

The Influence of Social Media Engagement on Chinese Consumers' Intention to Purchase Luxury Brand Cosmetics

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Abstract

Social media platforms have become primary sources of information for many individuals. Social media engagement has also slowly become a potential factor influencing consumer's intention to buy certain luxury brands. This study aims to extend the previous study by exploring the impact of social media engagement on the intention to buy luxury brand cosmetics. This study also successfully collected 254 responses from the Chinese consumers of luxury brand cosmetic products. The findings indicated that financial brand perception, social brand perception and social media engagement play important roles in affecting the intention to buy luxury brand cosmetic. These results also suggest that social media engagement can serve as a potential factor in influencing purchase intentions. The outcome of this study also contributes to the understanding of the role of social media engagement in the luxury cosmetic industry.

Keywords: *Luxury Cosmetic, Financial Perception, Functional Perception, Social Brand Perception, Social Media Engagement.*

1. Introduction

The luxury market has witnessed some structural shift over the past few years (Husain et al., 2022). This transformation has been caused by various factors, including the rapid adoption of the Internet as a powerful sales channel and the emergence of new market segments (Dwivedi et al., 2021). In this context, social media has emerged as a main source of information for consumers. Social media platforms also influenced consumer participation and their decision-making processes (Lim & Rasul, 2022). Moreover, SM has become an essential tool for luxury brands to cultivate and nurture meaningful relationships with their customers, fostering a sense of loyalty and brand advocacy (Yadav & Rahman, 2018).

The digital era has ushered in a paradigm shift for luxury brands, necessitating a comprehensive embrace of digital technology to effectively engage with their target audience. Luxury brands can no longer afford to ignore the potential of digital channels and tools for building and sustaining connections with consumers (Kumar et al., 2022). This is especially true given the widespread adoption of social media marketing (SMM) practices among luxury brands today. The strategic utilization of SMM has become an essential aspect of their overall marketing strategies, enabling them to connect with their customers on a deeper level and create immersive brand experiences that resonate with their aspirations and desires (Jamil et al., 2022). By actively participating in social media conversations and leveraging user-generated content, luxury brands can tap into the

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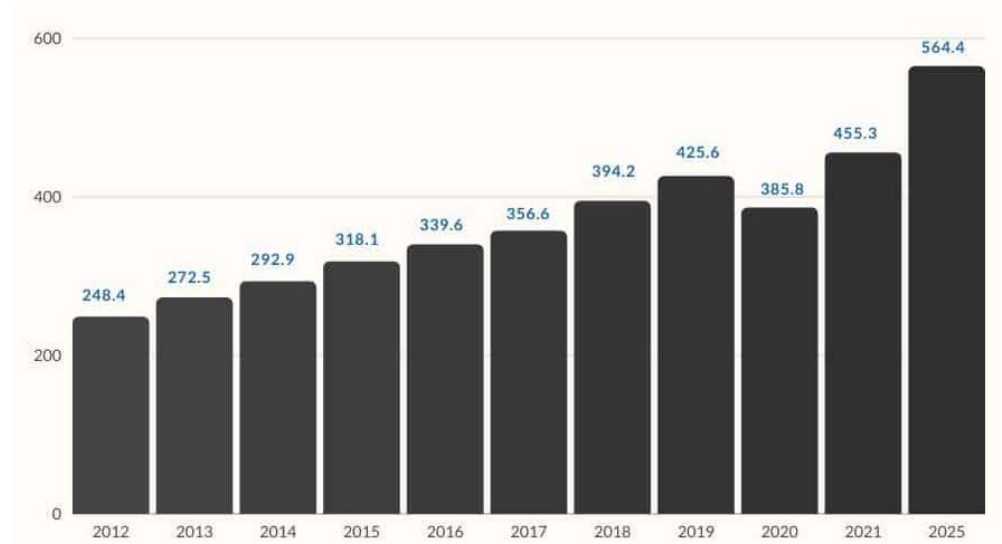
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power of social influence and harness the potential of brand advocacy (Liu et al., 2021). Furthermore, luxury brands must recognize the need to align their digital strategies with the evolving expectations and behaviors of consumers. Today's luxury consumers seek more than just material possessions; they desire unique experiences, personalized interactions, and a sense of exclusivity. Luxury brands must strive to create immersive digital experiences that reflect their brand heritage, craftsmanship, and values while catering to the desires and aspirations of their discerning consumers (Dobre et al., 2021).

