

Comparing Key Drivers of Consumer Purchase Choices: An Empirical Analysis of Rednote and Douyin

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Abstract. With the rapid advancement of various communication tools today, different types of social media have also emerged, and consumers' decision-making paths have undergone a dramatic transformation. This paper aims to highlight how contemporary social media influences consumer purchasing decisions through multiple factors—cognitive, emotional, behavioral, brand-related, and social—by comparing the pathways through which Rednote and Douyin impact consumer purchasing decisions. Thus, it can be concluded that the interaction of multiple factors determines whether consumers will purchase a product. Finally, this article concludes by offering marketing recommendations to relevant enterprises, promoting their healthy development and enabling them to implement effective brand marketing strategies. Methodologically, the study adopts a comparative mixed-methods design, integrating behavioral platform analytics with a user survey to map the conversion funnel and test mediation by cognition, emotion, and social interaction. The analysis clarifies platform-specific strengths—discovery on Rednote versus impulsive conversion on Douyin—and identifies actionable levers for segmentation and creative optimization.

Keywords: Social media, consumer purchase choice, Rednote.

1. Introduction

In the digital age, various types of social media platforms have emerged one after another, which become an important medium for information dissemination and social interaction. These media platforms not only provide users with a space for free expression of views, serving as key channels and important venues for information transition and social interaction, but have also become a new bridge for communication between businesses and consumers. As a result, the consumer decision-making process has undergone significant changes. From live-streamed sales across various video platforms to all kinds of soft advertising, consumers are influenced by them unconsciously.

Douyin, as one of China's mainstream social media platforms, has a significant impact on users' purchasing behavior. It brings consumers a completely new shopping experience and profoundly influences their decision-making process. For example, Douyin's live-streamed flash sales use short videos to showcase products and directly drive users to make purchases. Similarly, a phenomenon called “grass-planting” on Rednote reflects how users spark others' desire to purchase by sharing and recommending products. However, while both platforms influence consumer decision-making, they do so in different ways.

By delving into the factors that shape consumer decisions and conducting a thorough examination of their underlying impact mechanisms, this paper aims to yield deeper insights into the decision-making process. The findings of this study will be of great practical value for refining self-media marketing approaches and enhancing the quality of user experience.

Purpose of the Research

This paper will focus on examining the main factors influencing consumer decision-making on social media how social media platforms influence consumer purchase emotion and behavioral processes. Meanwhile, we will also analyze the differences between the Rednote and Douyin throughout this series of processes.

This research also contributes to safeguarding consumer interests and enhancing their overall experience. By clarifying the key factors that influence consumer decisions (for example, the credibility of promotional content, the transparency of product information), it provides a basis for

guiding platforms and marketers to focus on content quality and information authenticity—reducing misleading promotions or false advertising that may disrupt consumer decision-making. In turn, this helps consumers make more rational purchase choices aligned with their needs, fostering a healthier and more sustainable social commerce ecosystem.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

2.1. Consumer Purchase Decision Model

The consumer purchasing decision model is the AIDMA model, which was proposed by American advertising scholar E.S. Lewis describes the five stages the consumers go through from encountering a product to choosing to purchase it: Attention, Interest, Desire, Memory, and believe that consumer behavior consists of five distinct stages: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase theory was the first systematic description of the linear decision path, providing a theoretical foundation for advertising and marketing in the early era of mass media.

Information processing theory have already proved valuable in the study of discrimination and of language; they promise a great deal in the study of learning and memory; and it has even been proposed that they can be useful in the study of concept formation. George A. Miller pointed out in his research that there is a clear and definite limit to the accuracy with which we can identify absolutely the magnitude of a unidimensional stimulus variable. This demonstrates that humans can process the information they receive, rather than merely reacting to stimuli [1].

2.2. Factors Influencing Consumer Behavior

First, individual consumer characteristics—such as age, gender, educational background, and purchasing power—play a crucial role in shaping their willingness to purchase products. Second, social influence also affects user behavior, with opinion leaders, including well-known public figures, and phenomena like the bandwagon effect exerting significant impact. Moreover, the brand's reputation and perceived value strongly influence consumers' purchasing attitudes. Finally, emotional responses generated by users themselves further guide their purchasing intentions.

At this point, it is useful to introduce the theory of mental accounting. First proposed by Richard Thaler, a scholar of behavioral finance and economics at the University of Chicago, the theory helps explain why individuals are subject to the “sunk cost effect” when making consumption decisions. It shows that people tend to evaluate their choices by combining past investments with current expenditures as part of the total cost [2]. This psychological process—categorizing money into separate accounts for budgeting and allocation—is what Thaler referred to as “mental accounting.”

2.3. Social Media and Consumer Behavior

In recent years, content marketing has rapidly gained marketing evolved from the “content is king” concept proposed by Microsoft founder Bill Gates [3]. However, content marketing theory has gradually evolved into a tool, which can be defined as the creation, distribution, and sharing of essential relevant, and entertaining content with customers at the stage of their purchasing consideration, in order to motivate them to convert the process into a profit outcome. It can also be described as a digital marketing tactic that fosters user generated the process of content marketing, user-generated entertainment content—such as text, images, and videos—is referred to as UGC. It also plays a significant role in brand marketing.

