# Research On Consumers' Perception Of Shopping On Social E-Commerce Platforms: A Case Study Of Xiaohongshu

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*Abstract:*

*Background: The rise of social e-commerce platforms provides consumers with convenient, personalized, and social shopping experiences. Among these platforms, Xiaohongshu's user base and influence have been steadily growing, quickly making it one of the most influential e-commerce platforms in China. Therefore, this study will use Xiaohongshu as an example to explore the factors influencing consumers' purchase intentions on social e-commerce platforms.*

*Materials and Methods: An in-depth analysis of Xiaohongshu's marketing effectiveness can reveal successful models of social e-commerce and provide references for other companies, promoting industry development. This study will employ the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and analyze related literature and cases to investigate the marketing effectiveness of Xiaohongshu. It will explore the impact of word-of-mouth effects, user experience, and User-generated Content (UGC) on consumers' purchase perceptions and analyze the factors influencing these perceptions in-depth.*

*Results: Leveraging its strong community atmosphere and user-generated content, Xiaohongshu has successfully enhanced consumers' purchase intentions, strengthened brand influence, and promoted the dissemination of UGC. However, the platform needs to overcome challenges related to credibility of word-of-mouth, user stickiness, and the quality of products and services to ensure sustainable development and improve user shopping experience.*

*Keywords: Social E-commerce Platform; Xiaohongshu; Consumers; Shopping Perception.*

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## I. Introduction

Since the advent of the internet, its rapid development has driven transformations in various fields, especially the rapid rise of the e-commerce industry. According to the report released by CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Center) in November 2024, China has 1.099 billion internet users, with an internet penetration rate reaching 78.0%.[1] Against this backdrop, social e-commerce has emerged, attracting users by perfectly integrating social and commercial attributes and providing a seamless shopping experience. Users can browse, share, and purchase products through social media platforms, while brands use these platforms to promote their products and services.

As a leading social e-commerce platform, Xiaohongshu has rapidly risen thanks to its strong community atmosphere and user-generated content, with over 260 million monthly active users in 2024, 81% of whom express purchasing desires after browsing. As China's consumer market enters a new era of globalization, socialization, and youthfulness, studying the purchasing perceptions of Xiaohongshu consumers and their influencing factors becomes particularly important. Although scholars have explored the influencing factors of consumer purchasing perceptions on social e-commerce platforms, detailed analysis of these perceptions on Xiaohongshu is relatively scarce. Therefore, this paper will explore the purchasing perceptions and their influencing factors on social e-commerce platforms, specifically Xiaohongshu, from perspectives such as user experience, online reputation, and user-generated content, through the analysis of relevant literature and case studies combined with the critical incident technique.

## II. Literature Review

### Social E-commerce Platforms

E-commerce originated in the 1990s, with the establishment of Amazon in 1995 marking the beginning of the e-commerce era. Initially, e-commerce platforms were primarily transaction-oriented, with a single user

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experience and lacking social interaction. With the rapid development of social media, traditional social e-commerce platforms emerged.

Stephen and Toubia (2010) proposed a perspective on social e-commerce, describing it as internet-based "social media" that provides community platforms and online marketplaces, allowing users to engage in various marketing activities.[2]Hajli, N. noted that social e-commerce platforms connect consumers, enabling users to share products without switching software, thus achieving convenient consumption.[3]

Around 2010, social e-commerce platforms began to develop. Taobao in China launched "Weitao," pioneering the social e-commerce model by promoting products through sellers' personal homepages and interacting with friends, quickly attracting a large number of sellers and consumers. With the widespread adoption of smartphones and the rapid development of mobile payment technology, social e-commerce entered a rapid growth phase, with platforms focusing more on enhancing social functions and user interaction. In 2014, the WeChat official account launched the "Micro Shop" feature, becoming the first domestic social e-commerce platform to realize the entire process on mobile; in April 2015, "Pinduoduo" officially launched using a group-buying model; in the same year, the government included social e-commerce in the regulatory framework and issued policies to encourage its healthy development. In 2016, "Xiaohongshu" was launched, becoming a social e-commerce platform with millions of daily active users, highly favored by young consumers.

