






“Navigating influence: Unraveling the impact of micro-influencer attributes on consumer choices in the Chinese social media”

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NAVIGATING INFLUENCE: UNRAVELING THE IMPACT OF MICRO-INFLUENCER ATTRIBUTES ON CONSUMER CHOICES IN THE CHINESE SOCIAL MEDIA

Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between consumer purchasing behavior and key micro-influencer attributes, including knowledge, entertainment value, credibility, and transparency, within the context of Chinese social media platforms. The paper adopts a quantitative approach, employing partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the intricate relationships among latent variables. The respondents comprise active users of major Chinese social media platforms, such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu. For primary data collection, 329 respondents were surveyed online, utilizing a convenient sampling method as part of non-probability sampling. Data collection spanned four weeks, and participants were given the option to respond in either English or Mandarin. The findings suggest significant associations between consumer purchasing behavior and micro-influencer attributes. Specifically, knowledge, entertainment value, credibility, and transparency exhibit varying degrees of influence on consumer behavior within the Chinese social media landscape. The *p*-value for H1, H2, H3, and H7 appeared as 0.000 and shows that these are the highly significant relations, whereas the *p*-value for H3 (0.019), for H5 (0.001), and for H6 (0.028) shows that these relations play a moderate role in the proposed model. Elucidating the role of key attributes provides valuable insights for marketers and businesses seeking to leverage micro-influencer marketing strategies effectively in this rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Keywords

micro-influencers, purchase decisions, social media, advertising, credibility, Chinese consumer behavior, digital influence, trustworthiness

JEL Classification

M31, M37

INTRODUCTION

Micro-influencer credibility is a vital element in contemporary social media marketing, defined as the perceived trustworthiness and authenticity of individuals who wield influence on digital platforms (Sheng et al., 2023). Micro-influencer credibility plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer buying behavior in the dynamic Chinese social media market. Micro-influencers have gained prominence in the Chinese market, resonating with social media users due to their ability to offer authentic and relatable content, thus transforming the landscape of influencer marketing (Njathi, 2023; Sheng et al., 2023).

Unlike conventional influencer marketing, centered around celebrity endorsements, the emergence of micro-influencers has introduced a significant shift in marketing dynamics (Gerlich, 2022). These micro-influencers, often possessing niche expertise and passion, are perceived as more authentic and relatable by their audiences (Kay et al., 2020). Their smaller yet highly engaged follower base allows for per-

sonalized interactions, fostering trust and community (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). This shift aligns with the preferences of Chinese consumers, who increasingly seek individualized and trustworthy recommendations (Guan & Li, 2021). Consequently, micro-influencer credibility emerges as a vital factor in influencing consumer perceptions and actions, rendering it indispensable for organizations seeking to effectively utilize influencer marketing in the Chinese social media market (Roshandel et al., 2023).

Additionally, micro-influencers' expertise and their ability to capture their audience's attention through entertaining content is necessary (Shen, 2021). In the Chinese market, social media users are drawn to micro-influencers who exhibit extensive knowledge and proficiency in their respective fields (Zhang & Zhao, 2020). This expertise not only establishes micro-influencers as credible information sources but also instills confidence and trust in their followers (Roshandel et al., 2023). The inclusion of entertainment value in their content is equally vital, as it not only attracts but also retains audience attention, fostering devoted and receptive communities (Whitehead & Greenier, 2019). Transparency, another key aspect, has emerged as a fundamental component of influencer marketing, reshaping consumer perceptions and trust (Gerlich, 2023). As Chinese social media users prioritize honesty and authenticity, micro-influencers who openly disclose sponsored content and collaborations are considered more trustworthy and dependable (Pornsrimate & Khamwon, 2021). This transparency not only promotes authenticity but also strengthens the bond between micro-influencers and their followers (Jordas, 2023).

In the context of the Chinese social media market, this study intends to analyze the complicated links between micro-influencer legitimacy, knowledge, entertainment value, transparency, and consumer purchasing behavior. This study intends to provide significant insights for companies and marketers trying to harness the potential of micro-influencer marketing by employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) and gathering data from 329 respondents. The results of this study will help marketers develop more effective and focused influencer marketing strategies so they can establish real connections with their audience in the dynamic Chinese social media market.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In modern digital marketing, the influence wielded by micro-influencers has emerged as a driving force behind consumer behavior. These individuals, known for their niche expertise and relatable content, hold a unique position in the Chinese social media market. As businesses strive to connect with their target audiences, it becomes imperative to explore the intricacies of micro-influencer dynamics, particularly concerning their credibility, expertise, entertainment value, and trustworthiness.

1.1. Consumer buying behavior

Understanding consumer purchasing behavior has become the holy grail for brands and enterprises in today's ever-changing marketing world (El-Deeb, 2022). This element dives into the fascinating domain of how consumers make purchasing decisions for goods and services. For the Chinese social media market, micro-influencers tremendously affect consumer choices (Dou et al., 2023).

Micro-influencers have made a name for themselves by developing true connections with their audience, which they frequently accomplish through relatability and genuine interactions (Appel et al., 2020). Chinese social media users are more likely to trust recommendations from micro-influencers than traditional celebrity influencers (Crnjak-Karanović et al., 2023; Ha & Yang, 2023). This trust is founded on perceived legitimacy and a sense of community among these smaller-scale influencers (Triastuti, 2019).

Sun et al. (2022) illuminate the positive impact of micro-influencers on consumer trust and engagement, contributing to increased purchasing intention. Similarly, Gulfraz et al. (2022) found a positive correlation between micro-influencer credibility and consumer purchasing decisions, emphasizing the significance of influencer attributes. However, nuanced insights also emerge from the literature. S. Yang et al. (2022) shed light on potential drawbacks, highlighting the susceptibility of consumers to misinformation due to influencer

endorsements. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2023) revealed that overly-commercialized content from micro-influencers can lead to skepticism among consumers. By synthesizing these diverse findings, this study navigates the nuanced landscape of micro-influencer influence in the Chinese social media market. The literature underscores both the positive and potentially negative dimensions of micro-influencer impact, creating a comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior dynamics.

