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Impact of Social Media Marketing by Apparel Brands on Consumers' Willingness to Pay A Premium: A Study on the Mediating Effect of Consumer Trust

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ABSTRACT

Emerging social media formats and the evolving marketing methods leveraging them have made social media marketing a crucial approach for apparel brands to identify factors contributing to consumers' willingness to pay a premium (WTPP). To explore the relationship between social media marketing and consumers' WTPP, this study first adopted a literature review method to identify five dimensions of social media marketing: entertainment, interactivity, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth (WOM). It then introduced trust as a mediating variable, constructed a theoretical model based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, and proposed corresponding hypotheses. An empirical study was conducted using a questionnaire survey method. The results indicate that entertainment, customization, interactivity, and trendiness exert a significant positive impact on consumers' WTPP. In contrast, WOM failed to pass the significance test ($p=0.563$), thus its impact on the WTPP is not statistically significant. In addition, trust plays a partial mediating role in the impact of the entertainment, customization, and trendiness dimensions of social media marketing on the WTPP. The research findings provide targeted strategic guidance for apparel brands to better achieve premium payment conversion within the social media ecosystem.

KEYWORDS

social media marketing, premium payment, SOR, trust

INTRODUCTION

With the vigorous development of the digital economy, social media has been deeply integrated into people's daily lives and has become an indispensable social tool. Examples include major platforms such as Facebook,

Twitter, and Instagram [1], as well as popular Chinese applications like WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin [2]. Studies have shown that consumers' motivations for using social media are diversified [3]: some users mainly focus on searching for apparel products and seeking outfit recommendations, while others emphasize the comparative analysis of product characteristics and prices across different brands [4]. This two-way interactive social media environment not only allows consumers to actively obtain information but also supports user-generated content, enabling other consumers to receive instant pushes and view relevant information [5]. Social media marketing has not only changed the way information is transmitted in traditional consumption scenarios but also reshaped consumers' value perception and decision-making logic through emotional resonance, brand storytelling, and community operation [6]. Against this backdrop, many apparel brands have gradually carried out marketing through social media platforms, aiming to establish in-depth connections with consumers. Whether consumers are willing to pay a premium for brands, i.e., pay a price higher than the functional value of products, has become a key issue for enterprises to enhance their market competitiveness.

Currently, there is little research on the impact of social media marketing on willingness to pay a premium. Most existing studies have confirmed that there is a significant connection between social media marketing and consumers' purchase intention, with the former having a positive impact on the latter: Chan et al. [7] explored the factors influencing customers' participation in online brand communities and found that social media marketing can enhance the participation of social media users, thereby improving consumers' purchase intention; Kim et al. [8] found that consumer trust, which connects brand behaviors and consumption decisions, is particularly important in the online environment of social media; Wang et al. [9] found that social media marketing may enhance consumers' recognition of brand reliability through features such as User Generated Content (UGC) and real-time feedback, thereby affecting their willingness to pay. However, purchase intention is not equivalent to WTPP. Existing studies have not fully explored the driving mechanism of consumers' WTPP, especially the mediating effect of consumer trust in this process; the differentiated impact paths of different social media marketing strategies on trust, as well as the mechanism of trust in premium payment, still require theoretical deepening and empirical testing.

In summary, this study takes the apparel industry as the starting point, constructs a theoretical model of social media marketing, consumer trust, and WTPP based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Theory, and

reveals the intrinsic connections among the three. Through empirical analysis, it addresses the following issues: a) whether different dimensions of social media marketing affect consumers' WTPP; b) whether consumer trust plays a mediating role between the two. Meanwhile, based on the research results, it puts forward suggestions for optimizing social media marketing of apparel brands, providing a theoretical basis for enhancing brand premium capabilities.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND MODEL CONSTRUCTION

