

Research on the impact of user product information sharing on consumer decision-making behavior in social contexts

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Abstract

With the rapid development of social media and e-commerce, it has become a common phenomenon for users to share product information on social platforms, which has a profound impact on consumers' decision-making process. This study aims to explore the mechanism of the impact of users' product information sharing on consumer decision-making behavior in social contexts. By systematically reviewing relevant literature, this paper constructs a theoretical framework that integrates social cognitive theory, planned behavior theory and information adoption model to comprehensively analyze how information sharing affects consumers' cognition, attitude and behavioral intention. The study found that information quality and the credibility of information sources are two key factors affecting consumer decisions. High-quality information content and reliable information sources can significantly improve consumers' cognition and purchase intention of products. In addition, social relationship strength, as an important moderating variable, affects the information receiver's trust in and willingness to adopt shared information. Personal characteristics such as product involvement and risk preference also play a moderating role in this process, and different types of products also lead to differences in information sharing effects. The theoretical contribution of this study is to deepen the understanding of consumer behavior in the social commerce environment and expand the application of existing consumer decision-making theories in social contexts. At the same time, the research results provide practical guidance for how companies can effectively use social media for marketing communication. Future research can further verify the theoretical model proposed in this paper through empirical methods, explore the impact of different social platform characteristics on information sharing effects, and the differences in information sharing behavior in cross-cultural contexts.

Keywords

Social commerce, information sharing, consumer decision-making, social influence.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

In the wave of the digital age, social media has become an indispensable part of people's daily lives. With the rise of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Weibo, and Douyin, users are not only passive recipients of information, but also active content creators and disseminators. This transformation has profoundly affected the way people obtain information, communicate, interact, and make decisions. Especially in the field of consumption, social media platforms have evolved into an important channel for the exchange of commodity information. Users have formed a huge, decentralized information network by sharing shopping experiences, product reviews, and usage experiences. This user-generated content (UGC) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) are reshaping the traditional consumer decision-making model. At the same

time, the rise of social commerce has further blurred the boundaries between social interaction and commercial transactions, allowing consumers to directly complete the entire process from information acquisition to purchase on social platforms. In this context, it has become particularly important and urgent to understand the impact mechanism of user commodity information sharing on consumer decision-making behavior in social contexts.

1.2. Research significance

The significance of this study lies in both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, firstly, this study combines social influence theory, information adoption model and consumer decision theory to construct a more comprehensive and dynamic framework to explain the consumer decision-making process in the social media environment. This not only enriches the existing consumer behavior theory, but also provides a new perspective for future research. Secondly, by deeply analyzing the mechanism of information quality, source credibility, social relationship strength and other factors, this study helps to reveal the internal logic of how information sharing affects consumer decision-making in social contexts, thereby promoting the development of relevant theories. Finally, this study focuses on the moderating role of different product types and personal characteristics in this process, which provides new insights into understanding the complexity and diversity of consumer behavior. From a practical perspective, the findings of this study can provide important guidance for enterprises to formulate social media marketing strategies. By understanding how user information sharing affects consumer decisions, enterprises can more effectively use social platforms for brand communication and product promotion. At the same time, this study also provides platform designers with ideas for optimizing user experience, which helps to build a healthier and more efficient social commerce ecosystem. In addition, for consumers, understanding the information sharing mechanism in the social media environment can help them process information more rationally and make more informed purchasing decisions.

1.3. Research objectives and research questions

The main purpose of this study is to explore the mechanism by which users' information sharing about goods in social contexts affects consumer decision-making behavior. Specifically, we hope to answer the following core questions through systematic theoretical analysis: First, how does information sharing about goods on social media affect consumers' cognitive processes? We will explore how factors such as information quality and the credibility of information sources shape consumers' cognition and evaluation of products. Second, what role do social relationships play between information sharing and consumer decisions? We will analyze how the strength of social relationships moderates the influence of information, and the differential effects of different types of social relationships (such as strong and weak relationships) on information adoption. Third, how do personal characteristics (such as product involvement and risk preference) affect consumers' responses to shared information? We will explore how these individual differences moderate the impact of information sharing on consumer decisions. Finally, do different types of products (such as search products vs. experience products) show different characteristics in this process? By answering these questions, we aim to build a comprehensive theoretical framework that can not only explain consumer decision-making behavior in social contexts, but also provide a solid foundation for future empirical research and practical applications.