Noteworthy, Figure 1 shows that China's cosmetics market has witnessed an unprecedented surge over the past few years. Chinese consumers, with a growing emphasis on self-expression, individualism, and sustainability, are increasingly investing in a diverse range of beauty products and services (Verot, 2023). On the other hand, Ma (2023) reported that China was responsible for approximately 50% of the cosmetics market in the Asia-Pacific region and over 20% of the global cosmetics market in 2021. A recent consumer survey conducted by Statista also revealed that around 28% of Chinese consumers showed a preference for purchasing luxury or premium cosmetics, surpassing the preferences of consumers in South Korea and Australia. Given the fascinating growth and dynamism of the luxury cosmetics market, it is becoming increasingly interesting to study this fascinating sector.

Figure 1: China Cosmetic Market Size



Sources: <https://marketingtochina.com/cosmetics-china-top-marketing-strategies-beauty-market/>

Despite existing studies have provided valuable insights into the role of social media in the luxury industry, however the study related to social media engagement is limited. Thus, this study aims to fill in the knowledge gap by investigating the impact of social media engagement towards intention to buy luxury brand cosmetics. The main aim of this study is to investigate how social media engagement influence the consumer's intention to purchase luxury brand cosmetic. In addition, this outcome of this study is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge and offers actionable recommendations to the luxury cosmetics industry. The remainder of this study is organized and structured as follows: The next section reviews the relevant studies, followed by the discussion of the data and methodology. Then, Section 4 presents the results and discussion of this study. The last section includes the conclusion, recommendations and limitations of the study.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

This section discusses the findings of previous studies and summarizes the hypotheses to be tested in this study. Traditionally, luxury brands have been synonymous with exclusivity and high quality, often linked to higher price points (Heine & Phan, 2011). Luxury can create value by contributing to a symbolic narrative, adding elements of exclusivity, excellence, and prestige (Chapman & Dilmeri, 2022). Consumers would perceive higher-priced items as more desirable and exclusive (Hennigs et al., 2013). Consumers are inclined to pay higher prices for expensive luxury goods as they symbolize wealth, reputation, and social status, thereby emphasizing their desirability (Balabanis & Stathopoulou, 2021). However, recent research by Lee et al (2020) challenges this traditional perception, indicating that high prices can deter young consumers from purchasing luxury products. This shift in consumer behavior suggests a need to reassess the influence of price on the intention to buy luxury products. It is essential to strike a balance between maintaining the aura of exclusivity and prestige associated with luxury while ensuring that the pricing is perceived as fair and justified by the target audience (Holmqvist et al., 2020). On the other hand, the high price of luxury goods may reflect the inherent value attributed to luxury brand owners, consequently influencing their brand preferences and willingness to pay a higher price for the brand (Xi et al., 2022). Thus, this study hypothesizes that financial brand perception is positively related to the intention to buy luxury brand cosmetics.

Hypothesis 1: Financial brand perception is positively related to the intention to buy luxury brand cosmetics.

Functional value pertains to the expectations consumers have for a luxury brand in terms of exceptional product quality, encompassing attributes such as availability, reliability, durability, as well as distinctive services (Wiedmann & Siebels, 2009). Functional value stems from the characteristics of a product that facilitate its use and extends beyond the post-purchase phase. The evolution of omnichannel strategies and the incorporation of online and offline experiential elements, such as virtual fitting rooms, have transformed this perception and necessitated an updated understanding (Lee et al., 2020). A recent study by Li et al (2012) also revealed that luxury consumption not only offers superior goods but also aids consumers in enhancing their social status. Functional consistency influences consumer attitudes towards brands, as consumers are inclined towards products that align with their values (Lee & Jeong, 2014). The remarkable design and exceptional quality of luxury goods serve as both expressions of conspicuous consumption and extensions of consumers' internal self-image (Jacob et al., 2020). Consequently, it is believed that consumers' perceived functional consistency regarding luxury goods can enhance a brand's personal identity. This study hypothesizes that functional brand perception positively related to the intention to buy luxury brand cosmetics.

Hypothesis 2: Functional brand perception is positively related to the intention to buy luxury brand cosmetics.

Social value originates from a product's capacity to enhance an individual's social self-concept (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Consumers may associate psychological cues with products and integrate the symbolic meanings of brands into their identities (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Consequently, consumers establish their social identity by acquiring luxury goods, positioning themselves as members of esteemed social groups in order to attain coveted prestige, status, or social image. Shukla et al (2015) emphasized that consumers' attitudes towards luxury brands hinge on their social perception of such brands. Thus, it can be inferred that consumers' social brand perception in luxury goods positively influences intention to buy luxury brand cosmetics.

Hypothesis 3: Social brand perception is positively related to the intention to buy luxury brand cosmetics.