The SOR Model

The SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) model elucidates the process by which individuals generate behavioral responses through internal psychological and emotional mechanisms under external environmental stimuli [10]. Social media marketing is inherently multi-dimensional, with distinct sub-dimensions exerting differentiated impacts on consumers' psychological states [8,11]. This study extends the SOR framework by treating the five core dimensions of social media marketing—entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth, and trendiness as the constituent elements of social media marketing [8]. These dimensions collectively align with the fundamental "stimulus-organism-response" logic, wherein each specific stimulus acts upon the same organism (trust) to jointly drive the ultimate response, WTPP. Furthermore, paying a premium involves a more calculated decision-making process aimed at addressing the inherent uncertainties in online apparel shopping, such as perceived quality, fit, and value-for-money. Trust mitigates these perceived risks by conveying the brand's reliability and integrity to consumers, and serves as a critical bridge connecting marketing stimuli with rational premium payment decisions [12,13], which aligns more closely with the practical needs of apparel brands' premium pricing strategies. Specifically: S refers to the psychological stimuli imposed on consumers when browsing fashion brands' social media marketing content (the five sub-dimensions); O represents consumers' subjective trust evaluation toward the brand and its products after exposure to related content; R, refers to consumers' willingness to spend more on a clothing brand compared to those that do not engage in social media marketing, i.e., their WTPP. This includes paying a higher unit price, being willing to pay for marketing content, and accepting price increases. As shown in Figure 1.

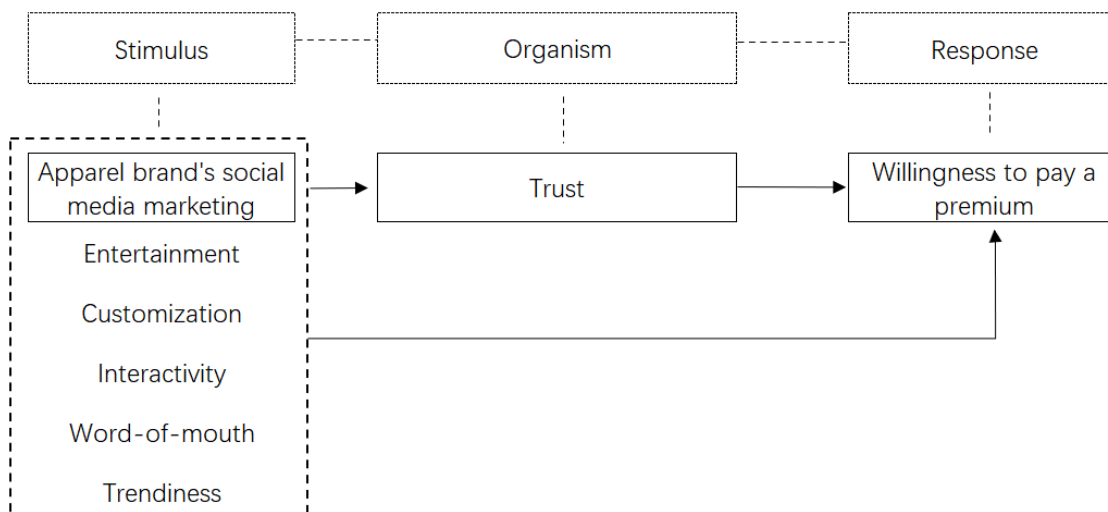


Figure 1. The SOR research model

Research on Social Media Marketing and Selection of Dimensions

The concept of social media was first proposed by Mayfield [14], who defined it as an online platform that provides users with a virtual space to express and share opinions, experiences, and views. With the development of digital technology, enterprises have gradually adopted social media as an important marketing channel, disseminating brand information through advertising, brand endorsements, and user-generated content management, thereby shaping a strong brand image in consumers' minds [15]. Regarding the effective dimensions of social media marketing, there are different perspectives in academia. Among them, the five-dimensional model proposed by Kim et al. [8,11]—including entertainment, interactivity, fashion, customization, and word-of-mouth communication—has been widely recognized and applied. In contrast, although Sano [16] proposed an alternative model covering dimensions such as application interaction, fashion, customization, and risk perception, its application scope is relatively limited. Based on this, this study adopts the five-dimensional framework of entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth, and trendiness to explore the influence mechanism of social media marketing on consumers' WTPP. The entertainment characteristic of social media platforms is reflected in marketers' provision of interactive experiences that meet users' needs for fun and pleasure through innovative content design [17]. Social media customization refers to the extent to which social media channels can provide personalized information

retrieval and exclusive services according to users' needs [18]. The interactivity of social media marketing emphasizes the convenience provided by social media platforms for two-way exchange of opinions and information sharing among users [19]. The online word-of-mouth of social media marketing involves discussions and evaluations of a product, brand, or enterprise by consumers who have purchased or are about to purchase the product through social media platforms; its level can be measured by the activity of consumers exchanging, disseminating, and publishing relevant information on social media [20]. The trendiness of social media marketing reflects the brand's ability to convey hot topics and the latest dynamic information through social media platforms [21].