Today, social e-commerce has become an important part of the e-commerce industry, with platforms continuously innovating and upgrading. Xiaohongshu, as a diversified social e-commerce platform, enhances user stickiness and conversion rates through UGC (user-generated content), allowing users to share lifestyles and shopping experiences, creating a seamless shopping experience. Rich user-generated content and genuine product recommendations attract a large number of young consumers and foster connections between brands and consumers.

In summary, social e-commerce platforms combine social networks and e-commerce, breaking through the limitations of traditional e-commerce's one-way information transmission and product display, meeting people's personalized, emotional, and entertaining needs. With the iterative updates of technology and operational methods, social e-commerce will develop more intelligently in the future.

**Xiaohongshu Platform**
**Development History of Xiaohongshu**

Xiaohongshu was founded by Mao Wenchao and Qu Fang in 2013 in Shanghai. Initially, it was a community for overseas shopping content but later successfully transformed into a lifestyle sharing platform. It interacts with users through efficient information processing and precise content matching.

In 2013, Xiaohongshu was born to meet Chinese consumers' demand for high-quality overseas products. By the end of 2014, it launched a mobile application and transformed into a shopping platform. In 2016, it received $13 million in Series A funding and introduced features such as online live shops in collaboration with Taobao.

Between late 2017 and early 2018, Xiaohongshu experienced a surge in users, surpassing 50 million users and over 20 million daily active users. At the same time, it secured over $200 million in funding, valuing the company at $5 billion. However, in 2019, Xiaohongshu faced regulatory issues, leading to its removal and reorganization, significantly impacting its user base and reputation. Subsequently, the platform implemented several adjustments, such as opening brand live rooms, strengthening product quality management, and introducing new features.

Between late 2020 and early 2021, Xiaohongshu received over $350 million in funding again and rapidly expanded into overseas markets. By mid-2021, it had become one of China's most popular social e-commerce platforms, with over 100 million global active users.

Overall, Xiaohongshu's development journey has been filled with challenges and obstacles. However, thanks to the founders' efforts, user reputation and market share have continuously improved, maintaining stable and rapid growth, and increasingly gaining favor from consumers and investors alike.

**Current research status of Xiaohongshu**

Currently, research on consumer purchase intention on social e-commerce platforms is still developing, with the success of Xiaohongshu's business model attracting significant scholarly attention. Antriksha Negi et al. point out that promoting products on social media platforms can enhance consumers' awareness, trust, and brand loyalty, thereby promoting consumer purchasing behavior. [4] Innovative and interactive social media content can attract more potential customers and enhance advertising effectiveness. For example, a study in Vietnam showed that social media marketing could effectively increase real estate brand awareness and sales. [5]

In terms of online reputation, Johansson et al. used quantitative methods to find that good online reputation positively affects consumer decision-making and is crucial for brand development. [6] George et al. explored the impact of perceived risk on consumer trust and loyalty on social e-commerce platforms from the perspectives of online trust, perceived risk, and purchase intention. [7]

Regarding user experience, Liu et al. found that e-commerce platforms that perform well in providing product information, social interaction, and personalized recommendations can promote consumer purchasing behavior. [8] Chen analyzed the impact of UGC (user-generated content) on brand awareness and loyalty on Xiaohongshu using strategic models, finding that its UGC model successfully enhances consumer trust and user stickiness, thereby improving purchasing perceptions. [9] Zhuang et al. also pointed out that Xiaohongshu's UGC content and brand image have a significant positive impact on purchase intention. [10]

In the guidance of key opinion leaders, research by Umair Akram et al. showed that KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) play a crucial role in word-of-mouth recommendations. They significantly influence consumer purchasing intentions through product recommendations and are considered a reliable source. [11] Ming Wang's research indicated that KOLs' marketing role in the era of self-media is increasingly prominent, creating significant traffic and value. [12]