Scholars and marketers investigated numerous elements that influence the purchasing decisions of social media users to better understand consumer buying behavior in micro-influencer marketing (Hsieh, 2023; Myers et al., 2023). The authenticity of micro-influencers, the resonance between their work and their followers' ideals, and their level of involvement and interaction with their dedicated fan base are essential (Pozharliev et al., 2022). Marketers can better target Chinese social media users with influencer marketing campaigns using these data (Zhou et al., 2021).

1.2. Micro-influencer trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a wonderful elixir that elevates ordinary micro-influencers to trusted voices in their respective fields (Connell, 2023). The legitimacy of micro-influencers is a critical link in the chain of successful influencer marketing efforts (Jordas, 2023; Pornsrimate & Khamwon, 2021). This enticing trait is based on being viewed as a beacon of honesty, dependability, and mastery in a specific sector (Pornsrimate & Khamwon, 2021). Micro-influencers earn respect in the enthralling domain of the Chinese social media industry due to their unshakable sincerity (Liu et al., 2021). The magic happens when a micro-influencer is perceived as someone who actually knows his subject and maintains a meaningful connection with the audience (Hurd, 2019). This idea of credibility is critical since it has a significant impact on consumer attitudes and behaviors (Tsang et al., 2004).

The literature examining trustworthiness and credibility in influencer marketing spans various markets and platforms, shedding light on the intricacies of consumer perceptions. Cartwright et al. (2022) highlighted how influencers' consistent

and authentic content fosters trust among followers, transcending market boundaries. Similarly, Gerlich (2022) explored the role of credibility in influencer endorsements across diverse platforms, emphasizing the significance of influencer expertise. Moreover, Isyanto et al. (2020) underscored the cross-market impact of influencer credibility on consumer engagement, highlighting the resonance of these factors in global contexts. When customers regard a micro-influencer as genuine, they are more inclined to accept their product suggestions and actively engage with branded material (Kay et al., 2020; Pradhan et al., 2023). But what creates this atmosphere of trustworthiness? It is an enticing combination of transparency in sponsored material, a continuous presence in connecting with followers, and a track record of giving dependable and accurate information (Carrete et al., 2012; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999).

1.3. Micro-influencer expertise

Expertise investigates the breadth of knowledge, ability, and experience possessed by these prominent figures (Tunpornchai et al., 2021). Their expertise shines through like a dazzling star as they influence hearts and minds on the Chinese social media stage (Feng & Wang, 2020). These micro-influencers have perfected the art of establishing expertise inside their unique niches in the enthralling realm of the Chinese social media market (Liu et al., 2021). These influencers are like sages in their own fields, whether it is beauty, gaming, fashion, or wellness. This proficiency provides them with the credibility needed to influence consumer behavior (Purcărea et al., 2022). The literature on micro-influencer expertise underscores its pivotal role in consumer engagement and purchasing decisions. Shen (2021) demonstrates that micro-influencers' domain knowledge enhances their credibility, positively affecting consumer trust and intention to purchase. Additionally, Isyanto et al. (2020) revealed that perceived expertise contributes to higher engagement rates and the authenticity of influencer endorsements.

As researchers and marketers explore this enthralling world, they want to learn how the level of micro-influencer skill affects customer choices (Swan, 2021). They investigate how the level of information carried by these micro-influencers in-

fluences the way customers perceive their recommendations and content by delving into the minds of social media users (Jacobson & Harrison, 2022). Brands can create more authentic and effective influencer marketing strategies to grab the hearts of their target audience by understanding the relationship between knowledge and consumer responses (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

1.4. Micro-influencer credibility

In the enthralling world of China's social media market, entertainment value is critical to the success of micro-influencers (Khan et al., 2023). Micro-influencers must build a compelling experience for their followers, just as a charismatic performer does for his audience (Todorov et al., 2023; Anwar et al., 2021). This mesmerizing quality entails providing information that not only teaches but also entertains people, leaving them intrigued and wanting more (Dou et al., 2023).

Researchers and marketers investigate how the entertainment value given by micro-influencers affects consumer behavior (Khan et al., 2023). The appeal of captivating material, along with moments of laughter and delight, has the potential to establish stronger ties with followers (Rungruangjit & Charoenpornpanichkul, 2022). But does this relationship result in measurable outcomes, such as improved brand loyalty or more word-of-mouth sharing?

Mabkhot et al. (2022) revealed that entertaining content from micro-influencers elicits higher engagement levels and positive emotional responses among consumers. Moreover, Saima and Khan (2021) delved into how entertainment value enhances the virality of micro-influencer campaigns, underscoring its pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions. In contrast, Shen (2021) offers insights into potential limitations, highlighting the need for a balance between entertainment and informative content. Furthermore, Connell (2023) explored the impact of excessive entertainment on consumer skepticism, emphasizing the nuanced effects of entertainment value on consumer reactions. Scholars are investigating this enthralling relationship to learn how the entertainment component of micro-influencers affects consumer responses (Isyanto et al., 2020). Brands that want to

orchestrate successful influencer marketing strategies may use these data to create content that not only informs but also captivates their followers, converting them into passionate advocates (Baker & Nenonen, 2020).

