purchasing psychology within the context of WeChat group buying and to examine how these factors interact through intermediary and peripheral routes to accelerate brand effect formation. While previous research has explored the roles of intermediary and peripheral routes in brand building, there has been insufficient clarification of how their interaction fosters the rapid enhancement of brand effects. This study proposes that the intermediary route plays a crucial role in facilitating the integration of peripheral and central routes, thus serving as a significant driver of rapid brand establishment.

In the WeChat group-buying environment, the intermediary route operates by combining advertising content with product characteristics to trigger consumers' brand responses. Initial consumer responses are often driven by the peripheral route, such as price advantages and social influence. However, achieving deep brand loyalty requires support from central route signals, including product quality and service satisfaction. By offering a variety of merchant options and leveraging the influence of group leaders, the WeChat platform enhances consumers' positive responses toward brands or group-buying initiators. However, excessive marketing can lead to inconsistency between peripheral and central route signals, which may weaken consumers' willingness to respond to brand cues.

Consumers' initial attitudes are typically shaped by peripheral route signals, resulting in a tendency for active participation. However, if brands or group-buying organizers fail to consistently provide positive central route feedback, such as quality assurance, during transactions, consumer brand loyalty may be hindered, affecting their ongoing trust in group leaders. The WeChat group-buying model effectively connects peripheral and central route feedback mechanisms through the intermediary platform, offering opportunities as well as challenges for brand development. Each positive shopping experience narrows the psychological gap between the brand and consumers, gradually strengthening brand trust.

In China's group-buying market, consumers are often highly price-sensitive, especially in categories such as fresh produce and other daily necessities, where group-buying prices lower than market rates serve as clear demand signals. The primary goal of group-buying activities is to help consumers find products that meet these price expectations, which is particularly crucial for daily necessities that address basic survival and physiological needs. Consumers generally have a fundamental level of judgment regarding these products and expect rapid delivery. As long as group-



buying prices offer a competitive advantage without compromising quality, consumers will immediately feel satisfied, driving the popularity of community group-buying in China.

Essentially, every piece of marketing information in WeChat group buying sends an invitation to consumers, stating "Our product can meet your needs." The alignment of peripheral and central routes in pursuing the core goal of "meeting consumer needs" is fundamental to building brand trust. Recommendations from group leaders or friends not only stimulate new consumer demands but also establish connections between product offerings and the fulfillment of these demands. Even if certain products perform poorly in core attributes, skillful marketing through the intermediary route—such as brand promotion, discounts, or rebates—can still make consumers feel their needs have been met, thereby increasing trust in the brand or group-buying organizer.

In academic discussions, irrational consumer behavior has long been a focus in consumer behavior studies. Consumers are susceptible to marketing influences primarily because they interpret marketing signals as assurances that their needs can be met. Fundamentally, the pursuit of need satisfaction is a basic human drive. However, the process of meeting needs is often disrupted by various factors, such as time constraints, spatial and social influences, prompting consumers to repeatedly assess whether their needs have truly been satisfied in different contexts.

The concept of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) illustrates this phenomenon well. The time-limited nature of group-buying transactions often triggers FOMO among Chinese consumers, where countdowns and notifications create a sense of urgency that encourages immediate action. This behavior stems from a fundamental concern about the potential hindrance of need satisfaction, prompting consumers to make quick purchases to maintain an open intermediary route and to confirm as swiftly as possible that their needs are indeed being met.

Group leaders and other social influencers serve as key indicators for consumers to assess whether a brand actively responds to their needs. The concepts of similarity and scarcity in consumer behavior theory further reveal how social influence aids consumers in confirming the fulfillment of their demands. For example, herd mentality suggests that when consumers observe others purchasing a product, they may infer that the brand or product has effectively met the needs of the majority and will likely satisfy their own needs as well. Scarcity, on the other hand, seems to prove that the brand and product have responded well to specific demands, enhancing their appeal and reliability. Ultimately, if the temporary consumer attitudes induced by the peripheral route are promptly reinforced by central route signals through the intermediary route, this two-way feedback mechanism can accelerate brand effect formation and strengthen the brand's responsiveness.

The unique advantages of the WeChat platform have greatly propelled the prosperity of various business models. Non-traditional business models that use WeChat Moments as a sales channel have helped numerous amateur vendors to accumulate considerable wealth. However, despite significant commercial achievements, China is still in the nascent stage of brand development. This paradox provides profound insights into why Chinese products have not yet established widely recognized brands in the international market. The vast user base and high frequency of use on WeChat enable merchants to rapidly accumulate wealth, often by persuading consumers to purchase through peripheral routes alone. This reflects a pragmatic survival strategy, revealing that in many Chinese business practices, wealth accumulation is not entirely dependent on the construction of brand value. This study utilizes the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to explore how different pathways affect consumer loyalty and the propensity to repurchase, analyzing the close link between consumer attitudes and brand development. Social influence has lubricated the channel between consumer needs and corporate product supply, ensuring its unobstructed flow.

## 6. Conclusion

In modern business practice, marketing has begun to deviate from its original goal: to assist consumers in recognizing the value of a brand. This study emphasizes the pivotal role of marketing in shaping the importance of brands, particularly highlighting the significant role of social influencers, such as group buying initiators, in fostering the interactive relationship between marketing and product engagement. The research specifically points out that brands must ensure that each marketing campaign clearly reflects a response to consumer needs within their products and services.

This alignment ensures that consumers experience a sense of value and reciprocation for their engagement during the interaction and acquisition of products, which is the true essence of brand value. Brand value lies in its ability to garner recognition from a multitude of consumers, thereby influencing more. Frequent and compelling marketing activities not only stimulate consumer demand but also shape their expectations for enjoyable brand interactions. These positive encounters accelerate the establishment of brand value when products and services effectively respond to marketing messages.

Group buying leaders play a crucial role in assisting consumers in their decision-making process and also benefit from consumer feedback. Recognizing the critical impact of consumer attitudes on brand value is essential. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), these attitudes are closely linked to brand perception and are significantly influenced by how brands interact with consumers through marketing messages. Strategic messaging along the peripheral route is seen as a brand's commitment to fulfilling consumer needs, especially for those with explicit expectations.

Research on WeChat group buying platforms reveals the importance of social influence factors, such as group leaders, in facilitating the transition from peripheral to central routes of information processing. Each affirmative interaction not only bridges the gap between consumers and the brand but also reinforces the brand's value proposition. Conversely, negative responses can create a divide, hindering the realization of brand value, and underscoring the necessity for brands to remain vigilant and responsive in their marketing, particularly in the dissemination of peripheral route communications.

Brands can transform each consumer touchpoint into an opportunity to strengthen their relationship with consumers, thereby consolidating their market position and ensuring sustainable growth. In this context, brand loyalty emerges as a natural outcome of consistent, positive interactions. When consumers receive clear and affirmative feedback through the central route, they reciprocate with loyalty. This loyalty is the culmination of multiple positive experiences where the brand has demonstrated its commitment to meeting consumer needs and expectations. Once this principle is understood and effectively implemented, leveraging China's vast population and technological advancements, merchants in the country possess the fundamental ingredients to cultivate a diverse array of successful brands.

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