Regarding user types in lower-tier markets, Xiaohongshu's target users are primarily elite women, which limits the platform's market expansion capability, affecting commercial expansion and revenue. Researchers like Jiang et al. studied the impact of UGC quality, local social interactions, and other factors on Xiaohongshu's user stickiness, proposing strategies to enhance platform stickiness by improving UGC quality and formulating marketing strategies targeting male users, which are of significant reference value for improving consumer purchasing perceptions. [13]
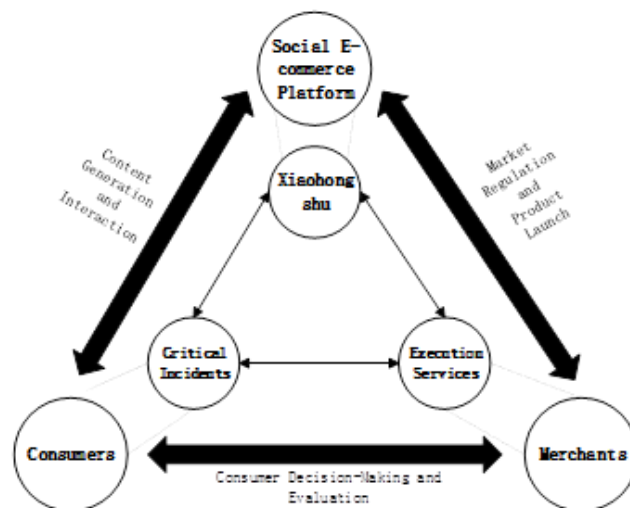


**Picture1**：Xiaohongshu Shopping Relationship Diagram

## III. Research Methodology

**Critical Incident Technique**

In 1954, Professor Flanagan from the University of Pittsburgh proposed the Critical Incidents Technique (CIT) [14], aiming to deeply understand user experiences by analyzing key incidents of consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This method is widely used in various fields, such as customer feedback in the service industry (Flanagan, 1954). In social e-commerce platform consumer research, CIT can reveal the critical incidents consumers encounter during the purchase process, helping to understand their impact on the shopping experience.

For instance, analyzing the key incidents shared by Xiaohongshu users can provide in-depth insights into how social interactions influence purchasing decisions, offering important evidence for optimizing platform user experience. Therefore, this paper will employ the Critical Incidents Technique to explore Xiaohongshu shopping perceptions, aiming to deeply understand consumers' experiences and feelings during the shopping process on Xiaohongshu, and provide strong support for enhancing shopping perceptions.

**Data Collection**

This study employed a linear research method to distribute questionnaires, with respondents being informed of the survey's purpose beforehand to alleviate concerns. The researchers collected and analyzed data on the most satisfying and dissatisfying critical incidents experienced by respondents on the Xiaohongshu platform to identify factors affecting user shopping experiences. The questionnaire survey lasted for half a month, with 150 questionnaires returned. After excluding invalid responses, 136 valid questionnaires were obtained, resulting in an effective rate of 90.7%.Sample analysis showed that respondents were aged between 16 and 55, with educational backgrounds ranging from high school to doctoral degrees, and incomes ranging from 1000 yuan or less to over 10,001 yuan. Among them, 84% were young women aged 16-25, and 82% had a bachelor's degree or higher, aligning with Xiaohongshu's target demographic of young users.