1.5. Micro-influencer entertainment value

Entertainment value is the allure of openness in the glittering world of micro-influencer marketing (Syrdal et al., 2023). Transparency shines as a guiding light that creates trust and credibility among their audience as these powerful figures take center stage (Ihlen et al., 2022). Transparency is similar to pulling back the curtain on the behind-the-scenes magic, providing followers with an intimate look into the influencer's world (Wachler, 2022). The Chinese social media market values authenticity and sincerity, and transparency is essential to developing that rapport with followers (Zheng et al., 2024). Micro-influencers that freely disclose their commercial ties and sponsored content foster a trustworthy environment, which influences how customers view their suggestions and endorsements (Lou, 2022).

The literature exploring the influence of openness on customer behavior and micro-influencer trustworthiness unveils intriguing insights. Connell (2023) discovered that micro-influencers who demonstrate openness by sharing personal experiences foster deeper connections with followers, leading to heightened trust and engagement. Similarly, Cartwright et al. (2022) delved into how transparent and open communication positively influences perceived authenticity and, subsequently, consumer purchasing decisions. Conversely, Leung et al. (2022) examined the potential drawbacks of excessive openness, noting that oversharing personal information can lead to perceptions of inauthenticity and skepticism among consumers.

Scholars and marketers are trying to figure out the impact of micro-influencer openness on customer behavior as this fascinating thread of research unravels (Kochhar, 2021). Does the revelation of sponsored content increase these influencers' perceived trustworthiness, resulting in more posi-

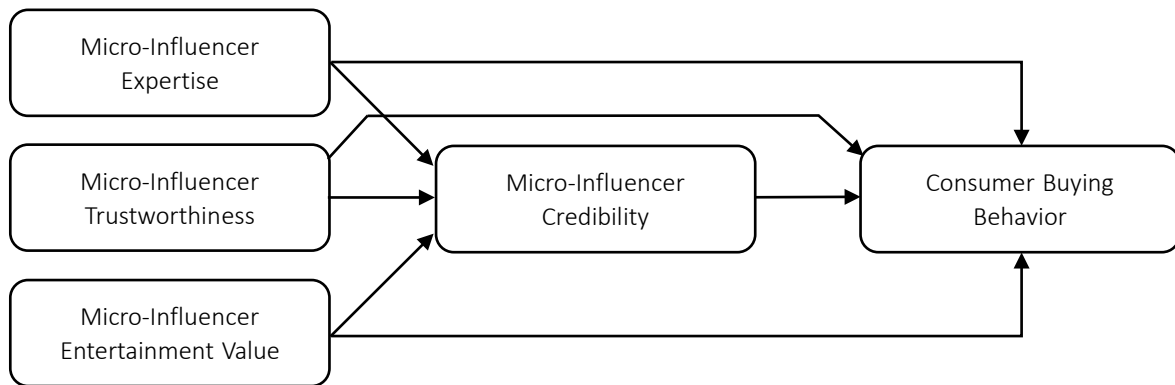


Figure 1. Conceptual model

tive consumer responses? Can transparency be a powerful motivator for people to embrace micro-influencer suggestions with open hearts and open wallets? Researchers shed light on how transparency influences the interaction between micro-influencers and their followers by unraveling these puzzles (Woodroof et al., 2020). Brands looking to capitalize on the power of influencer marketing in China’s social media market may use these insights to establish connections based on trust and authenticity, fostering long-lasting and meaningful relationships with their target audience (Sinha & Srivastava, 2023).

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of micro-influencer characteristics on consumer buying behavior within the Chinese social media market.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model, and the hypotheses are:

- H1: Micro-influencer credibility positively influences consumer buying behavior in the Chinese social media market.*
- H2: Micro-influencer expertise positively influences consumer buying behavior in the Chinese social media market.*
- H3: Micro-influencer entertainment value positively influences consumer buying behavior in the Chinese social media market.*
- H4: Micro-influencer trustworthiness positively influences consumer buying behavior in the Chinese social media market.*

H5: Micro-influencer credibility mediates the relationship between micro-influencer expertise and consumer buying behavior in the Chinese social media market.

H6: Micro-influencer credibility mediates the relationship between micro-influencer entertainment value and consumer buying behavior in the Chinese social media market.

H7: Micro-influencer credibility mediates the relationship between micro-influencer trustworthiness and consumer buying behavior in the Chinese social media market.

2. METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative approach, leveraging partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to investigate the interrelationship between consumer purchasing behavior and key micro-influencer attributes, namely knowledge, entertainment value, credibility, and transparency. PLS-SEM was chosen as the analytical technique due to its ability to explore intricate relationships among latent variables effectively. The study’s participants consist of individuals actively using prominent Chinese social media platforms, such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu. To gather primary data, a sample of 329 respondents was selected through online surveys, employing a convenient sampling method as part of non-probability sampling. Data collection spanned four weeks, and participants were given the option to respond in either English or Mandarin. Ensuring data quality and ethical considerations, all responses were

anonymized, and participants were guaranteed data confidentiality and ethical usage throughout the study.

The survey instrument was divided into several sections to gather insights (Appendix A). Participants' perceptions of the reliability of Chinese social media micro-influencers they follow were evaluated using items by Mabkhot et al. (2022). Micro-influencer competence was analyzed using five items adapted from Zaharani et al. (2021); competence assessed participants' perceptions of the expertise displayed by micro-influencers within their respective niches. The amount of entertainment and engagement offered by micro-influencers was evaluated using items inspired by Mabkhot et al. (2022), investigating the importance of entertainment in influencer material. Trustworthiness assessed how much-paid material and brand partnerships micro-influencers disclosed using the scale of Mabkhot et al. (2022). Consumer buying behavior was analyzed by using a set of items designed to capture purchasing decisions, brand perception, and interaction with influencer content by adopting the scale of Maraz et al. (2014).