2. Literature review

2.1. Research on factors influencing users' sharing of product information

Zhao Wenjun et al. (2017) believed that information value perception is the evaluation of users after purchasing goods, and this evaluation will have a positive impact on brand loyalty,

continued use intention, sharing and recommendation and other results. Li Xianguo et al. (2017) showed that information value perception is a subjective impression and comprehensive evaluation of products or services, which will affect users' willingness to share. Beyari and Abareshi (2018) believed that individual factors include emotions, motivations and value perceptions, and external environmental factors include group emotions and group trust. The most significant feature of commodity information is that it has commodity and economic attributes. Users sharing this kind of information may expose personal privacy and other information to a certain extent, which will also hinder their sharing behavior. Liu et al. (2021) found that emotions play an important driving role in the process of users' social sharing. It can be seen that emotions are also an important variable affecting individual information sharing behavior. According to social exchange theory, group attitudes play an important role in explaining the impact of situations on individual and group behaviors. In addition, existing literature focuses on group psychological resources, but there are obvious deficiencies in cross-level research on group emotions. How group emotions affect consumer information sharing behavior needs to be further explored. Shi (2023) studied the impact of user product information sharing on consumption based on the SOR theoretical model. Exploring the factors that influence sharing willingness has become a meaningful way to improve the dissemination of marketing information.

2.2. Related research on the impact of product information sharing on consumer decisions

Chatterjee (2004) believes that by obtaining product information shared by other consumers, consumers' perceived risk and perceived uncertainty can be reduced, thereby enhancing their willingness to buy. Kwek et al. (2010) pointed out that the shopping experience shared by users will positively affect consumers' willingness to buy. Smith (2013) believes that the professionalism and degree of connection of the sharer will affect their consumption decisions. Zhu Xiaodong and Chen Jie (2016) believe that social e-commerce can promote the promotion and marketing of products or services through communication and sharing between users and user-generated content. Su Haoxuan (2019) pointed out that product involvement has a certain moderating effect on the relationship between information sharing and consumer purchase decisions. The empirical research results of Wang Jianjun et al. (2019) show that product information shared by strangers has a significant impact on consumers' willingness to buy, and the degree of intimacy plays a moderating role in the relationship between product information sharing and consumer purchase intention. Luo Mingfang (2023) studied the consumption intentions, behaviors, and driving factors of college students in sharing commodity information, and determined that the external influencing factors in sharing commodity information are the development of live broadcast culture and the attention effect driven by commercial capital, while the internal influencing factors are psychological needs and interest-driven.

3. Theoretical Basis and Conceptual Model

3.1. Social cognitive theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), proposed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes that individual behavior is learned by observing and imitating the behavior of others. The theory points out that there is a dynamic interaction between an individual's cognition, behavior, and environment. This triadic reciprocal determinism shows that an individual's behavior is not only affected by his cognition and environment, but also affects his cognition and environment in turn. In the social media environment, users can form cognition and attitudes towards products by observing the product information shared by others. This cognitive process not only includes the evaluation of the product itself, but also involves the trust in the source of information and the judgment of the quality of information. Therefore, social cognitive theory

provides an important framework for understanding users' consumption decision-making behavior in social contexts.

3.2. Theory of Planned Behavior

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), proposed by Icek Ajzen, is a theory used to predict and explain individual behavior. TPB believes that behavioral intention is the direct antecedent of behavior, and behavioral intention is determined by three factors: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. In social situations, users' attitudes toward product information (such as the credibility and usefulness of information), subjective norms from social networks (such as recommendations from friends and family), and perceived behavioral control (such as the ease of purchase) jointly influence their consumer decision-making behavior. By applying TPB to the social media environment, we can better understand how users make purchasing decisions when faced with a large amount of information, and which factors play a key role in this process.