Research Hypotheses

Hypotheses on the Relationship between Apparel Brands' Social Media Marketing Factors and Willingness to Pay a Premium

In the fields of economics and marketing, scholars have conducted in-depth research on consumers' WTPP. Studies have shown that this willingness mainly depends on consumers' perception of the value of products or services, and is also significantly affected by external factors such as price and brand image [22,23,24]. Specifically, WTPP reflects consumers' tendency to pay a price higher than the market average for specific products or services [25]. This tendency essentially reflects the behavioral characteristics of consumers making positive judgments and forming continuous usage intentions after evaluating the economic value of products or services. Research by Bahri-Ammari et al. [26] shows that consumers tend to endow products or brands with multiple symbolic meanings beyond their inherent value. These additional values include but are not limited to: reducing decision-making uncertainty, alleviating psychological anxiety, enhancing social identity, practicing environmental protection, and maintaining family health. These in-depth psychological motivations and social needs significantly enhance consumers' WTPP.

Academia has conducted systematic research on the influence paths of various factors of social media marketing on consumers' purchase decisions. Social media provides users with the latest information and current hot topics of discussion [21], and attracts consumers' attention by providing them with the latest trend information [27]. Consumers increasingly search for and obtain product-related information through social media platforms; compared with traditional channels, consumers perceive social media as more useful

and timely [28]. In addition, brands carry out marketing activities through social media platforms, disseminating product information by publishing relevant content on social media platforms to stimulate consumers' vision and meet their emotional and hedonic needs. Kim's research indicates that the entertainment value, interactivity, and word-of-mouth aspects of social media marketing all have a positive impact on purchase intention [29]. Specifically, marketing entities can significantly increase user attention and enhance brand attractiveness by publishing multimedia content (including short videos, graphics, and brand stories) on brand pages [30]; by improving users' immersive experience on social media platforms, they effectively stimulate their enthusiasm to participate in brand community interactions, thereby promoting in-depth interaction between users and brands [28]. Interactivity is an incentive for consumers to create user-generated content, and also strengthens their attitudes and purchase intentions toward brands [31]. Customized services and information are more beneficial for consumers to use social media [29], and also help create value for specific consumers or consumer groups [32], facilitating access to target audiences, establishing trust in consumers' minds and consumers' sense of closeness to the brand, and enhancing their purchase intentions [19]. User-generated content shows a significant growth trend on social media platforms, with more and more users actively creating and disseminating brand-related information [33]. Studies have shown that compared with content officially released by brands, user-generated online word-of-mouth has obvious advantages in dimensions such as credibility and emotional resonance [34]. Positive online word-of-mouth can promote consumers' favor toward the brand, thereby enhancing their purchase intentions [35]. Therefore, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: The entertainment of apparel brands' social media marketing positively influences consumers' WTPP.

H1b: The customization of apparel brands' social media marketing positively influences consumers' WTPP.

H1c: The interactivity of apparel brands' social media marketing positively influences consumers' WTPP.

H1d: The online word-of-mouth of apparel brands' social media marketing positively influences consumers' WTPP.

H1e: The trendiness of apparel brands' social media marketing positively influences consumers' WTPP.

Hypotheses on the Mediating Effect of Consumer Trust

Brand trust reflects the degree of consumers' confidence in a brand's reliability and its ability to fulfill commitments. This trust relationship can not only maintain consumers' positive attitudes toward enterprises

but, more importantly, significantly enhance consumers' willingness to pay, thereby creating considerable economic benefits for the brand [12]. Studies have shown that brand trust is positively correlated with brand equity value; that is, the higher consumers' trust in a brand, the higher the corresponding brand equity value [36]. When consumers are convinced that a brand is reliable and capable of fulfilling its commitments, they are often willing to pay a premium to ensure access to the brand's products or services [13].

