The Influence of Social Media Marketing and Customer Experience on Consumer Purchase Intentions: A Case Study of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea Company

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Abstract

In this study the impact of social media marketing and customer experience was investigated on consumer purchase intentions, using Mixue Ice Cream & Tea as a case study. Data were collected through an online survey of 501 Nanjing, China respondents who had purchased products from Mixue Ice Cream & Tea. Structural equation modeling was used for hypothesis testing. The findings revealed that social media marketing and customer experience significantly and positively influenced purchase intentions, with trust and brand awareness as key mediators. The results underscore the importance of innovative social media strategies and high-quality customer experiences in fostering trust and enhancing brand awareness. Practical implications include recommendations for enhancing social media engagement, customer service, and transparent business practices. Future research should expand geographically, incorporate additional variables, and explore emerging technologies. This study contributes to the literature by offering a comprehensive model of consumer behavior and actionable insights for the ready-to-drink tea industry.

Keywords: *Social media marketing, customer experience, purchase intentions*

Introduction

Tea is one of the most popular beverages globally, with a history dating back to 1500 BC in Yunnan Province of China (Macfarlane & MacFarlane, 2009). In 2022, the Chinese tea market was valued at nearly $100 billion, dwarfing India's $15.7 billion market (Ridder, 2023). China is the leading producer, exporter, and consumer of tea, consuming almost one-third of the global 6.9 billion kilograms of tea in 2022. The global tea market is expected to grow, reaching $266.7 billion by 2025, despite a dip in 2020 due to the pandemic. The Chinese tea market is evolving with the rise of ready-to-drink (RTD) tea, which is especially popular among young consumers. In 2023, more than 40% of Chinese consumers bought bubble tea or RTD tea at least three times a month, favoring brands like HeyTea, Nayuki, and Mixue Ice Cream & Tea (Hu et al., 2023). The ready-to-drink tea market alone was projected to reach $30 billion worldwide by the end of 2024 (Ridder, 2023).

Mixue Ice Cream & Tea, a multinational RTD tea company from Zhengzhou, Henan, China, was established in June 1997 (Ramadhan et al., 2023). It targets younger people, and has a strong market presence, with over 29,000 stores in China and around 4,000 overseas by the end of 2023 according to Mixue Ice Cream & Tea's official website. Mixue gained significant attention in 2021 with its viral theme song, "I love you, you love me, Mixue ice cream and tea," which promoted brand awareness through social media (Nursalim & Setianingsih, 2023). This study focused on the domestic market in China, identifying social media marketing and customer experience as independent variables, trust, and brand awareness as mediating variables and purchase intention as the outcome variable.

Prior research studies (Aji et al., 2020; Solomon, 2020) has highlighted social media marketing's influence on brand awareness and purchase intentions, but these often focus on broader contexts, such as retail or the fast-moving consumer goods sectors, and do not address the unique dynamics of the RTD tea market in China. Moreover, the Chinese social media environment (dominated by platforms like Xiaohongshu, WeChat, and Douyin) presents different engagement behaviors compared to global platforms. This distinction is critical for companies like Mixue Ice Cream & Tea, which must tailor their strategies to context-specific audiences. Additionally, research on the mediating roles of trust and brand awareness in the relationship between social media marketing, customer experience, and purchase intentions remains scarce in this sector. The aim of this study was to fill these gaps by

providing insights into how social media marketing and customer experience influence consumer behavior, focusing on trust and brand awareness as mediating factors in the Chinese RTD tea market.

The purpose of this study was to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of social media marketing on consumer trust and brand awareness?
2. What is the impact of customer experience on consumer trust and brand awareness?
3. How do trust and brand awareness affect consumer purchase intentions?
4. Do trust and brand awareness mediate the influence of social media marketing and customer experience on purchase intentions?

Literature Review

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing has become an essential tool for businesses, which leverage platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Pinterest to promote products and engage with consumers (McClure & Seock, 2020). This trend especially is notable among millennials and younger generations, who frequently share their experiences online, making social media a vital marketing channel (Shearer et al., 2021). Social media marketing, driven by elements such as entertainment, influencers, interaction, customization, and word-of-mouth, enhances a brand's ability to engage with and influence consumers (Kim & Ko, 2012). As a second-order reflective construct, social media marketing is constituted by these elements. In the light of reported evidence, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H_{1a}: Social media marketing has a significant positive effect on trust.