Due to its interactive characteristics, social media has emerged as a primary platform for consumer-brand engagement (Dolan et al., 2014). However, despite the increasing attention from researchers and industry professionals regarding brand presence and customer engagement on social media (Dessart, 2017), there is still limited scholarly and managerial understanding of the nature and dynamics of consumers' online engagement practices. Social media platforms play a significant role in providing relevant brand information that influences consumer preference and purchase intentions (Naylor et al., 2012). Consumers often rely on product-related content shared on social media platforms to evaluate brands and make decisions about purchasing specific products. Previous studies have explored the impact of social media engagement activities on consumer responses, including brand preference, loyalty, and purchase intentions (Kim & Ko., 2012; Godey et al., 2016). In particular, Kim and Ko (2012) found a positive relationship between social media engagement activities and purchase intentions, while Godey et al (2016) demonstrated the positive impact of these activities on consumers' willingness to pay a premium price. Thus, this study hypothesizes that social media engagement positively related to the intention to buy luxury brand cosmetics.

Hypothesis 4: Social media engagement is positively related to the intention to buy luxury brand cosmetics.

3. Data and Methodology

This section provides an overview of the data and methodology utilized in this study. Firstly, the researchers developed an online questionnaire (refer to Appendix 1) using <https://www.wjx.cn/>. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A focused on gathering demographic information from the respondents, while Section B aimed to collect feedback from the respondents regarding various statements related to factors potentially influencing consumer attitudes or behaviors towards luxury brands.

Subsequently, the online questionnaire was distributed through the WeChat platform, resulting in the successful collection of 254 responses. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirement. According to Ramayah et al (2011), the minimum sample size should be at least five times the number of independent variables. As this study only involved four independent variables, a minimum sample size of 20 would have sufficed. Therefore, the number of responses collected for this study was deemed adequate.

This study employed the Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) to assess the convergent validity. Generally, Hair et al (2010) suggested that the Cronbach's alpha values that exceed 0.70 indicate an accurate measurement of the items. Dash and Paul (2021) also suggested that the composite reliability and AVE should exceed 0.6 and 0.5, respectively. On the other hand, this study also employed the Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) analysis to confirm the discriminant validity, with the HTMT ratio expected to be lower than 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015).

Then, this study also employed the PLS-SEM to explore the relationship between potential factors and attitudes toward behavior toward luxury brands. Specifically, this study extended the study of (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2022) by including the perceived social media marketing activities as one of the potential factors in affecting the perception toward luxury brands.

4. Results and Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the survey. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the respondents. Majority of the respondents are female (70.08%), single (50.79%), employees (33.47%), and earning more than RMB 2,400 every month.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Total Respondents : 254			
		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	76	29.92%
	Female	178	70.08%
Marital Status	Single/Unmarried	129	50.79%
	Married	120	47.24%
	Divorced	5	1.97%
Age (Years Old)	<21	17	6.69%
	21 to 30	107	42.12%
	31 to 40	68	27.17%
	41 to 50	33	12.99%
	>50	29	11.42%
Occupation	Employee (Private Sector)	48	18.90%
	Employee (Public Sector)	37	14.57%
	Student	59	23.23%
	Self-employed	29	11.42%
	Freelance	16	6.30%
	Retiree	21	8.27%
	Others	44	17.32%
Monthly Income (RMB)	Below RMB 2,400	35	13.78%
	RMB 2,401- RMB 4,800	31	12.20%
	RMB 4,801- RMB 6,400	42	16.54%
	RMB 6,401- RMB 8,000	19	7.48%
	RMB 8,001- RMB 9,600	35	13.78%
	RMB 9,601- RMB 11,200	21	8.27%
	RMB 11,201- RMB 12,800	26	10.24%
	>RMB 12,800	45	17.72%

Table 2: Results of Convergent Validity

Variable	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha (CA)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
FB	FB1	0.773	0.797	0.879	0.709
	FB2	0.862			
	FB3	0.887			
FCB	FCB1	0.890	0.803	0.868	0.624

	FCB2	0.813			
	FCB3	0.717			
	FCB4	0.728			
SB	SB1	0.911	0.906	0.936	0.787
	SB2	0.930			
	SB3	0.942			
	SB4	0.751			
SM	SM1	0.838	0.903	0.932	0.774
	SM2	0.913			
	SM3	0.883			
	SM4	0.883			
INT	INT1	0.714	0.825	0.876	0.586
	INT2	0.803			
	INT3	0.790			
	INT4	0.709			
	INT5	0.806			

Notes: FB refers to financial brand perception; FCB refers to functional brand perception; SB refers to social brand perception; SM refers to social media engagement; and INT refers to intention to purchase luxury brand cosmetic.