Existing studies have shown that trust plays a key mediating role in the mechanism by which social media marketing influences consumers' purchase intentions [8,37,38]. Regarding the five dimensions of social media marketing, scholars have explored their relationship with trust from different perspectives: Gautam [39] confirmed that the entertainment dimension significantly affects consumers' expectations and trust levels toward luxury fashion brands; research by Chang et al. [38] also supports the view that entertainment has a significant positive impact on consumer trust; Kim [8] found that both entertainment and interactivity have significant impacts on trust formation; Jakic [40] emphasized that interactivity is a key prerequisite for building trust.

Based on the above views, this paper proposes: Can the five dimensions of social media marketing influence consumers' WTPP by affecting trust?

Therefore, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H2a: Trust plays a mediating role between the entertainment of apparel brands' social media marketing and WTPP.

H2b: Trust plays a mediating role between the customization of apparel brands' social media marketing and WTPP.

H2c: Trust plays a mediating role between the interactivity of apparel brands' social media marketing and WTPP.

H2d: Trust plays a mediating role between the online word-of-mouth of apparel brands' social media marketing and WTPP.

H2e: Trust plays a mediating role between the trendiness of apparel brands' social media marketing and WTPP.

Model Construction

Based on the theoretical framework of the SOR model, this study integrates literature analysis and research

hypotheses, and combines trust to construct a theoretical model of the influence mechanism of social media marketing on consumers' WTPP, as shown in Figure 2. This model aims to explore the influence paths through which each dimension of social media marketing affects consumers' WTPP via the mediating role of trust.

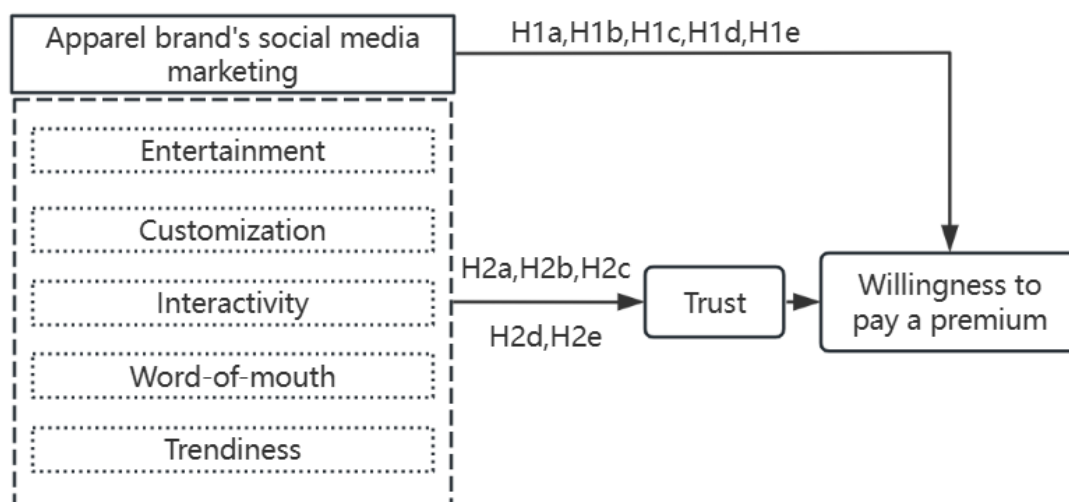


Figure 2. Theoretical model

RESEARCH DESIGN

Selection and Measurement of Variables

Based on mature scales from previous scholars' studies and relevant literature, this study finally established a measurement index system covering 8 key variables to ensure the reliability and validity of the research. These include 5 independent variables: entertainment (X1), customization (X2), interactivity (X3), word-of-mouth (X4), and trendiness (X5); 1 mediating variable: consumer trust; and 1 dependent variable Y: consumers' WTPP. The details are as follows: The effectiveness of social media marketing draws on the studies by Kim and Ko [8] and Almohaimmeed[37], with a total of 19 measurement items, including 4 items for entertainment, 5 items for customization, 4 items for interactivity, 3 items for online word-of-mouth, and 3 items for trendiness; consumer trust refers to the studies by Sahin et al. [41] and Manzoor et al. [42], with 3

measurement items; Paying a premium refers to the relative increase in price that consumers are willing to pay for a brand, as compared to brands that do not utilize social media marketing. Referring to the studies by Zhang et al. [43] and Anselmsson et al. [44], with 3 measurement items. The specific measurement indicators for each dimension of social media marketing are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Measurement indicators and reference sources