Data analysis was conducted utilizing PLS-SEM and appropriate software (Guenther et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2017; Shaikh et al., 2023; Wong, 2013). PLS-SEM is particularly advantageous when dealing with limited sample sizes and intricate relationships among latent variables. It permits the simultaneous testing of both measurement and structural models, facilitating a comprehensive examination of the proposed research model. To uphold the rights and privacy of participants, this study adhered to stringent ethical requirements. Prior to participating, all respondents provided informed consent, and data were treated confidentially, with any identifiable information removed during analysis. The findings of the study will be reported in aggregate to ensure participant confidentiality.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 shows Cronbach's alpha statistics for the variables in this investigation. Cronbach's alpha, which reflects how consistent the items are

in measuring each variable, is used to assess the reliability of the measures. This study achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.803 for consumer buying behavior, indicating a good level of internal consistency among the items used to assess this variable. This shows that the items connected to consumer purchasing behavior in reaction to the content of micro-influencers are trustworthy and consistent. With a Cronbach's alpha of 0.845, micro-influencer credibility also revealed remarkable internal consistency. This finding validates the items used to assess the perceived trustworthiness of micro-influencers among the participants.

Cronbach's alpha for micro-influencer entertainment was 0.736, indicating that internal consistency was satisfactory. This implies that the items used to assess the entertainment value offered by micro-influencers are fairly dependable. Similarly, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.857, micro-influencer expertise demonstrated a high level of internal consistency. This suggests that elements relating to micro-influencers' perceived knowledge in their specific domains are trustworthy measures.

Finally, this study obtained a remarkable Cronbach's alpha of 0.909 for micro-influencer trustworthiness, indicating a very high level of internal consistency (Figure 2). This finding validates the items used to test the perceived trustworthiness of micro-influencers among the participants. Overall, Cronbach's alpha statistics highlight the reliability of the measuring tools, which improves the robustness of this study's analysis and findings.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha statistics

| Constructs | Cronbach's Alpha |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Consumer Buying Behavior | 0.803 |
| Micro-Influencer Credibility | 0.845 |
| Micro-Influencer Entertainment Value | 0.736 |
| Micro-Influencer Expertise | 0.857 |
| Micro-Influencer Trustworthiness | 0.909 |

Table 2 shows reliability statistics. These statistics show each factor's internal consistency, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE), indicating the measurement model's dependability and robustness. The composite reliability for consumer buying behavior is 0.859, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the items

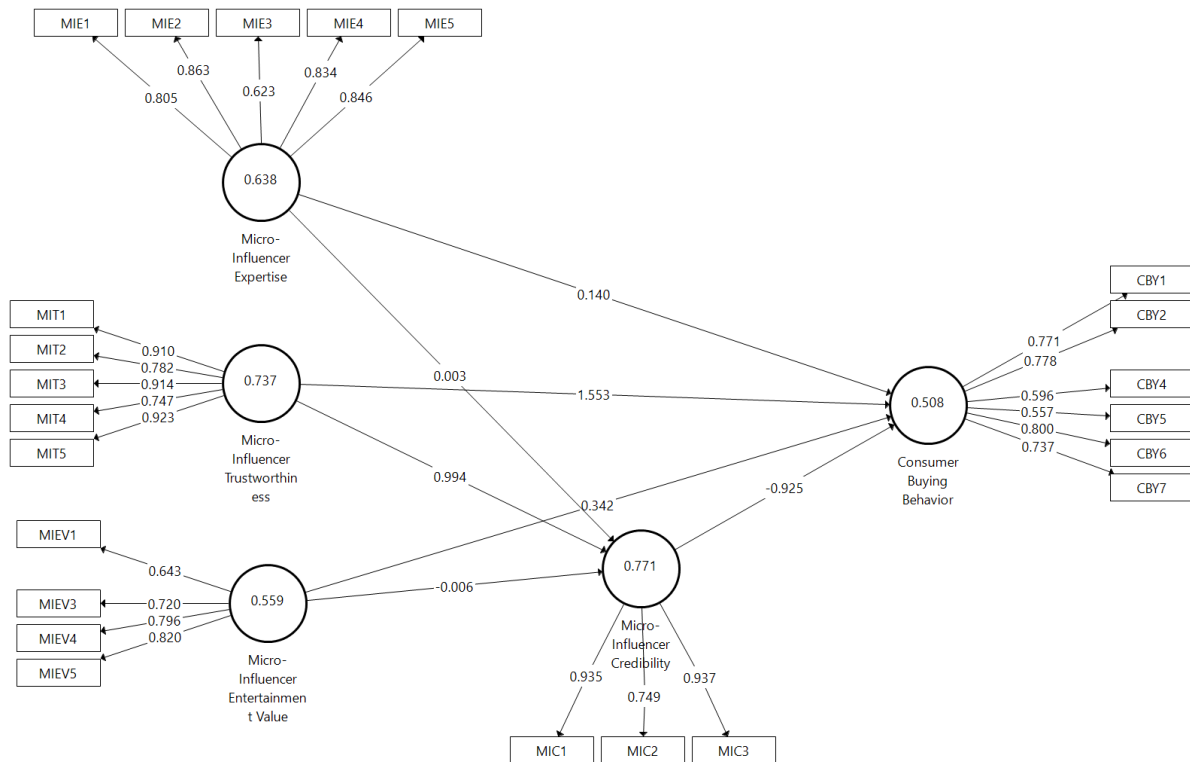


Figure 2. Estimation model

(CBY1 to CBY6) used to measure this construct. The AVE value of 0.508 indicates that the items in this component can explain 50.8% of the variance in consumer buying behavior, providing an adequate level of convergent validity. In terms of

micro-influencer credibility, the composite reliability is an excellent 0.909, indicating strong internal consistency for the items evaluating this construct (MIC1 through MIC3). The AVE value of 0.771 suggests that the items capture 77.1% of