# IV. Data Analysis

**Data Processing and Analysis**
**Category Confirmation**

By comparing and categorizing the 136 most satisfying critical incidents and 125 most dissatisfying critical incidents, seven categories of the most satisfying critical incidents were identified: customization, affordability, sociability, convenience, authenticity, quality, and service. The seven categories of the most dissatisfying critical incidents were identified as: quality, service, advertisements, customization, affordability, functionality, and efficiency. Details are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

**Table no 1:** Definitions of Most Satisfactory Critical Incident Categories.

| Category | Definition |
|---|---|
| Customization | The platform analyzes users' preferences and needs to recommend personalized content, including but not limited to post recommendations and product suggestions. |
| Affordability | Many products are promoted and sold through live streams and posts on the platform, offering prices more affordable than traditional channels. |
| Sociability | Users can follow other users, view shopping experiences, and recommended products, and interact and share with each other, creating a social and shared shopping atmosphere. |
| Convenience | Users can directly purchase products by clicking on links on the platform, eliminating the need for searches and making shopping more convenient. |
| Authenticity | Users can refer to genuine experiences and product reviews shared by others on the platform to make informed purchasing decisions. |
| Quality | The platform recommends and promotes high-quality products, allowing users to choose products that meet their needs. |
| Service | Xiaohongshu provides a certain level of customer service, allowing users to consult with customer support during the shopping process to improve their experience. |

**Table no2:** Types of Most Unsatisfactory Critical Incidents.

| Category | Definition |
|---|---|
| Quality | Issues related to encountering counterfeit or substandard products. |
| Service | Problems with incomplete, cumbersome, and time-consuming after-sales service processes. |
| Advertising | Presence of a large amount of advertising mixed with community content, requiring users to sift through to find valuable information. |
| Affordability | Concerns about inflated product prices and limited variety. |
| Efficiency | Inefficiencies in logistics and after-sales processes in the shopping experience. |
| Functionality | Perception that the platform's features and interface are not fully developed, leading to cumbersome operations and poor user experience. |
| Customization | Issues related to the platform's ability to recommend personalized content and the fatigue caused by frequent algorithm recommendations. |

**Reliability and Validity Testing**

Reliability analysis of the Critical Incidents Technique (CIT) classification can generally be divided into personal classification consistency and inter-classifier consistency. In this study, three experienced Xiaohongshu users categorized the most satisfying and most dissatisfying critical incidents twice, with an interval of one month between the categorizations. The consistency levels of the three classifiers' categorizations for the most satisfying critical incidents were 0.81, 0.82, and 0.82, respectively. For the most dissatisfying critical incidents, the consistency levels were 0.89, 0.82, and 0.80, respectively. All values being greater than 0.8 indicate that the classifications are consistent and reliable.

Additionally, this test requires validation of the inter-classifier consistency using formulas 1 and 2 when the three classifiers complete the category refinement. Formula 1 is used to calculate the reliability index of satisfying and dissatisfying critical incidents, while Formula 2 calculates the average mutual consistency among the classifiers.

$$R = \frac{(N \times A)}{1 + [(N-1) \times A]} \quad \text{(Formula 1)}$$

$$A = \frac{\frac{2M_{12}}{n_1 + n_2} + \frac{2M_{23}}{n_2 + n_3} + \frac{2M_{13}}{n_1 + n_3}}{N} \quad \text{(Formula 2)}$$

In the formulas, R represents the reliability index; N is the number of classifiers; A is the average mutual consistency; M is the number of consistent classifications among classifiers; n is the sample size for classification judgments by each classifier. The reliability for the most satisfying critical incidents was found to be 0.903, and for the most dissatisfying critical incidents, it was 0.912, as shown in Table 3. Generally, a consistency level of above 0.8 is considered acceptable, and above 0.9 is deemed good. Therefore, the reliability of the most satisfying and dissatisfying critical incidents surpasses the good level, indicating high reliability in this study's classification.

**Table no3:** Classification Reliability Table.

| BBT Category | Average Mutual Consistency（A） | Reliability Index（R） |
|---|---|---|
| Satisfactory | 0.757 | 0.903 |
| Unsatisfactory | 0.776 | 0.912 |

**Content Validity**

In terms of validity, as long as the information provided by critical incidents is comprehensive, accurate, and authentic, the research results are valid. [15] The critical incidents collected in this study were truthfully filled out by respondents from across the country, covering comprehensive and authentic information. Therefore, the critical incidents in this study have high validity.