Measurement Indicator	Variable Name	Measurement Item	Source
Entertainment (ENT)	ENT1	The content found on the apparel brand's social media account seems interesting	[8,37]
	ENT2	Browsing the apparel brand's social media account is exciting	
	ENT3	The brand information collected through social media is interesting	
	ENT4	It is easy to kill time by browsing the apparel brand's social media account	
Customization (CUS)	CUS1	Customized information can be searched through the apparel brand's social media account	
	CUS2	Customized services can be enjoyed through the apparel brand's social media account	
	CUS3	Vivid updates that interest me can be browsed through the apparel brand's social media account	
	CUS4	It is easy to browse the apparel brand's social media account	
	CUS5	The apparel brand's social media account can be browsed anytime and anywhere	
Interactivity (INT)	INT1	It is easy to convey my opinions about the brand through social media	
	INT2	Conversations or exchanges of opinions about the brand with other users can be conducted through social media	
	INT3	Two-way interaction can be carried out through social media	
	INT4	It is possible to share information with other users through social media	
Word-of-mouth (WOM)	WOM1	When browsing the brand's social media account, I want to pass on information about the brand, products, or services to my friends	
	WOM2	When browsing the brand's social media account, I want to share relevant content on my own account	
	WOM3	I want to share opinions about the brand, products, or services obtained therefrom with acquaintances	
Trendiness (TRE)	TRE1	Browsing the apparel brand's social media account is a latest trend	
	TRE2	The content found by browsing the apparel brand's social media account is up-to-date	
	TRE3	Browsing the apparel brand's social media account is fashionable	

Consumer trust (CT)	CT1	I believe the official social media account of the brand is trustworthy	[41,42]
	CT2	I believe the official social media account of the brand will keep its promises	
	CT3	I trust the store on the official social media account of the brand and will consider purchasing products	
Willingness to pay a premium (WTPP)	WTPP1	Compared with other brands, I am willing to pay a higher price for it	[43,44]
	WTPP2	Compared with traditional retail methods, I am willing to spend more on the brand's social media account	
	WTPP3	I will purchase the brand's apparel even if there is a price increase	

Questionnaire Design and Sample Data Collection

All variables in this study were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree." A total of 261 questionnaires were distributed online via Wenjuanxing (a professional online survey platform), and 235 valid questionnaires were recovered, with an effective rate of 90.03%.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

In terms of demographic characteristics, there were 121 female samples (51.48%) and 114 male samples (48.52%). Regarding age distribution: 13 respondents (5.53%) were under 18 years old, 92 (39.15%) were 18-23 years old, 99 (42.13%) were 24-29 years old, 20 (8.51%) were 30-35 years old, 9 (3.83%) were 36-41 years old, and 2 (0.85%) were over 41 years old. This age distribution is consistent with the trend of younger groups using social media platforms. In terms of education: most respondents had a bachelor's degree (145, 61.7%), followed by master's degree holders (52, 22.13%) and junior college graduates (13.19%); only 7 respondents (2.98%) had education at or below high school. In terms of occupation: the largest group was students (126, 53.62%), followed by employees of state-owned enterprises (57, 24.26%). Regarding monthly spending on apparel: most respondents spent 1,000-1,499 yuan (42.12%) or 500-999 yuan (30.64%). The sample distribution was concentrated in the unemployed young group, indicating that this group is more active on social media and has a higher acceptance of apparel brands' social media marketing strategies.

Reliability and Validity Tests of the Questionnaire

This study included five factors (entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth, and trendiness

of social media marketing), one mediating variable (trust), and one dependent variable (WTPP). SPSS software was used to conduct reliability tests on the collected valid data. In this test, the total number of items in the sample was 30, and the overall Cronbach's α of the sample was 0.800 (≥ 0.8), indicating good stability of the sample data. Additionally, the Cronbach's α after item deletion was >0.6 , suggesting that the reliability of the questionnaire scale passed the test and subsequent analyses could be conducted. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of confidence analysis