Table 2. Reliability statistics

| Constructs | Factor | Original Sample | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|--------------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Consumer Buying Behavior | CBY1 | 0.771 | 0.859 | 0.508 |
| | CBY2 | 0.778 | | |
| | CBY3 | 0.596 | | |
| | CBY4 | 0.557 | | |
| | CBY5 | 0.800 | | |
| | CBY6 | 0.737 | | |
| Micro-Influencer Credibility | MIC1 | 0.935 | 0.909 | 0.771 |
| | MIC2 | 0.749 | | |
| | MIC3 | 0.937 | | |
| Micro-Influencer Expertise | MIE1 | 0.805 | 0.897 | 0.638 |
| | MIE2 | 0.863 | | |
| | MIE3 | 0.623 | | |
| | MIE4 | 0.834 | | |
| | MIE5 | 0.846 | | |
| Micro-Influencer Entertainment Value | MIEV1 | 0.643 | 0.834 | 0.559 |
| | MIEV3 | 0.720 | | |
| | MIEV4 | 0.796 | | |
| | MIEV5 | 0.820 | | |
| Micro-Influencer Trustworthiness | MIT1 | 0.910 | 0.933 | 0.737 |
| | MIT2 | 0.782 | | |
| | MIT3 | 0.914 | | |
| | MIT4 | 0.747 | | |
| | MIT5 | 0.923 | | |

the variance in micro-influencer credibility, validating the convergent validity of this factor.

Finally, the composite dependability for micro-influencer trustworthiness is 0.933, indicating high internal consistency for the items (MIT1 through MIT5) evaluating this construct. The AVE value of 0.737 suggests that the items capture 73.7% of the variance in micro-influencer trustworthiness, validating the convergent validity of this factor. Overall, the reliability statistics in Table 2 show that the measurement model has excellent internal consistency and convergent validity, which increases trust in the correctness and reliability of the components utilized in the investigation.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion is presented in Table 3 to examine the discriminant validity of the components in this investigation. The values along the diagonal reflect the square root of the extracted average variance (AVE) for each factor, while the values outside the diagonal represent the correlations between the factors. The criterion aids in determining if the elements are distinct from one another, demonstrating discriminant validity.

The AVE for consumer buying behavior is 0.713 squared. It reflects the factor’s average shared variance with itself as the diagonal element. The off-diagonal cells will be blank if this component has no significant relationships with the other factors.

Micro-influencer credibility showed an AVE of 0.876 squared. The correlation between micro-influencer credibility and consumer buying behavior is shown in the off-diagonal cell with a value of 0.878, indicating a somewhat good correlation.

The AVE for micro-influencer entertainment value is 0.691 squared. This value is presented in the diagonal cell for this factor. Off-diagonal cells with values of 0.424 and 0.748 indicate moderate positive correlations between micro-influencer enter-

tainment value, micro-influencer credibility, and micro-influencer expertise, respectively.

The AVE for micro-influencer expertise is 0.829 squared. This value is presented in the diagonal cell for this factor. Off-diagonal cells with values of 0.808, 0.507, and 0.799 indicate moderate positive relationships between micro-influencer expertise and micro-influencer credibility, micro-influencer entertainment value, and micro-influencer trustworthiness, respectively.

The AVE for micro-influencer trustworthiness is 0.896 squared. This value is presented in the diagonal cell for this factor. Off-diagonal cells with values of 0.993, 0.431, and 0.813 indicate moderate to considerable positive connections between micro-influencer trustworthiness, credibility, entertainment value, and expertise.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion shows that each component has discriminant validity since its square root of the AVE is greater than its correlation with other variables. This implies that the factors are sufficiently separate from one another to allow for meaningful interpretation and analysis of the relationships.

The model fit statistics in Table 4 evaluate the research model’s correctness and prediction ability.

Q2predict: Model predictive relevance is 0.462. The model’s independent variables predict a percentage of the dependent variable’s variation. The model’s Q2predict score of 0.462 indicates moderate predictive relevance, explaining 46.2% of the dependent variable’s variance. RMSE (Root Mean Square Error): 0.052 is the model’s average prediction error. A lower RMSE suggests a better model fit. An RMSE of 0.052 indicates a strong match and a small model prediction error. MAE (Mean Absolute Error): The model’s predictions and actual values differ by 0.082 on average. MAE, like

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker criterion

| Constructs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Consumer Buying Behavior | 0.713 | | | | |
| Micro-Influencer Credibility | 0.876 | 0.878 | | | |
| Micro-Influencer Entertainment Value | 0.691 | 0.424 | 0.748 | | |
| Micro-Influencer Expertise | 0.829 | 0.808 | 0.507 | 0.799 | |
| Micro-Influencer Trustworthiness | 0.896 | 0.993 | 0.431 | 0.813 | 0.859 |

RMSE, decreases prediction errors. The model's predictions average 0.082 units from the actual values, indicating a good fit.

The model fit statistics in Table 4 show that the research model has a moderate predictive relevance (Q²predict) and accurate predictions (low RMSE and MAE). To understand the model's performance and validity, these statistics must be interpreted with other model evaluation criteria.

Table 4. Model fit

| Q ² predict | RMSE | MAE |
|------------------------|-------|-------|
| 0.462 | 0.052 | 0.082 |

Table 5 shows *R*-square (*R*²) statistics, which reveal key variable relationships. The *R*-square for consumer buying behavior is 0.633, indicating that the independent variables explain 63.3% of its variance. This suggests that micro-influencer credibility, expertise, and entertainment value strongly influence consumer buying behavior. With a high *R*² value, these independent variables influence Chinese social media consumers' purchasing decisions.