**Analysis of Data Results**

This study collected 136 critical incidents of the most satisfying shopping experiences and 125 of the most dissatisfying ones, with specific examples shown in Tables 4 and 5. The survey results indicate that key factors affecting shopping experience include affordability, quality, customer service, after-sales service, and customization. The platform needs to establish regulations to manage and optimize these aspects to ensure consumer satisfaction. Dissatisfactory incidents mainly relate to unfriendly interface design, incomplete functionalities, and hidden advertisements. Additionally, product quality, cost performance, and platform convenience significantly affect shopping experience. Users' acceptance of social and personalized content varies; some believe personalized content enhances the shopping experience, while others find community content too homogeneous and commercialized. In summary, the platform should optimize quality control, enhance service processes, reduce ad interference, and improve functionalities and user experience to increase overall satisfaction.

**Table no4:** Examples of Most Satisfactory Critical Incidents (Partial).

| Category | Percentage (%) | Example 1 |
|---|---|---|
| Customization | 5.9 | When you're looking for a specific product, Xiaohongshu can accurately recommend items that match your needs and preferences, providing a highly personalized shopping experience. |
| Affordability | 27.9 | When shopping on Xiaohongshu, you can join live streams to get large discount coupons, allowing you to purchase items at more affordable prices. |
| Sociability | 5.9 | You can buy the items you need based on others' shared shopping experiences and recommendations. |
| Convenience | 14.7 | You can directly purchase products by clicking on links in videos or articles on the social platform, making shopping more convenient. |
| Authenticity | 9.6 | Through detailed introductions by bloggers and genuine user reviews, I became interested in a skincare product and decided to purchase it, and it met my expectations upon receipt. |
| Quality | 14.7 | Live streams and try-on sessions allow me to better understand how products look when worn, helping me avoid poor-quality items. |
| Service | 21.3 | Good after-sales service provides a certain level of assurance, enhancing the shopping experience. |

**Table no5:** Examples of Most Unsatisfactory Critical Incidents (Partial).

| Category | Percentage (%) | Example 1 |
|---|---|---|
| Quality | 34.4 | Too many counterfeit products on Xiaohongshu. I bought a hairdryer once, and it broke after a few days. The merchant refused to replace it, claiming it was due to personal reasons. |
| Service | 27.2 | I encountered some after-sales issues after placing an order, such as a cumbersome return/exchange process, which left me dissatisfied. |
| Advertising | 15.2 | The authenticity of information on Xiaohongshu is questionable, with a lot of self-promotion and false information from merchants. |
| Customization | 3.2 | The platform has a strong shopping orientation, always recommending similar items or inducing me to purchase. |
| Affordability | 9.6 | The price of the same item on Xiaohongshu fluctuates frequently. The price even dropped right after I placed an order, making me feel cheated or treated unfairly. |
| Functionality | 3.2 | It's not very convenient to find orders while shopping. |
| Efficiency | 7.2 | I applied for a refund due to product quality issues, but the merchant refused. I requested platform intervention, but there was no response despite multiple follow-ups. |

## V. Conclusion And Suggestions

**Conclusion**

This study focuses on consumers' purchasing perceptions on social e-commerce platforms and finds that product attributes, merchant services, and platform sociability positively influence consumer purchase intentions.

Xiaohongshu has great potential in guiding consumer purchasing behavior, enhancing brand influence, and promoting the dissemination of UGC content. However, the platform faces challenges such as reputation credibility, user stickiness, and inconsistent product quality. Some low-quality content and fake reviews can even damage brand reputation, such as the "filter classic" issue. Xiaohongshu should optimize searches and advocate against excessive embellishment.

The platform offers a wide variety of products, but some are of poor quality, and self-operated products lack attractiveness. Instabilities and bugs in the shopping cart system affect user purchase experience. Additionally, Xiaohongshu's performance in after-sales service, return processes, and logistics distribution needs improvement. In 2021, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology reported issues with Xiaohongshu's over-collection of user permissions and excessive collection of personal information. While conducting online marketing, the platform also needs to focus on protecting user information security and complying with regulations.