Latent Variable	Variable Name	Observable Variable	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's α if Item Deleted	Cronbach's α
ENT	ENT1	Content is interesting	0.796	0.775	0.855
	ENT2	Exciting	0.637	0.846	
	ENT3	Information is vivid	0.786	0.776	
	ENT4	Killing time	0.592	0.857	
CUS	CUS1	Customized information	0.617	0.811	0.837
	CUS2	Customized services	0.617	0.833	
	CUS3	Dynamic content	0.538	0.786	
	CUS4	Easy to operate	0.703	0.789	
	CUS5	Browsable anytime	0.658	0.802	
INT	INT1	Conveying opinions	0.722	0.801	0.852
	INT2	Exchanging opinions	0.822	0.758	
	INT3	Two-way interaction	0.655	0.845	
	INT4	User-generated content	0.630	0.842	
WOM	WOM1	Recommending to friends	0.681	0.608	0.773
	WOM2	Voluntary sharing	0.609	0.693	
	WOM3	Word-of-mouth communication	0.541	0.764	
TRE	TRE1	Latest trend	0.776	0.616	0.809
	TRE2	Latest content	0.607	0.815	
	TRE3	Fashionable to use	0.685	0.759	
CT	CT1	Trustworthy	0.384	0.792	0.773
	CT2	Keeping promises	0.429	0.790	
	CT3	Considering purchase	0.194	0.799	
WTPP	WTPP1	Higher unit price	0.399	0.793	0.852
	WTPP2	Spending more	0.505	0.785	
	WTPP3	Accepting price increases	0.441	0.788	

To test the construct validity of the questionnaire scale, factor analysis was used to test the validity of valid samples, and the results are shown in Table 3. Exploratory factor analysis on the data sample validity revealed that the dimensions of apparel brand social media marketing were divided into five factors as expected, while trust and WTPP were each divided into one factor. All factor loadings were higher than the standard threshold of 0.500, indicating that each factor could effectively reflect the corresponding indicator variables. The Composite Reliability (CR) values were all higher than the standard threshold of 0.7, indicating good internal consistency of the measurement model. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were all higher than the standard threshold of 0.5, indicating that the latent variables could effectively explain most of the variance of the items. The KMO values for apparel brand social media marketing, the mediating variable (trust), and WTPP were 0.801, 0.788, and 0.670, respectively; the significance of Bartlett's test of sphericity was 0.000, indicating that the theoretical model had good construct validity and could be used for subsequent empirical analysis.

Table 3. Results of validity analysis

Variable	Variable Name	Standardized Factor Loading	CR	AVE
ENT	ENT1	0.830	0.856	0.602
	ENT2	0.736		
	ENT3	0.870		
	ENT4	0.647		
CUS	CUS1	0.700	0.857	0.546
	CUS2	0.652		
	CUS3	0.786		
	CUS4	0.792		
	CUS5	0.754		
INT	INT1	0.604	0.820	0.540
	INT2	0.858		
	INT3	0.843		
	INT4	0.591		
WOM	WOM1	0.803	0.819	0.602
	WOM2	0.744		
	WOM3	0.779		
TRE	TRE1	0.766	0.766	0.526
	TRE2	0.804		

	TRE3	0.588		
	CT1	0.882		
CT	CT2	0.927	0.876	0.705
	CT3	0.692		
	WTPP1	0.873		
WTPP	WTPP2	0.933	0.914	0.779
	WTPP3	0.840		

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of Empirical Analysis

SPSS was used to conduct sequential regression analyses on the data samples. The factors were the five dimensions of apparel brands' social media marketing, the mediating variable Z was consumer trust, and the dependent variable Y was consumers' WTPP. The regression results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis results

Factor	Y Regression Analysis 1)	Z Regression Analysis 2)	Y Regression Analysis 3)	Y Regression Analysis 4)
ENT	0.226** (4.026)	0.282** (4.722)	-	0.195** (3.283)
CUS	0.267** (0.098)	0.216** (3.621)	-	0.243** (4.160)
INT	0.170** (0.098)	-0.034 (-0.566)	-	-
WOM	0.033 (0.579)	0.198** (3.318)	-	-
TRE	0.352** (6.261)	0.126* (2.103)	-	0.338** (5.894)
CT	-	-	0.261** (4.125)	0.111* (1.806)
R2	0.276	0.183	0.068	0.257
F	17.476	10.232	17.016	19.876

Note: The regression coefficients including the constant term are not reported in this table; * and ** denote the 5% and 1% significance levels, respectively; the values in parentheses are t-values.