Micro-influencer credibility's *R*-square is 0.387, indicating that independent variables explain 38.7% of its variance. This shows that micro-influencer expertise, entertainment value, and transparency affect micro-influencer credibility. With a high *R*² value, these independent variables clearly influence how Chinese social media users view micro-influencers.

These *R*-square statistics help one understand the strength of the relationships. *R*² values alone do not indicate model performance. Effect sizes, significance levels, and potential moderating variables must be considered to assess the research model's validity. These findings can help one understand the fascinating world of micro-influencer marketing in the Chinese social media market.

Table 5. *R*-statistics

| Constructs | R Square |
|------------------------------|----------|
| Consumer Buying Behavior | 0.633 |
| Micro-Influencer Credibility | 0.387 |

The *F*-statistics in Table 6 evaluate the effects of independent variables on dependent variables,

consumer buying behavior, and micro-influencer credibility. For consumer buying behavior and micro-influencer credibility, the *F*-statistic is 0.170. This statistic examines the joint significance of the independent variable (micro-influencer credibility) in explaining consumer buying behavior variance. To fully assess the relationship, the study considers effect sizes, *p*-value, and the *F*-statistic, which is small.

For consumer buying behavior and micro-influencer entertainment value, the *F*-statistic is 1.302. The independent variable (micro-influencer entertainment value) is tested for its combined significance in explaining consumer buying behavior. With a slightly larger *F*-statistic, micro-influencer entertainment value may have a more meaningful impact on consumer buying behavior, but more analysis is needed to fully understand the association.

For consumer buying behavior and micro-influencer expertise, the *F*-statistic is 0.090. This statistic measures micro-influencer expertise's contribution to the variance in consumer buying behavior. To better understand this relationship, further research is needed due to the small *F*-statistic.

The *F*-statistic for consumer buying behavior and micro-influencer trustworthiness is 0.468. This statistic examines the joint significance of the independent variable (micro-influencer trustworthiness) in explaining the variance in consumer buying behavior. The low *F*-statistic suggests that micro-influencer trustworthiness has a limited effect on consumer buying behavior, highlighting the need for further study.

Next, the *F*-statistic between credibility and entertainment value is 1.302. This statistic examines how micro-influencer credibility affects micro-influencer entertainment value. The moderate *F*-statistic suggests a moderate impact of micro-influencer credibility on entertainment value, but further analysis is needed to fully understand this relationship.

For micro-influencer credibility and expertise, the *F*-statistic is 0.090. This statistic examines the role of micro-influencer credibility in explaining micro-influencer expertise. The small *F*-statistic

Table 6. *F*-statistics

| Constructs | Consumer Buying Behavior | Micro-Influencer Credibility |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Micro-Influencer Credibility | 0.170 | |
| Micro-Influencer Entertainment Value | 1.302 | |
| Micro-Influencer Expertise | 0.090 | |
| Micro-Influencer Trustworthiness | 0.468 | 25.131 |

suggests that micro-influencer credibility has little effect on micro-influencer expertise, requiring further study.

The *F*-statistic for micro-influencer credibility and trustworthiness is 25.131. This statistic examines how micro-influencer credibility affects trustworthiness. The large *F*-statistic indicates a significant relationship between micro-influencer credibility and trustworthiness.

Table 7 shows the route analysis results for Chinese social media micro-influencer marketing, revealing critical variable relationships. This study found that micro-influencer credibility, entertainment value, expertise, and trustworthiness directly affect consumer purchasing behavior. To begin, the -0.925 negative path coefficient between micro-influencer credibility and consumer buying behavior suggests a significant and inverse association.

As micro-influencer credibility grows, consumers are more inclined to engage in purchasing activity. Similarly, micro-influencer entertainment value has a positive direct influence on customer buying behavior (path coefficient of 0.342), emphasizing the importance of amusing material in encouraging customer purchases. Furthermore, with a path coefficient of 0.140 and a significant *T*-statistic of 2.084 ($p = 0.019$), micro-influencer expertise has a favorable direct impact on consumer buying behavior. Although this link is slightly weaker than others, it implies that customers are influenced by the perceived knowledge of micro-influencers inside their specific fields.

The link between micro-influencer trustworthiness and consumer buying behavior exhibits perhaps the most substantial direct influence. The huge positive path coefficient of 1.553 and the extremely significant *T*-statistic of 7.082 ($p = 0.001$)

