

Research on the Paradigm Innovation of Consumer Decision-Making Processes by Social Media

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Abstract: The introduction expounds the extensive penetration of social media in the current business environment and highlights the necessity of studying its impact on the consumer decision-making process. This study focuses on the paradigm innovation of social media on the consumer decision-making process. Based on consumer decision-making theories, it systematically analyzes the mechanism of social media at each stage of decision-making. Through data mining and case analysis, it deeply reveals the specific impacts of social media on information acquisition, cognitive stimulation, evaluation and comparison, and other links, carefully discusses existing problems such as information quality crises and group polarization, and proposes targeted strategies from technical, mechanical, ethical and other dimensions, providing a more in-depth reference for enterprise marketing and consumer behavior research.

Keywords: Social Media; Consumer Decision-Making Process; Paradigm Innovation; Information Communication; Group Influence

Preface

With the popularization of mobile Internet technology, social media has become the core platform for daily information interaction among global users. Statista data shows that as of 2024, the global social media user base has exceeded 4.8 billion, with an average daily usage time of 2 hours and 27 minutes ^[1]. In this context, social media has not only reconstructed the path of information communication but also had a profound impact on the consumer decision-making process. In traditional consumer behavior research, the decision-making process is regarded as a linear and rational path, but the intervention of social media has broken this inherent model. Existing studies mostly focus on the strategic level of social media marketing and lack a systematic analysis of the decision-making paradigm changes it triggers. Based on consumer behavior theories, combined with the principles of information communication and group dynamics, this study deeply explores the innovation mechanism of social media on the consumer decision-making process.

1. Theoretical Basis of the Consumer Decision-making Process

1.1 Traditional Consumer Decision-making Process Model

The traditional consumer decision-making process follows the classic five-stage model of “need confirmation - information search - plan evaluation - purchase decision - post-purchase evaluation”. In this model, consumer decision-making shows obvious linear characteristics, and information sources mainly rely on corporate advertising, word-of-mouth recommendations and professional evaluations. Taking home appliance consumption before 2010 as an example, when purchasing a refrigerator, consumers usually obtained information through explanations by sales staff in offline stores, evaluations in home appliance magazines and suggestions from relatives and friends, with an average decision-making cycle of up to 14 days ^[2]. In this model, consumers are in a relatively passive information-receiving state, and enterprises have strong control over information communication by virtue of advertising placement channels and media resources. From the perspective of information economics, consumers have high information acquisition costs, and the phenomenon of information asymmetry is relatively prominent, with enterprises occupying a dominant position in the decision-making process.

1.2 Changing Trends of the Consumer Decision-making Process in the Digital Age

The development of digital technology has made the consumer decision-making process show non-linear characteristics. According to Google’s research on the consumption behavior of Generation Z, 43% of young consumers will experience more than 7 information interaction cycles in the decision-making process, and the decision-making path has significant jumpiness ^[3]. The real-time and interactive nature of

social media has prompted consumers to change from passive receivers to active participants. Taking the decision-making of beauty products on the Little Red Book platform as an example, users often form a personalized information cognitive system through multi-dimensional interactions such as searching keywords, browsing talent notes and participating in topic discussions. In this process, consumers are no longer limited to a linear decision-making process, but jump repeatedly in different stages and continuously adjust their decision-making direction according to newly acquired information. This dynamic interaction process has transformed the decision-making chain from a linear structure to a network structure, reflecting the trend of increased complexity and autonomy of consumer decision-making in the digital age, and also putting forward new challenges to the traditional marketing model of enterprises.

2. Specific Impacts of Social Media on the Consumer Decision-making Process

2.1 Information Acquisition Stage: Expansion and Change

Social media has built a multi-source heterogeneous information network, which has greatly enriched the information acquisition channels of consumers. iResearch data shows that in travel consumption decision-making, 68% of users will refer to user-generated content (UGC) on social media [4]. The short videos of “immersive travel guides” on the Douyin platform, through scene-based presentation and the personal experience of creators, increase the information transmission efficiency by 40% compared with traditional text and pictures. This benefits from the fact that short videos can mobilize multiple senses such as vision and hearing, which can more vividly restore the travel scene and make consumers feel as if they are on the scene. At the same time, the algorithm recommendation mechanism realizes the precise delivery of information. Taking Taobao’s “Guangguang” as an example, the click-through rate of personalized recommended content is 2.3 times that of general recommendations. The algorithm builds user portraits by analyzing users’ historical browsing records, search keywords, stay duration and other multi-dimensional data, so as to push content that matches their interests and preferences to consumers, significantly reducing consumers’ information search costs. However, it is worth noting that algorithm recommendation may also lead to the information cocoon effect, making consumers fall into a single information dimension and limiting their ability to obtain diversified information.