Empirical Analysis of the Relationship Between Apparel Brands' Social Media Marketing Factors and Consumers' Willingness to Pay a Premium

The regression analysis results (as shown in Regression Analysis 1) indicated that the F-value in the test was 17.476, with an R^2 value of 0.276. The p-values for the five dimensions were 0.000 (X1), 0.000 (X2), 0.003 (X3), 0.563 (X4), and 0.000 (X5), respectively. Except for word-of-mouth, the p-values of the other four dimensions were all < 0.01 , passing the significance test. This suggests that the entertainment, customization, interactivity, and trendiness of apparel brands' social media marketing have a significantly positive impact on consumers' WTPP at the 1% significance level. Hypotheses H1a, H1b, H1c, and H1e in H1 are supported. Meanwhile, the impact of social media marketing strategies on consumers' WTPP is ranked as follows: trendiness (0.352) $>$ customization (0.267) $>$ entertainment (0.226) $>$ interactivity (0.170).

For the direct positive impact on WTPP, Gautam and Sharma confirmed that entertainment can enhance consumers' acceptance of luxury fashion brand premiums [45], additionally, trendiness helps brands establish a fashion-leading image, and consumers are willing to pay more for brands that align with their pursuit of trendiness [19,31]. The inherent logic of these direct effects lies in their direct alignment with core drivers of premium payment in fashion consumption: entertainment primarily satisfies consumers' hedonic needs through immersive and enjoyable content experiences, while trendiness caters to their symbolic needs for social identity and fashion conformity, thereby prompting their WTPP [26,30].

The empirical results confirm that customization exerts a positive impact on consumers' WTPP. The customization measured herein refers to value-added personalized services, include personalized outfit recommendations tailored to consumers' style preferences and one-on-one fashion consulting services provided through social media platforms. For apparel brands, by integrating user preferences into brand interactions and service design, customization endows consumers with a sense of being valued and exclusivity, thereby enhancing their perceived value of the brand [36]. Consistent with the findings of Jakic et al. [46], symbolic value and experiential value are key drivers for consumers' acceptance of premiums, and personalized interactions that convey targeted brand attention can effectively reduce consumers' psychological resistance to premiums.

However, the p-value of X4 (0.563) was > 0.05 , failing to pass the significance test. Therefore, this variable was excluded from subsequent regression analyses, and Hypothesis H1d within H1 is not supported. The analysis indicates that this may be attributed to the sample being predominantly composed of young individuals, with the 18–29 age group accounting for as high as 86.81% of respondents. This demographic tends to exhibit strong independence and is less susceptible to others' word-of-mouth influence [45]. Additionally, there are differences in consumers' sensitivity to word-of-mouth. Such individual variations may contribute to the overall insignificant impact of word-of-mouth on the WTPP.

Test of the Mediating Effect of Consumer Trust

According to Regression Analysis 2 in the table, the F-value in the test was 10.232, with an R^2 value of 0.183. The p-values of the four dimensions except interactivity were all < 0.01 , passing the significance test. This indicates that the entertainment, customization, word-of-mouth, and trendiness of apparel brands' social media marketing have a significantly positive impact on consumer trust at the 1% significance level.

According to Regression Analysis 3 in the table, the F-value in the test was 17.016, with an R^2 value of 0.068, and the p-value was < 0.01 , passing the significance test. This suggests that the mediating variable (trust) has a significantly positive impact on consumers' WTPP at the 1% significance level.

According to Regression Analysis 4 in the table, the F-value in the test was 19.876, with an R^2 value of 0.257. The p-values of X1, X2, and X5 were all < 0.01 , passing the significance test. This indicates that the entertainment, customization, and trendiness of apparel brands' social media marketing have a significantly positive impact on consumers' WTPP at the 1% significance level. The p-value of the mediating variable Z was < 0.05 , passing the significance test, suggesting that trust has a significantly positive impact on consumers' WTPP at the 5% significance level.

Based on the results of the above four regression analyses, after introducing the mediating variable (trust), the impacts of entertainment, customization, and trendiness on consumers' WTPP remained significant. Thus, consumer trust plays a partial mediating role in the impacts of entertainment, customization, and trendiness of apparel brands' social media marketing on WTPP. Therefore, Hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2e are supported, while Hypothesis H2c is not supported. The possible reasons are that most interactive forms focus more on information acquisition rather than conveying signals of brand credibility; furthermore, consumer trust

typically requires long-term accumulation of consistent behaviors, whereas interactivity is more reflected in short-term, fragmented participation. Hence, the mediating effect of trust in the impact of interactivity on WTPP is insignificant.