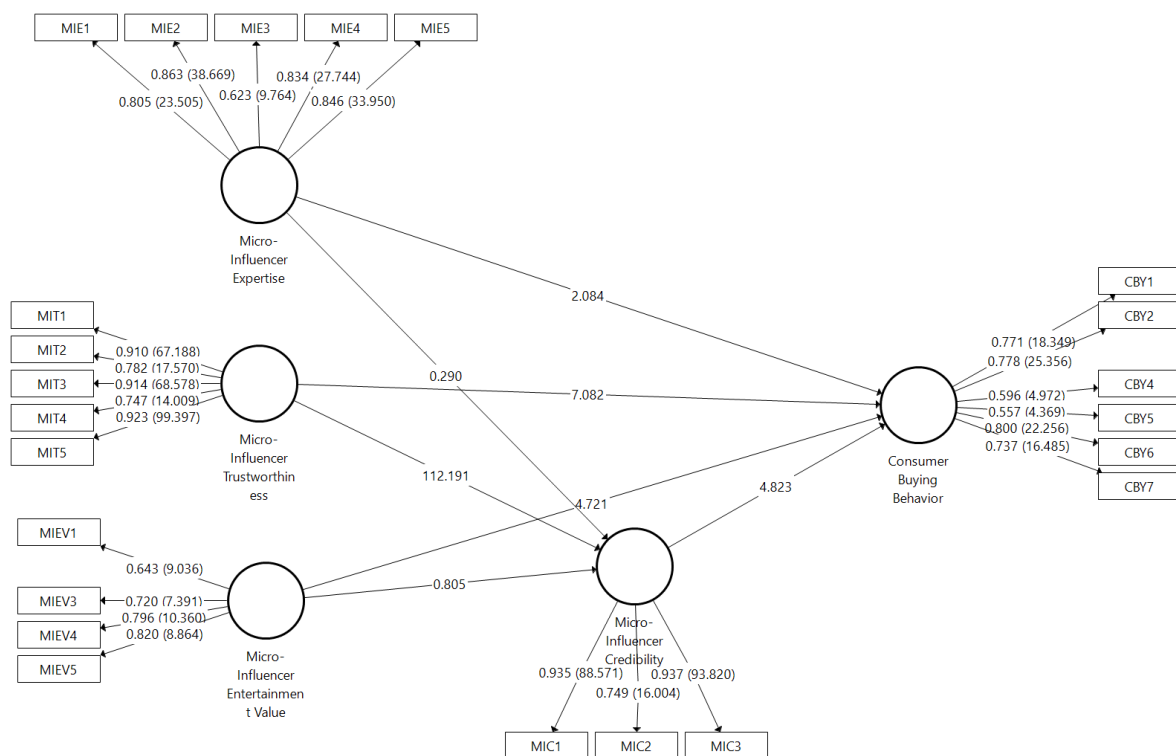


Figure 3. Structural model

Table 7. Path analysis results

| | Original Sample (O) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (O/STDEV) | P Values |
|----|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| H1 | -0.925 | 0.192 | 4.823 | 0.000 |
| H2 | 0.342 | 0.073 | 4.721 | 0.000 |
| H3 | 0.140 | 0.067 | 2.084 | 0.019 |
| H4 | 1.553 | 0.219 | 7.082 | 0.000 |
| H5 | -0.003 | 0.009 | 3.275 | 0.001 |
| H6 | 0.005 | 0.007 | 2.746 | 0.028 |
| H7 | -0.919 | 0.194 | 4.741 | 0.000 |

emphasize the importance of trustworthiness in driving consumer purchase decisions. Because customers regard micro-influencers as trustworthy, they are more inclined to base their purchasing decisions on their suggestions. Aside from the direct effects, this study investigates the function of micro-influencer credibility in mediating the links between micro-influencer expertise, micro-influencer entertainment value, micro-influencer transparency, and consumer buying behavior. The findings show that micro-influencer credibility has significant mediating effects in all three connections, underscoring its importance as a mediator in influencing consumer behavior.

Overall, the path analysis gives useful information for marketers and organizations interested in leveraging micro-influencer marketing on Chinese social media platforms (Figure 3). Understanding micro-influencer credibility, expertise, entertainment value, and trustworthiness may help create effective marketing strategies that resonate with the target audience and encourage consumer involvement and purchasing. These findings contribute to influencer marketing research and have practical significance for companies seeking to leverage micro-influencers on Chinese social media.

4. DISCUSSION

In contemplating the future prospects of research, it becomes evident that the findings of this study hold significant implications for the evolving landscape of micro-influencer attributes on consumer choices. As technology continues to advance and consumer behaviors undergo dynamic shifts, this study opens avenues for further exploration. The identified patterns and correlations not only shed light on the current state of affairs but also offer a predictive lens into potential developments. Looking ahead, researchers may delve deeper into

understanding the nuances of digital influences, credibility, and social media marketing, exploring its impact on consumer behavior.

By studying the direct and mediating relationships between micro-influencer credibility, entertainment value, expertise, trustworthiness, and consumer buying behavior, this study offers a better understanding of influencer marketing dynamics. The findings demonstrated that micro-influencer credibility, micro-influencer entertainment value, micro-influencer expertise, and micro-influencer trustworthiness had substantial direct impacts on consumer buying behavior. Notably, micro-influencer trustworthiness was a key driver of customer purchase decisions, correlating with earlier research highlighting the role of trust in influencing consumer behavior (H4) (Connell, 2023; Rungruangjit & Charoenpornpanichkul, 2022). Consumers are more inclined to act on suggestions from credible micro-influencers because they regard them as trustworthy sources of information and advice.

Furthermore, the data show that micro-influencer entertainment value has a considerable impact on customer purchasing decisions (H3). This is consistent with Dinh and Lee (2022), who highlight the importance of engaging and entertaining material in grabbing consumer attention and cultivating a favorable relationship between micro-influencers and their audience. Through the attractiveness of pleasant and fascinating information, the entertainment element acts as a catalyst for engagement, influencing customer purchasing behavior. Furthermore, findings show a link between micro-influencer expertise and consumer buying behavior (H2). This conclusion is consistent with Y. Yang et al. (2022), who emphasized the significance of expertise in enhancing customers' trust in suggested items or services. The demonstrated knowledge and authority of micro-influencers

inside their niches build credibility, resulting in greater customer trust in their recommendations.

The relationships between micro-influencer expertise, entertainment value, transparency, and consumer purchasing behavior are mediated by micro-influencer credibility. These factors have a significant impact on consumers' purchase decisions through micro-influencer credibility. Micro-influencer credibility significantly mediated the relationships between expertise, entertainment value, trustworthiness, and consumer buying behavior (H5, H6, and H7). These findings support Crnjak-Karanović et al. (2023), who highlighted the role of trustworthiness in micro-influencers' consumer behavior. As a mediating factor, micro-influencer credibility highlights its importance as a key influencer of consumer behavior by enhancing the impact of other factors on consumer purchase decisions. When compared to previous studies, trustworthiness, entertainment value, and competence significantly affect consumer behavior (Saima & Khan, 2021). This study emphasizes micro-influencer credibility as a mediator, which helps explain how it influences consumer purchasing behavior.