H_{1b}: Social media marketing has a significant positive effect on brand awareness.

Customer Experience

Customer experience (CX) was defined as the internal and subjective responses customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company (Schwager & Meyer, 2007). Schmitt developed a comprehensive consumer experience framework, advocating five dimensions of experience: Sensory (sense), cognitive (think), affective (feel), physical (act), and social-identity (relate) (Schneider & Bowen, 1999). These dimensions help companies create engaging environments and memorable experiences, ultimately adding value to their products (Keiningham et al., 2020). Customer experience was considered a second-order formative construct, where each dimension independently or simultaneously contributed to the overall experience (Wijaya et al., 2019). Based on this evidence, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H_{2a}: Customer experience has a significant positive effect on trust.

H_{2b}: Customer experience has a significant positive effect on brand awareness.

Trust

Trust is a multifaceted concept studied across various disciplines, including social psychology, sociology, economics, and marketing (Doney & Cannon, 1997). It can be divided into cognitive trust, based on perceptions of competence and reliability, and affective trust, which emphasizes emotional interactions and connections (Rempel et al., 1985). Trust is considered crucial for long-term, reliable connections between brands and buyers, influencing purchase intentions (Chae et al., 2020). A previous study found that trust in social networking sites mediated between social commerce and online purchase intentions (Aloqool & Alsmairat, 2022). In the light of reported evidence, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H_{1c}: Social media marketing positively influences purchase intention through the mediating effect of trust.

H_{2c}: Customer experience positively influences purchase intention through the mediating effect of trust.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is the ability of a prospective buyer to recognize or recall a brand as part of a particular category (Aaker, 1991). It significantly influences purchase decisions through brand

association and image (Keller, 1993). Earlier research findings have indicated that brand awareness mediated the impact of social media marketing on Haroo Table purchase decisions (Angelyn & Kodrat, 2021a). High brand awareness enhanced marketing effectiveness, as familiar brands are more likely to be considered during decision-making processes (Nursalim & Setianingsih, 2023). Based on this evidence, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H_{1d}: Social media marketing positively influences purchase intention through the mediating effect of brand awareness.

H_{2d}: Customer experience positively influences purchase intention through the mediating effect of brand awareness.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention reflects a consumer's plan to buy a specific product brand in the future, indicating willingness to make purchases (Chetioui et al., 2020). Understanding purchase intention is considered crucial for marketers to anticipate consumer behavior and foster brand loyalty (Chae et al., 2020). It encompasses the mix of consumers' concerns and the likelihood of purchasing the goods. Previous research has linked purchase intention to attitudes and preferences towards a brand or product (Kim & Ko, 2012). In a previous study, it was shown that halal brand trust had a significant positive effect on purchase intention (Kusuma & Anandya, 2023). Based on this evidence, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H_3: Trust has a positive impact on purchase intention.

H_4: Brand awareness has a positive impact on purchase intention.

H_5: Social media marketing has a positive effect on purchase intention.

H_6: Customer experience has a positive effect on purchase intention.

The above hypotheses were generated and displayed in a conceptual framework (Figure 1). At its core, the framework elucidates the interplay between social media marketing, customer experience, trust, brand awareness, and consumer purchase intentions, highlighting the intricate relationships and mediating mechanisms that influence consumer decision-making processes.

Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework*
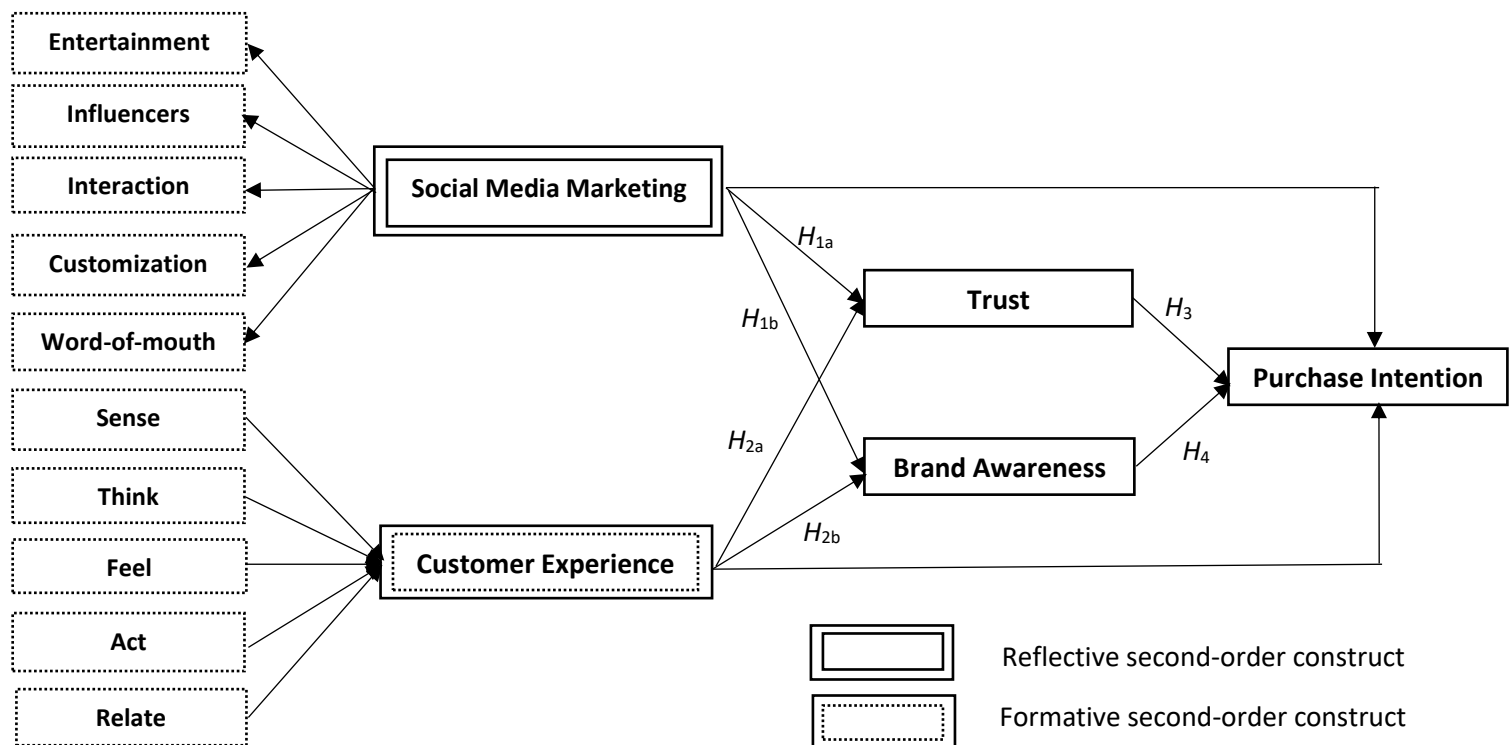
Source. Developed by Authors.

Methodology

A quantitative research method was employed in this study. An online survey was conducted using items with a 5-point Likert scale (*Strongly Agree* - 5, *Agree* - 4, *Neutral* - 3, *Disagree* - 2, *Strongly Disagree* - 1). The questionnaire, divided into three parts (demographic data, purchasing behavior and preferences, and adapted scale questions), was translated into Mandarin Chinese using the back-translation technique. The target population for this study was customers over the age of 18 who had purchased Mixue Ice Cream & Tea products in Nanjing, China. Nanjing, with its high economic development level and diverse consumer market, was chosen for its relevance.

A pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents to assess reliability and validity, followed by Cronbach's alpha and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The social media marketing scale, consisting of 10 items, had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .79. Other scales (customer experience, trust, brand awareness, and purchase intention) also demonstrated good reliability, with an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .92. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test result for the Social Media Marketing scale was .63, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at $p < .001$, indicating good construct validity.

After the survey questionnaire was refined, data was collected from a convenience sample of 501 respondents using a self-administered online questionnaire. The final data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha analysis for scale reliability, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess validity, and Confirmatory Bias Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) to analyze the conceptual model and test hypothesis paths.