Faced with the information overload brought about by modern technological advancements, marketers have also found a solution: algorithmic systems proactively recommend items that align with users' interests and needs by analyzing user characteristics, item attributes, historical user behavior, and other supplementary information [4]. This constitutes an active service provision not only recommends items like users' preferences based on their existing tastes, but also helps users

discover new content they might enjoy even without known preferences—making it an effective solution to information overload.

Finally, the rise of virtual communities and social identity can also help explain various consumer behaviors. Tajfel and Turner proposed in 1979 that social identity refers to “the self-image an individual derives from the group to which he perceives himself as belonging, along with the emotional and value experiences associated with membership in that group” [5]. Individuals can achieve self-fulfillment through social recognition, and virtual communities, as emerging small social groups, are also an aspect that cannot be ignored.

3. Case Platform Introduction: the Rednote and Douyin

3.1. Rednote

The Rednote, an e-commerce platform founded in 2013, primarily features text and images while also incorporating short videos. Users can document their lifestyles, share life moments, and receive product recommendations. Its primary user base consists of women who recommend products and assess their quality through the process of “recommending” to “abandoning “the items [6]. Consumers' trust in products stems from authentic recommendations by relevant bloggers and the bloggers' personal endorsement—that is, their own credibility and willingness to vouch for the product—which ultimately determines whether they will purchase the recommended items.

3.2. Douyin

Launched in 2016, Douyin is a music-based creative short-video social platform featuring a powerful algorithmic recommendation system. It recommends similar short videos and products based on users' preferences and their browsing history, emphasizing an immersive short video experience [7]. Compared to the Rednote, Douyin boasts a more diverse user base and features faster-paced short video content, typically allowing users to finish watching a video within a minute. Meanwhile, the rise of flash sales in Douyin live-streaming commerce has made impulse purchases more commonplace on the platform.

3.3. Comparison of Platform Differences and Similarities

From the above explanation, we can see that the two platforms differ in their content presentation formats. Although both platforms feature short video content, the Rednote primarily focuses on text and images, while Douyin emphasizes the immersive experience of short videos. At the same time, the target user groups and purchasing channels also differ. The Rednote uses a combination of images and text, along with store exploration videos, to inspire users to “plant the seed” or “pull the weed”—helping them decide whether to purchase a product. However, Douyin employs fast-paced marketing tactics like live flash sales to attract users to make purchases, stimulating consumer buying through various emotional triggers.

4. Analysis of Key Factors Influencing Consumer Purchase Decisions

4.1. Cognitive Factors: Information Acquisition and Trust Building

In terms of information acquisition, The Rednote and Douyin exhibit significant differences. On the Rednote, while content recommendations are tailored to user preferences, most users actively search for product notes they need. By evaluating product quality based on reviews from users who have tried the product, you can compare offerings from different sellers and ultimately choose the product that best suits your needs. Building on this approach to information acquisition, the Rednote typically employs highly interactive images and headlines to capture users' attention. It then provides detailed and comprehensive product descriptions to establish consumer trust.

However, on Douyin, a platform with a powerful algorithm-driven recommendation system, consumers are largely passive recipients of the product information conveyed by the app. Moreover, as users' work and life circumstances evolve, their interests and hobbies will also undergo constant change, leading to a continuous decline in the accuracy of recommendations. This may lead users into an “information bubble,” making consumers increasingly reliant on the first impressions from videos they encounter and recommendations from related content creators. To gain users’ trust, Douyin employs flash sales via live streaming. Through short, fast-paced livestreams featuring product launches and limited-time offers, it captures user attention and sparks their desire to purchase. Meanwhile, through live streamers' explanations, Douyin continuously builds up the product's credibility, thereby increasing consumers' trust in the product.

4.2. Emotional Factors: Resonance, Identification, and Emotional Marketing

The theory of emotional marketing in consumer psychology posits that consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by emotional responses rather than solely based on rational analysis [6]. Positive emotional experiences can increase consumers' willingness to purchase and make them more inclined toward brands or products that evoke positive emotions during their buying decisions.

Therefore, emotional factors also play a significant role in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. For example, the Rednote places greater emphasis on the connection between lifestyle and emotion, weaving products into the fabric of everyday life to create an authentic and warm atmosphere for consumers. It makes consumers feel the warmth of life, thereby creating an emotional connection to the described object or product and sparking their desire to purchase.

As a short-video platform, Douyin primarily generates buzz or laughs by sharing amusing anecdotes or emotionally charged clips that are entertaining and distinctive within short videos or live streams. This can stimulate positive emotions in users, boost engagement, and thereby capture their attention quickly. It prompts immediate responses, effectively promoting the product.