Table 1: Comparison of Information Acquisition Methods between Traditional and Social Media Models

Information Acquisition Method	Proportion in Traditional Model	Proportion in Social Media Model
Corporate Advertising	65%	32%
Word-of-Mouth Recommendation	20%	45%
Professional Evaluation	10%	15%
User-Generated Content (UGC)	5%	68%

2.2 Cognition and Interest Stimulation Stage: Content-driven

The content ecology of social media stimulates consumers’ interest through emotional resonance and value identification. Knowledge-based UP hosts on Bilibili transform complex product technologies into easy-to-understand content through professional analysis and interesting expression, increasing the planting conversion rate of 3C products to 18%. This content-driven model breaks through the one-way infusion of traditional advertising and uses story-based narration and scene-based display to influence consumer cognition imperceptibly. For example, Xiaomi launched the “Product Co-creation Plan” on the Weibo platform, inviting users to participate in product design discussions, and fully absorbing user opinions from the selection of appearance colors to the design of functional modules. This measure not only increased the user attention during the new product preheating period (reaching 300%), but more importantly, made users have a sense of participation and belonging, transforming consumers from mere product buyers into brand co-builders. From a psychological point of view, this sense of participation satisfies consumers’ self-actualization needs, thereby enhancing their sense of identity and loyalty to the brand.

Table 2: Conversion Rates of Different Content Types in Traditional Advertising and Social Media

Content Type	Conversion Rate of Traditional Advertising	Conversion Rate of Social Media Content
Product Feature Introduction	8%	12%
Storytelling Narrative	5%	18%
Scenario-based Display	7%	16%
User-Co-created Content	3%	22%

2.3 Evaluation and Comparison Stage: Socialized Reference

Consumers' evaluation behavior on social media shows significant social attributes. JD.com's user comment analysis shows that the influence weight of post-purchase comments containing pictures and videos on other users' purchase decisions is 62% higher than that of pure text comments. Visual post-purchase content can more intuitively display product details, use effects and other information, providing more real and reliable references for other consumers. The social proof theory is manifested as a "group influence matrix" at this stage. Consumers build a personalized evaluation reference system through multi-dimensional social relationships such as follow lists, topic tags and friend dynamics. Taking the community evaluation function of the DeWu APP as an example, KOC (Key Opinion Consumers) help users complete multi-dimensional comparisons in the purchase of sneakers by virtue of their professional interpretation of sneakers and sharing of real experiences. These KOCs are often in the same consumption circle as ordinary consumers, and their recommendations are more likely to be trusted^[5].

Table 3: Influence Weights of Different Review Forms on Purchase Decisions

Review Form	Influence Weight on Purchase Decision
Text-only Review	100%
Review with Images	162%
Review with Videos	175%
Professional Evaluation by KOC	190%

2.4 Purchase Decision Stage: Convenience and Impulse

The shopping function of social media shortens the conversion path from decision-making to purchase. The "one-click order" function of WeChat mini-programs increases the proportion of impulsive consumption by 27%. This convenient shopping experience reduces consumers' operation steps and decision-making hesitation in the payment link and reduces the purchase resistance^[6]. The live e-commerce model forms an "instant decision-making scene" through real-time interaction and limited-time promotion. Taobao live broadcast data shows that the average conversion rate of top anchors reaches 12%, far higher than 3% of traditional e-commerce. In the live broadcast process, anchors create a tense and exciting shopping atmosphere through professional explanations, on-site demonstrations, preferential activities, etc., and use consumers' herd mentality and loss aversion mentality to accelerate the occurrence of purchase behavior. For example, a beauty anchor launched a limited-time preferential set in the live broadcast, emphasizing that the inventory is limited and the purchase is time-limited, prompting consumers to make a purchase decision in a short time.

2.5 Post-purchase Behavior Stage: Word-of-mouth Communication and Brand Interaction

Social media has become the main platform for consumers' post-purchase feedback. Data from Tmall's brand flagship stores shows that the repurchase rate of users who have participated in product evaluation interaction is 45% higher than that of users who have not participated. Consumers share shopping experiences and usage experiences on social media, which not only provides references for other potential consumers but also provides channels for brands to collect user feedback. Brands transform consumers from mere buyers into brand co-builders by establishing private domain communities and launching topic challenges. For example, Starbucks' "Selected Coffee Community" forms a continuous brand communication closed loop through users sharing coffee making experiences, creative beverage formulas and other content, increasing member activity by 60%. In this process, the relationship between the brand and consumers has changed from one-way transaction to two-way interaction, and consumers' word-of-mouth communication has become an important force for brand promotion.

3. Problems in the Process of Social Media Influencing Consumer Decision-making

3.1 Information Quality and Authenticity Crisis

The low-threshold content production of social media leads to information overload and uneven quality. Third-party monitoring data shows that about 35% of the content in beauty planting notes has the problem of exaggerating efficacy. False information is amplified by the algorithm recommendation effect, which is easy to mislead consumers' decisions. For example, a weight-loss product recommended by a certain online celebrity was detected by a professional institution to have 70% invalid ingredients, but it has obtained millions of transmissions on social media, harming consumers' interests^[7]. On the one hand, this phenomenon is due to some creators deliberately exaggerating product

effects in pursuit of traffic and commercial interests; on the other hand, the content review mechanism of social media platforms has lag and limitations, and it is difficult to carry out comprehensive and accurate reviews of massive content.