In conclusion, Xiaohongshu needs to gradually address these challenges to ensure sustainable development. As social e-commerce platforms continue to grow and expand, Xiaohongshu's influence on consumer purchasing perceptions will become more significant.

## Suggestions
### Suggestions for Government Departments

Xiaohongshu is a social e-commerce platform integrating "social + content + e-commerce". The healthy development of e-commerce requires support from laws and regulations. The government should improve relevant regulations such as the "E-commerce Law" to create a fair and transparent legal environment that supports innovation. By guiding industry self-regulation through policies, encouraging consumer participation in supervision, and building a sustainable online ecosystem, the government can set up reward mechanisms to encourage companies to improve user experience and punish malicious competition behaviors, thus ensuring the healthy development of the industry.

Social e-commerce brings new business models and challenges, particularly in the area of consumer rights protection. The government should strengthen supervision to ensure platforms operate in compliance, eliminate false advertising and price fraud, and encourage platform self-regulation to maintain market order. Additionally, promoting online ethics education to enhance consumers' self-protection awareness, guiding correct consumption concepts, and encouraging platforms to conduct training and publicity can improve consumers' rational shopping capabilities.

### Suggestions for Social E-commerce Platforms

Firstly, platforms need to enhance self-regulation and comply with relevant laws and regulations. They should establish clear content and commercial activity guidelines to ensure information is truthful and reliable. Strengthening the social e-commerce features and converting social media traffic into e-commerce purchasing power is essential.

Secondly, platforms should strengthen the regulatory mechanisms for merchants and users, improving identity verification, content review, merchant credit evaluation systems, and supervision mechanisms to ensure high standards for content, product quality, and service levels. Leveraging the influence of KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) and KOCs (Key Opinion Consumers) is crucial, encouraging them to share quality content to enhance brand exposure and stimulate user purchase desire.

In terms of user experience, Xiaohongshu should optimize shopping processes and adjust page designs, simplifying operations to enhance user experience. Building interactive modules to encourage users to discuss products, share reviews, and engage in community interactions on the platform can create effective social marketing.

Lastly, Xiaohongshu can actively engage in cross-industry collaborations, utilizing resources from different fields to achieve diversified content dissemination. For example, through joint brand marketing and online-offline activities, the platform can enhance interactions and stickiness with users and brands.

### Suggestions for Merchants

Merchants should actively focus on current trends and online popular topics, combining their product's selling points and pain points to create high-quality UGC (user-generated content) and PGC (professionally-generated content). They can use social media platforms to interact with consumers and guide discussions about product information to increase brand popularity on the platform. Additionally, merchants need to maintain stable word-of-mouth marketing by establishing public opinion monitoring mechanisms, regularly monitoring user comments on social platforms, and promptly addressing negative information. Ensuring the authenticity of product displays and avoiding false advertising can enhance user trust. Merchants should also guarantee product

quality, strengthen after-sales service and user experience, and handle complaints promptly to create a positive shopping experience and reputation.

**Suggestions for Consumers**

Consumers should actively participate in discussions and sharing, learning to use the platform's social functions to share their shopping experiences and influence other customers' decisions, creating a positive shopping atmosphere. They should approach KOL (Key Opinion Leaders) and KOC (Key Opinion Consumers) Suggestions rationally, develop the ability to distinguish between true and false information, focus on genuine product reviews and price changes, and avoid blindly following trends. Users should remain objective in the face of bad temptations, advocate rational consumption and sustainable development, and form healthy shopping views. Additionally, consumers should improve their media literacy, enhance their ability to discern information, and increase their awareness of personal privacy protection. This will help consumers make more rational and autonomous consumption decisions on social e-commerce platforms, maintaining their personal rights and information security.

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