Strategies and Recommendations

According to the empirical analysis results, trendiness has the most significant impact on WTPP, followed by customization and entertainment, then interactivity, while word-of-mouth has an insignificant impact. The varying degrees of impact of different social media marketing factors on consumers' WTPP may be because, on social media platforms, the latest real-time information most easily attracts consumers' attention, which in turn generates demand for other types of content. Based on these findings and the theoretical discussions, targeted recommendations for apparel brands' social media marketing strategies are proposed as follows:

(1) Strengthening Entertaining Content.

Entertaining content, such as interesting short videos and brand co-branded activities, significantly enhances WTPP through creating pleasant experiences and indirectly drives it through trust. Therefore, brands should create immersive entertainment experiences: showcasing brand stories and product highlights through short videos and live streams, and designing creative activities around hot topics or festivals to enhance consumers' sense of participation and emotional connection. They should also enhance entertainment value through cross border collaborations: co-branding with popular IPs, celebrities, or artists to launch limited editions or themed series, leveraging cross-border influence to expand brand exposure while satisfying consumers' pursuit of unique experiences.

(2) Deepening Customized Services

Customization strategies significantly enhance WTPP by meeting consumers' differentiated needs. Thus, brands can provide personalized products and services: using big data to analyze consumer preferences and launch customized designs, such as embroidered names, exclusive color schemes, or personalized recommendations. They should also build customized interactive scenarios: setting up "outfit consultants" or "exclusive customer service" on social media platforms to enhance consumers' sense of participation and brand loyalty through real-time interaction.

(3) Optimizing Interactive Design

The effect of interactivity in social media marketing on WTPP is significant, indicating that real-time interaction and a sense of community belonging are key drivers of premiums. Brands can improve real-time interaction experiences: establishing rapid response mechanisms on social media platforms, such as 24-hour online customer service and real-time comment replies, and engaging in direct dialogue with consumers through live streams and Q&A sessions to enhance brand approachability. They should also build a brand community ecosystem: creating exclusive brand communities, encouraging users to share personal outfit and purchase experiences, and strengthening community belonging and brand recognition through UGC.

(4) Publishing Cutting-Edge Updates in Real Time

Shaping a cutting-edge brand image can significantly enhance consumers' willingness to pay a premium. In terms of social media platform selection, brands can investigate the most popular platforms and adopt a multi-channel approach. They should regularly publish real-time interpretations of fashion trends and trendy outfit guides on these platforms to strengthen the brand's image as a trendsetter. Additionally, they can design topic-based marketing around hot issues to increase brand exposure and expand brand influence.

CONCLUSION

Theoretical Contributions

This study combines SOR theory and empirical analysis to reveal the influence mechanism of apparel brands' social media marketing on consumers' WTPP, addressing the insufficient exploration of WTPP in existing studies. It provides theoretical support and practical guidance for enterprises to achieve premium payment conversion in the digital ecosystem.

Limitation and Future Research

(1) This study only considers trust as the mediating variable and does not exclude the potential impacts of other mediating variables (e.g., brand attachment, self-congruity). Future research could adopt a multiple mediation model to more comprehensively explore the influence paths of social media marketing on consumers' WTPP.

(2) Consumers' perceptions and responses to social media marketing may vary across different cultural contexts. Future research can conduct cross-cultural comparisons and further explore the integration of new

technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence to expand the theoretical boundaries and practical application scenarios of social media marketing.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization – Lei Q; methodology – Lei Q and Qu H; formal analysis – Lei Q and Tian B; investigation – Lei Q; resources – Lei Q and Tian B; writing-original draft preparation – Lei Q; writing-review and editing – Tian B, Qu H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Human Research Subjects

This study strictly adhered to the principle of informed consent. Prior to the survey, all participants were clearly informed of the research objectives, data usage, potential risks, and their respective rights. To maximize data objectivity, specific theoretical hypotheses under examination were not disclosed to the participants. Informed consent was obtained after participants acknowledged the information provided and actively selected the "I agree" option, thus confirming their voluntary participation in the study. Additionally, the survey was conducted anonymously, with all data treated with strict confidentiality and used exclusively for academic research purposes.

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