3.2 Group Polarization and Cognitive Bias

The homogeneity of social circles intensifies the phenomenon of group polarization. Facebook's user behavior research shows that the tendency of users in closed communities to have extreme views is 41% higher than that in open environments. Consumers receive homogeneous content in the information cocoon, resulting in a single decision-making reference dimension. Taking the fan community of a new energy vehicle brand as an example, the spread speed of members' negative comments on competing products is 2.8 times that of positive comments, affecting the objective judgment of potential consumers. In a closed community, similar views are continuously strengthened, different opinions are excluded, and the cognition of group members gradually tends to be extreme. This group polarization phenomenon not only affects consumers' rational decision-making but also may trigger online public opinion conflicts, causing negative impacts on brand images and market competition order.

3.3 Privacy Leakage and Data Abuse Risks

The collection and analysis of user data by social media have ethical dilemmas. The EU GDPR compliance report shows that consumer complaint cases caused by data breaches increased by 53% year-on-year in 2023^[8]. Enterprises collecting excessive user behavior data may violate consumers' privacy. For example, a social e-commerce platform used users' browsing records for precise marketing without authorization, triggering a class action lawsuit and damaging the enterprise's reputation. In the digital economy era, user data has become an important asset of enterprises, but some enterprises violate the principle of data minimality and necessity and collect excessive user data in pursuit of commercial interests. At the same time, security vulnerabilities in the process of data storage and transmission also increase the risk of data leakage.

4. Strategies to Address the Problems in the Process of Social Media Influencing Consumer Decision-making

4.1 Constructing a Multi-dimensional Information Verification Mechanism

Enterprises and platforms should establish an information quality review system and introduce third-party professional institutions for content certification. The "professional account certification" mechanism launched by Little Red Book, through the endorsement of experts in medicine, beauty and other fields, increases the credibility of certified content by 58%. At the same time, users are encouraged to participate in content supervision. The "content reporting - rapid review" process of Douyin shortens the processing time of illegal content to within 2 hours, effectively purifying the information environment. On this basis, artificial intelligence technologies such as natural language processing and image recognition can be further used to carry out automatic review of content, improving review efficiency and accuracy. In addition, an information traceability mechanism is established to track the transmission path of false information, clarify the responsible subjects, and increase the punishment for illegal acts. A user evaluation system for content quality can also be constructed through user ratings, tags, etc., to provide references for other consumers and form a virtuous cycle of information quality.

4.2 Optimizing the Transparency Design of Algorithm Recommendation

The algorithm recommendation system needs to add an explainable module. Netflix's "recommendation reason visualization" function increases members' acceptance of recommended content by 32%. Enterprises should provide users with control over personalized recommendations, such as Weibo's "interest tag management" function, which allows users to independently adjust information push preferences and reduce the information cocoon effect. At the same time, an algorithm ethics review committee is established to regularly evaluate the impact of recommendation strategies on consumer decision-making. In the process of algorithm design, the principles of fairness, justice and transparency should be followed to avoid algorithm bias. For example, in the news recommendation algorithm, ensure that news from different viewpoints and sources are displayed equally. In addition, algorithm interpretation tools can be developed to explain the basis and algorithm logic of recommended content to users, enhance users' trust in algorithm recommendation, and reduce the negative impact of information cocoon on consumer decision-making.

4.3 Strengthening Data Security and Privacy Protection

Enterprises need to collect user data in accordance with the principle of minimality and necessity. Apple's App privacy label function compels developers to disclose data usage, increasing consumers' clarity of data authorization by 75%. The government should improve data security legislation and clarify the boundaries of enterprise data processing. For example, the implementation of China's "Personal Information Protection Law" has reduced the incidence of data leakage incidents by 29% year-on-year, enhancing consumers' trust in the digital consumption environment. Enterprises should take strict security protection measures such as encryption technology and access control in the links of data collection, storage and use to prevent data leakage. At the same time, a data compliance management system is established to conduct regular compliance reviews of data processing activities to ensure compliance with laws and regulations. In addition, strengthen consumer data protection education, improve consumers' privacy protection awareness, enable them to better safeguard their own rights and interests, and promote the healthy development of the digital consumption environment.

5. Conclusion

Social media has systematically innovated the consumer decision-making process by reconstructing the information communication model and social interaction mechanism. It has shown significant advantages in expanding information channels, stimulating consumption interest and accelerating decision-making transformation, but it has also brought new challenges such as information quality, cognitive bias and privacy security. Enterprises need to start from three aspects of technological optimization, mechanism innovation and ethical norms to build a benign social media marketing ecology. By constructing a multi-dimensional information verification mechanism, optimizing the transparency of algorithm recommendation, and strengthening data security and privacy protection, the scientificity and security of consumer decision-making are improved. Future research can combine neuroscience and behavioral economics to further explore the neural mechanism of social media's impact on consumer decision-making, provide more scientific theoretical support for precise marketing and consumer protection, and promote the sustainable development of social media in the consumption field.

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