Table 2 presents the results of factor loading and convergent validity. The factor loadings fell within the range of 0.709 and 0.942. These factor loadings surpass the validity threshold of 0.5 recommended by Hair et al. (2009), indicating a strong individual item reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values for all items ranged from 0.797 to 0.906. This indicated reliable internal consistency among the items. Moreover, the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) values also exceeded the suggested threshold level of 0.6 and 0.5, as proposed by Dash and Paul (2021). This indicates the convergence of the constructs and further supports the reliability of the measurements. Table 3 presents the results of Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) analysis. All the HTMT ratio reported was below the threshold of 0.85 suggested by (Henseler et al., 2015). This result also confirms the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Table 3. Results of Discriminant validity [Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT)]

	INT	FB	FCB	SB	SM
INT					
FB	0.544				
FCB	0.717	0.739			
SB	0.745	0.632	0.710		
SM	0.806	0.594	0.704	0.698	

Table 4: Results of Path Analysis

	Coefficient	P values
FB -> INT	0.096	0.004***
FCB -> INT	0.004	0.797
SB -> INT	0.529	0.000***
SM -> INT	0.351	0.000***

Notes: *significant at 10%, **significant at 5%, ***significant at 10%

Table 4 presents the result of path analysis. Generally, the path analysis results suggest that FB, SB and SM had significant positive relationship with the INT. This implies that consumers' perceptions of financial aspects, social brand perception, and social media engagement play a crucial role in customer's intention to purchase luxury brands cosmetics.

Financial brand perception (FB) encompasses consumers' beliefs and evaluations regarding the financial aspects of luxury brands, such as their perceived value for money, pricing strategies, and financial stability. Contradict with Reyes-Menendez et al. (2022), the significant positive relationship between FB and INT suggests that consumers who perceive luxury brands favorably in terms of financial attributes are more likely to purchase luxury brand cosmetic. Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported.

Similar to Reyes-Menendez et al. (2022), there is no significant relationship between FCB and INT. One possible explanation for this lack of significant relationship could be that luxury brands are primarily associated with intangible and symbolic values, such as exclusivity, prestige, and social status. In other words, consumers may view luxury brands as more than just functional products, but rather as symbols of status and social identity. Thus, hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Meanwhile, this study found that SB is positively related with the INT, which supported the findings of Reyes-Menendez et al. (2022). The positive impact of social brand perception on overall luxury brand perception can be attributed to the symbolic and aspirational nature of luxury brands. Consumers often seek luxury brands not only for the social meanings conveyed by the products. In addition, luxury brands serve as symbols of social status, and consumers perceive them as vehicles for expressing their identity and gaining recognition within their social groups. Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported.

Social media (SM) has emerged as a powerful tool in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors, including their attitudes and perceptions towards luxury brands. The significant positive relationship between SM and INT indicates that consumers who are actively engaged with luxury brands through social media platforms are more likely to purchase these brands. This highlights the influence of social media on shaping consumers' intention to purchase luxury brand cosmetics, as they seek information, inspiration, and social validation through these platforms. Thus, hypothesis 4 is supported.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this study delved into the influence of social media on consumer behavior in the luxury cosmetic industry. Specifically, this study found that financial brand perception (FB), social brand perception (SB), and social media engagement (SM) significantly influenced the intention to purchase luxury brand cosmetics (INT). This study sheds light on the significant impact of social media on consumer behavior in the luxury cosmetic industry. By understanding the dynamics of social media engagement and its influence on consumers' intention to purchase luxury brand cosmetics, the industry

can devise effective marketing strategies to capture the attention and loyalty of their target audience in this competitive market.

This study also recommends the luxury cosmetics industry prioritize in building a strong presence on social media platforms to engage with their target audience effectively. They should create compelling content that showcases the financial benefits, functional advantages, and social aspects of their products, which can positively influence consumers' overall perception of the brand. They may also leverage the influencer partnerships and user-generated content to further enhance their brand credibility and engagement. Moreover, it is vital for luxury cosmetic brands to continuously monitor and adapt their social media strategies to align with evolving consumer preferences and trends. By staying attuned to the changing landscape of social media and exploring innovative approaches, the luxury cosmetic industry can maintain a competitive edge and stay connected with their target audience.

5.1 Limitation of the Study

This study also has several limitations. Firstly, this study only focused on a specific geographic region and may not fully capture the diverse global consumer landscape. Future studies could incorporate a more extensive sample size from various regions to obtain a broader perspective. In addition, the data of this study could be subject to respondent biases or memory recall issues. Future studies also can employ alternative research methods, such as experimental studies or in-depth interviews. This helps to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving consumer behavior in the luxury cosmetic industry. Lastly, this study mainly explored the influence of social media on consumer perception and behavior. Future studies could delve deeper into the other factors, such as product quality, brand heritage, and sustainability, in shaping consumer attitudes and preferences towards luxury cosmetic brands.

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