Data Analysis

Data from 501 samples showed nearly equal gender distribution (50.1% female, 49.9% male). The young adults constituted the majority, with 31.7% aged 26–30 and 24.8% aged 31–40. Nearly half of the respondents (47.9%) held a Bachelor's degree. Most respondents earned between 5,000 and 10,000 Renminbi per month (34.3%). Occupation-wise, office workers comprised the largest group (38.1%). Regarding consumer behavior, 30.7% purchased Mixue Ice Cream & Tea products less than once a month. Meanwhile, 27.5% purchased them 4–8 days a month, classifying them as moderate buyers. Notably, 20.6% of respondents bought the products daily, demonstrating strong brand loyalty and consistent product preference.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs used in this study, various statistical tests were conducted. Factor loadings, which indicate the degree to which each item was correlated with the underlying construct, all exceeded the recommended threshold of .50. Specifically, factor loadings ranged from .67 to .83 for Social Media Marketing, .73 to .81 for Customer Experience, .73 to .75 for Trust, .66 to .79 for Brand Awareness, and .70 to .79 for Purchase Intention. Cronbach's alpha was adopted to ensure the reliability of all the scale items. The results indicated that all variables had Cronbach's alpha values higher than .70, demonstrating good internal consistency. Additionally, the Composite Reliability values for all constructs were above the threshold of .70, confirming the internal consistency of the constructs. Furthermore, the AVE values for all constructs exceeded the threshold of .50, indicating good convergent validity.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement model's fit for the independent variables, mediators, and dependent variables. The analysis was performed in three parts: Independent variables (Social Media Marketing, Customer Experience), mediators (Trust, Brand Awareness), and the dependent variable (Purchase Intention). The results are summarized in Table 1.

The CFA results for the independent variables demonstrated excellent model fit. The χ^2/df ratio was well below the recommended threshold of 3.0, indicating a good fit between the hypothesized model and the observed data. Moreover, the comparative fit indices (CFI, NFI, TLI) all exceeded the criterion of .90, suggesting a robust fit where the model explained a substantial proportion of variance in the observed variables. The CFA results for the mediators displayed exceptional model fit. These indices indicated that the proposed model fitted the data very well, with the RMSEA and SRMR values well below the threshold of .05 and .08, respectively. This suggests a high level of congruence between the hypothesized relationships and the observed data for the mediators. For the dependent variable,

the CFA results indicated an excellent model fit. These findings demonstrated that the model adequately represented the relationships among the variables of interest, with all fit indices meeting or exceeding the recommended thresholds.

The goodness-of-fit indices for the SEM model, presented in Table 1, conformed to the established benchmark values, indicating adequate model fit. The Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ($χ^2/df$) should be below 3.0 (Byrne, 2016). According to Hair et al. (2013), the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) should exceed .90, while the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) should also be above .90. RMSEA values between .05 and .08 suggest a reasonable fit, and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) should be below .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The SEM model demonstrated a good fit with the data.

Table 1 *Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

Items	$χ^2/df$	GFI	CFI	NFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Criteria	**<3**	**>.90**	**>.90**	**>.90**	**>.90**	**< .05**	**< .08**
CFA of Social Media Marketing, Customer Experience	1.07	.96	.99	.97	1.00	.01	.04
CFA of Trust, Brand Awareness	.73	.99	1.00	.99	1.00	.00	.02
CFA of Purchase Intention	.34	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.01	.00	.01
SEM model	1.26	.93	.99	.94	.99	.02	.06

Note. Minimum Value of Discrepancy ($χ^2/df$), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR).