Based on the comprehensive findings, a multifaceted interplay has emerged within the realm of micro-influencer marketing. This study illuminates the intricate relationships connecting micro-influencer expertise, entertainment value, transparency, and their collective impact on consumer purchasing behavior, with micro-influencer credibility as a central mediator. Intriguingly, analysis reveals that these factors wield a substantial influence on consumers' purchase decisions, and this influence is significantly mediated by the pivotal factor of micro-influencer credibility. This underscores the pivotal role of credibility in shaping consumer perceptions and guiding their purchasing choices within the context of micro-influencer interactions.

Furthermore, findings resonate with Crnjak-Karanović et al. (2023), who similarly underscored the significance of trustworthiness in influencing consumer behavior within the micro-influencer landscape. Building upon this foundation, this study offers an enriched understanding by revealing micro-influencer credibility as a potent mediator, elucidating how it not only influences consumer decisions directly but also amplifies the impact of other contributing factors. Comparing these results to the broader landscape, this study observed a consistent pattern: the dimensions of trustworthiness, entertainment value, and competence, as highlighted by Saima and Khan (2021), indeed play a significant role in consumer behavior. Yet, this paper augments this understanding by spotlighting micro-influencer credibility as the linchpin that intricately binds these dimensions, explaining the mechanisms through which micro-influencers exert their influence over consumer purchasing behavior. Moreover, the results suggest that social media marketing and influencer credibility could serve as a foundation for the development of innovative strategies in shaping consumer behavior. This forward-looking perspective not only enriches scholarly discourse but also provides practical insights for practitioners and policymakers navigating the challenges and opportunities in the ever-evolving landscape of market research. As the field continues to progress, this study serves as a catalyst for future investigations, encouraging a continuous dialogue that shapes the trajectory.

This study propels the significance of micro-influencer credibility to the forefront, revealing its dynamic role as a mediator and providing a deeper comprehension of how it facilitates and enhances the impact of various factors on consumer purchase decisions. This realization underscores the complexity of the micro-influencer-consumer relationship while also displaying the instrumental role that credibility plays in driving this process.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to investigate the impact of micro-influencers on customer purchasing behavior within the Chinese social media market. It focused on assessing micro-influencer credibility, entertainment value, expertise, and trustworthiness, utilizing route analysis and mediation testing to analyze their direct and indirect effects on consumer purchase decisions. The study sought to provide novel insights

into China's micro-influencer marketing ecosystem. Significant determinants influencing Chinese social media customer buying behavior were identified, with micro-influencer credibility, entertainment value, expertise, and trustworthiness emerging as key factors. Notably, micro-influencer trustworthiness was found to be the primary driver of consumer decisions, emphasizing the importance of building trust and credibility among micro-influencers to effectively shape consumer behavior.

Furthermore, the study revealed that micro-influencer credibility serves as a significant mediator in establishing connections between expertise, entertainment value, transparency, and consumer purchasing behavior. This underscores the crucial role of perceived credibility in micro-influencers effectively communicating expertise, engaging content, and trustworthiness to consumers, thereby affecting purchasing decisions. By contextualizing findings within the unique dynamics of the Chinese social media landscape, characterized by the substantial influence of micro-influencers, the study contributes valuable insights to the field of influencer marketing. These findings have significant implications for marketers and businesses, emphasizing the importance of creating authentic, expertise-aligned content to enhance micro-influencers' influence over customer behavior and foster stronger brand-consumer relationships.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Research variables

| Variable | Item Number | Questionnaire Item |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Consumer Buying Behavior | 1 | As a consumer, I consider the familiarity of a micro-influencer as an attribute that can influence my purchase decision for a certain product or service. |
| | 2 | I think that negative publicity about a micro-influencer can influence my purchase decision. |
| | 3 | I am more likely to consider purchasing products or services endorsed by micro-influencers. |
| | 4 | I have purchased products and services endorsed by micro-influencers. |
| | 5 | Overall, I am satisfied with purchasing products or services advertised by micro-influencers. |
| | 6 | The content shared by micro-influencers on social media platforms influences my brand perception. |
| | 7 | The content shared by micro-influencers on social media platforms affects my interaction with brands. |
| | 8 | Following micro-influencers on social media platforms has impacted my buying behavior. |
| Micro-Influencer Expertise | 9 | I perceive micro-influencers as experts in their respective niches. |
| | 10 | I believe micro-influencers possess significant expertise. |
| | 11 | Micro-influencers exhibit a high level of competence. |
| | 12 | Micro-influencers display extensive knowledge. |
| | 13 | I consider micro-influencers to be qualified in their fields. |
| Micro-Influencer Trustworthiness | 14 | I find micro-influencers to be trustworthy sources of information. |
| | 15 | Micro-influencers come across as dependable. |
| | 16 | I perceive micro-influencers as honest and sincere. |
| | 17 | Micro-influencers are reliable in the content they share. |
| | 18 | Micro-influencers provide accurate and reliable information. |
| Micro-Influencer Credibility | 19 | Micro-influencers exhibit a high level of credibility. |
| | 20 | I perceive micro-influencers as credible sources. |
| | 21 | Micro-influencers offer trustworthy information. |
| | 22 | I consider micro-influencers to be dependable. |
| Micro-Influencer Entertainment Value | 23 | Following micro-influencers on social media platforms provides me with a lot of fun. |
| | 24 | I have fun following micro-influencers on social media platforms. |
| | 25 | The content shared by micro-influencers on social media platforms is enjoyable. |
| | 26 | The content shared by micro-influencers on social media platforms keeps me engaged. |
| | 27 | The process of using social media platforms with micro-influencer content is enjoyable. |
| | 28 | I find using social media platforms with micro-influencer content to be engaging. |