4.3. Behavioral Factors: Participation Behavior and Decision Pathways

Consumer actions such as liking, saving, and commenting on platforms like the Rednote and Douyin not only signal their purchasing intent to other potential consumers but also influence others' buying decisions by sharing their experiences. When users post positive reviews and share their experiences, it not only reflects their personal satisfaction but also provides potential consumers with relatively reliable reference information. Positive word-of-mouth reduces perceived risk among potential consumers, thereby boosting product sales.

Meanwhile, the widespread practice of “zhongcao” (which means someone is recommended to purchase a product) and “bacao”(which means deciding not to purchase a product due to others' negative user experiences) on the Rednote also influences users' decision-making. Through the process of browsing notes, discovering products, making purchases, and sharing experiences, consumers gain access to more authentic insights into product consumption and usage. Through this positive cycle, we attract more users to post notes, providing powerful assistance for their purchasing decisions.

It is evident that user-generated content such as notes and videos on Rednote and Douyin, along with consumer reviews and likes, significantly influence the purchasing decisions of other potential consumers. Positive feedback on a product stimulates consumer purchases, while negative reviews make consumers more hesitant about the product [7].

4.4. Brand and Blogger Influence

In real life, we can often see brands enlisting famous celebrities, athletes, or prominent figures and experts from various fields to endorse their brands, thereby attracting consumers to purchase their products. This is called a KOL, or Key Opinion Leader. Key Opinion Leaders are typically defined as individuals who possess more extensive and accurate product information, are accepted or trusted by relevant groups, and exert significant influence over the purchasing decisions of those groups [8].

The influence and authority of KOLs effectively drive consumers' desire to purchase. For example, former top KOL Jiaqi Li once recommended Perfect Diary's "Slim Heel Lipstick" on the Rednote, propelling the product to rapid mainstream popularity [8]. Meanwhile, Rednote's algorithm-based recommendations precisely deliver relevant content tailored to users' interests. This can attract more potential consumers to purchase the product, maximizing the influence of the KOLs.

However, influencer content may also pose a series of issues. For instance, the incident where Jiaqi Li's reputation collapsed after mocking consumers, or the tax evasion scandal involving former prominent KOL Viya. This will cause consumer trust to rapidly collapse, leading to a sharp decline in brand credibility and influence. At the same time, repetitive influencer content may lead to ad fatigue among consumers. For example, on Douyin, videos from multiple creators are recommended based on user interests, but without exception, each one features the exact same Guaizi Used Cars advertisement. Such repeated references will undoubtedly cause user fatigue.

4.5. Social Factors and Conformity

Often, family members, relatives, or close friends around us will recommend products they think are good. We are influenced by them and may also purchase the products they recommend and try them out. If we find it suitable, we may become repeat customers. At the same time, just as children compare the quality and advantages of products with their peers, we often unconsciously compare ourselves with others or those around us. This is peer influence and social comparison.

Most of the behaviors stem from the urge to conform and the desire for social acceptance [9]. Conformity refers to the tendency of humans to mimic the behavior of the majority under group pressure or influence. This enables people to quickly integrate into social groups and gain a sense of social belonging. Meanwhile, individual imitative behavior also ensures that the direction of societal progress remains consistent, guaranteeing orderly and efficient social functioning. In the process of social identification, individuals categorize themselves and others with similar traits into a group [10]. Moreover, in order to maintain and enhance their self-esteem, they will strive to outperform other external groups.

This herd mentality and social identification subtly influence consumers. Whether through recommendations from friends and family or comparisons with others, these examples around us—intentionally or unintentionally—make us potential users of certain products. At some point, the desire to purchase the recommended product suddenly arises.

5. Conclusion

As can be seen from the above, Douyin and the Rednote exhibit distinct pathways and mechanisms in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. The Rednote provides consumers with avenues to discover and purchase products through its image-and-text notes, enabling them to efficiently understand product features and pros and cons. This subtly deepens consumers' impressions of the products. Douyin, however, more commonly employs live flash sales to capture user attention or leverages algorithmic recommendations to predict users' interests in information and products. This approach attracts users' immediate attention, thereby stimulating purchases of promoted items.

Through analyzing the factors influencing consumers, we can see that consumers' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral factors collectively form the foundation of their purchasing decisions. The interplay of multiple factors determines whether consumers will purchase a product. Social media platforms like the Rednote and Douyin employ various promotional tactics to influence these dimensions, stimulating potential consumers to purchase products and thereby maximizing product promotion and profits.

For enterprises to achieve targeted marketing of their products, it is essential to understand the content ecosystems and user psychology of different platforms. First, businesses should develop a deep understanding of the core needs of users across various platforms, paying attention to consumers' emotions and purchasing motivations, and engaging with them in familiar language. Second,

companies need to master the content formats and community cultures of each platform, tailoring their content to align with the platform's unique ecosystem. Finally, enterprises should deliver content precisely according to consumer interests and platform rules, while continuously refining their approach through the real-time collection and analysis of user feedback.

In short, only by implementing precision marketing to meet user needs and continuously refining brand strategies based on user reviews and feedback can we enhance user satisfaction, boost brand affinity, and improve marketing conversion efficiency.

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