3.3. Information Adoption Model

The Information Adoption Model (IAM) is used to explain how individuals process and accept information. The model was proposed by Sussman and Siegal and is based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and information adoption theory. IAM believes that the usefulness and credibility of information are the two main factors that affect individual information adoption behavior. In a social context, the quality of the product information shared by users and the credibility of the source directly affect the usefulness and credibility of the information, thereby affecting the adoption behavior of other users. By analyzing these characteristics of information, we can better understand how users screen and accept product information on social media, and ultimately affect their consumption decisions.

3.4. Conceptual model construction

Based on the above theories, this study constructed a conceptual model to explain the impact of user product information sharing on consumer decision-making behavior in social contexts. The model includes the following main variables: information quality, information source credibility, social relationship strength, personal characteristics (such as product involvement and risk preference), and consumer decision-making behavior. Information quality and information source credibility, as independent variables, directly affect consumers' cognition and attitude; social relationship strength, as a moderating variable, affects the dissemination effect and acceptance of information; personal characteristics, as a moderating variable, affect individuals' reactions to information and decision-making processes. Through this comprehensive model, we can systematically analyze the complex mechanism of information sharing in social contexts and provide valuable theoretical guidance and practical suggestions for enterprises and researchers.

4. Theoretical Analysis and Discussion

4.1. The impact mechanism of information sharing on consumer cognition

In the social media environment, the product information shared by users has a multi-faceted impact on consumer cognition. First, based on social cognitive theory, consumers form a preliminary understanding of a product by observing the purchasing experience and evaluation of others. High-quality information can provide a more comprehensive and accurate product description, thereby reducing consumer uncertainty and improving their understanding of product characteristics. Secondly, the diversity and richness of information can help consumers form a more three-dimensional product cognition. Information shared by different users from different perspectives can help consumers fully understand the advantages and disadvantages

of a product and form a more objective evaluation. In addition, the timeliness of information is also an important factor affecting cognition. Real-time updated user feedback on social media can help consumers keep abreast of the latest product developments, such as quality issues or new features.

However, information overload may have a negative impact on cognition. Faced with a large amount of information, consumers may feel confused or fatigued, leading to cognitive bias. Therefore, the ability to filter and integrate information becomes a key factor affecting the quality of cognition. In general, information sharing on social media significantly affects consumers' cognitive formation process of products by providing diversified and real-time information, but it also brings challenges to information processing.

4.2. The impact of information sharing on consumer attitudes

The mechanism of information sharing's influence on consumer attitudes is mainly reflected in two aspects: emotional transmission and social identity. First, according to the theory of emotional contagion, users often attach personal emotions and evaluations when sharing product information. These emotional factors can be transmitted to other users through social media platforms, thereby affecting their attitudes towards products. Positive user experience and evaluation can stimulate positive emotional reactions and promote the formation of positive attitudes; conversely, negative evaluations may cause consumers to resist products. Second, social identity theory points out that people tend to identify with and accept the views of groups that are similar or close to themselves. In the social media environment, product information sharing from friends, family or opinion leaders often has higher credibility and influence, and is more likely to affect consumers' attitudes. This influence comes not only from the information content itself, but also from the need to maintain social relationships and group belonging. In addition, the diversity of information sources will also affect the formation of attitudes. User sharing from different backgrounds and different usage scenarios can provide multi-angle product evaluations, which helps consumers form more comprehensive and objective attitudes. However, this may also lead to uncertainty in attitudes, especially when there are contradictions in information from different sources. In general, information sharing on social media has a profound impact on the process of consumer attitude formation towards products through mechanisms such as emotional transmission, social identity and diversified evaluation. This influence is not just one-way; consumers' attitudes may in turn influence their information sharing behavior on social media, forming a dynamic interactive process.

4.3. The impact mechanism of information sharing on consumer behavior intention

The mechanism of information sharing's impact on consumer behavior intention can be analyzed from the perspective of the theory of planned behavior. According to the theory, behavior intention is determined by three factors: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control. In the social media environment, the product information shared by users affects consumers' purchase intention by affecting these three factors. First, information sharing affects behavior intention by affecting consumers' attitudes toward products. High-quality, positive user reviews and usage experience can enhance consumers' positive attitudes toward products, thereby increasing purchase intention. Second, information sharing on social media constitutes a subjective norm. When consumers find that people around them or opinion leaders are using and recommending a product, they may feel social pressure, thereby increasing their purchase intention. Finally, information sharing can also affect consumers' perceived behavior control. Detailed product instructions, purchase channel information, etc. can increase consumers' confidence in completing purchase behavior and reduce perceived difficulty. However, the impact of information sharing on behavior intention is not always positive. Negative reviews, controversial information, or excessive marketing may reduce

consumers' purchase intention. In addition, the authenticity and credibility of information are also key factors. False or misleading information may cause consumers to distrust, thereby affecting their behavior intention.

5. Research Implications

5.1. Theoretical Contribution

This study has made many theoretical contributions in the fields of consumer behavior theory and social media marketing. By integrating social cognitive theory, planned behavior theory, and information adoption model, we have constructed a comprehensive and dynamic theoretical framework to deeply analyze the impact mechanism of user product information sharing on consumer decision-making behavior in social contexts. This comprehensive framework not only expands the application scope of traditional consumer decision-making theory in social media environments, but also provides a novel perspective for understanding consumer behavior in the digital age. In exploring the mechanism of factors such as information quality, credibility of information sources, and strength of social relationships, this study enriches the academic community's understanding of information dynamics in social commerce. In particular, we reveal how the strength of social relationships regulates the impact of information characteristics on consumer cognition, attitudes, and behavioral intentions, opening up a new path for the application of social network theory in consumer behavior research.

This study also examines the moderating role of personal characteristics (such as product involvement and risk preference) in the process of social media information sharing affecting consumer decision-making. This not only extends the application of individual difference research in the field of social commerce, but also lays a theoretical foundation for understanding the heterogeneity of consumer behavior. By analyzing the differences in the effects of social media information sharing between different product types (search products vs. experience products), we expand the scope of application of product type theory in the digital marketing environment and provide a new theoretical perspective for understanding how product characteristics affect social media marketing effects. In addition, this study systematically analyzes the mechanism of social context factors (such as platform characteristics, interaction patterns, etc.), which not only enriches the theoretical connotation of social media research, but also provides a theoretical explanation for understanding the differences in consumer behavior on different social platforms. By constructing this multi-level and multi-dimensional theoretical framework, we not only integrate and expand existing theories, but also lay a solid theoretical foundation for future empirical research, and promote the development of social commerce and consumer behavior research.

5.2. Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide rich practical implications for enterprises, social media platforms and consumers. For enterprises, the results emphasize the importance of improving information quality in social media marketing. Enterprises should strive to create high-quality, authentic and credible product information to enhance consumer cognition and trust. At the same time, it is crucial to actively cultivate and manage social relationships with consumers, especially to pay attention to the role of opinion leaders and key users, and spread product information through them to achieve better marketing results. It is worth noting that enterprises should formulate differentiated social media marketing strategies according to different product types. For example, for experience products, more use can be made of user-generated content and video displays; while for search products, the focus can be on providing detailed product specifications and comparative information.

Social media platforms can gain insights from this study on optimizing information flow and improving information quality. Platforms should develop smarter algorithms to help users obtain high-quality, relevant product information while avoiding information overload. Establishing a more effective credit evaluation system is also key to improving the credibility of information sources. In addition, developing diverse interactive functions can meet the needs of different users in various social situations, thereby promoting more effective information sharing and consumption decisions. For consumers, this study reminds them of the importance of maintaining rational and critical thinking when making consumption decisions in the social media environment. Consumers should learn to discern the quality of information and the credibility of the source, and not blindly follow the opinions of others. At the same time, being aware of the impact of their own characteristics (such as product involvement and risk preference) on information processing can help make decisions that are more in line with personal needs. Policymakers can learn from this study The need to regulate the dissemination of commercial information on social media. Formulating relevant policies to encourage true and transparent information sharing while combating false advertising and misleading marketing practices is crucial to protecting consumer rights and maintaining a healthy social commerce ecosystem.

Overall, the practical implications of this study provide valuable strategic guidance for all parties involved in the social commerce environment, which will help promote the healthy development of social media marketing and improve consumer welfare. By deeply understanding and applying these implications, all parties can make more informed decisions and create greater value in the rapidly changing digital marketing environment.

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