In this study, Structural Equation Modeling was employed to investigate the relationships between Social Media Marketing, Customer Experience, Trust, Brand Awareness, and Purchase Intention, accounting for potential measurement errors. The structural model is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 *Summary of Structural Equation Modeling*
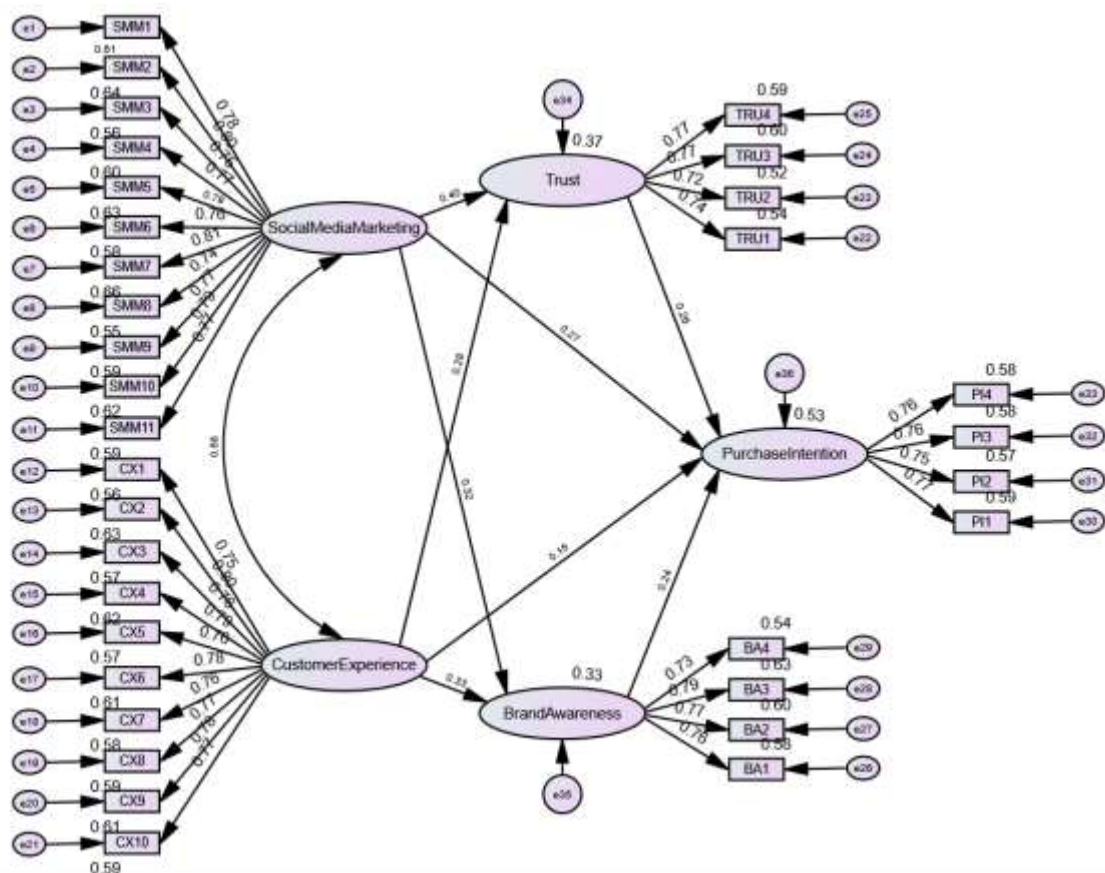
Source. Developed by Authors

This section presents the hypothesis testing results of the structural equation model, summarized in Table 2. The proposed model includes 12 hypotheses related to social media marketing, customer experience, trust, brand awareness, and purchase intention; all were supported in the path analysis.

Table 2 *Hypothesis Testing Results*

Hypothesis Path	Standardized Coefficients (β)	Estimate	SE	CR (t-value)	p-value	Results
H_{1a}: Social media marketing → Trust	.40	.36	0.05	7.04	***	Supported
H_{1b}: Social media marketing → Brand awareness	.32	.27	0.05	5.69	***	Supported
H_{2a}: Customer experience → Trust	.28	.26	0.05	5.03	***	Supported
H_{2b}: Customer experience → Brand awareness	.33	.29	0.05	5.72	***	Supported
H_3: Trust → Purchase intention	.26	.26	0.06	4.53	***	Supported
H_4: Brand awareness → Purchase intention	.24	.25	0.06	4.28	***	Supported
H_5: Social media marketing → Purchase intention	.27	.24	0.05	4.88	***	Supported
H_6: Customer experience → Purchase intention	.15	.14	0.05	2.78	**	Supported

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

To conduct the mediation analysis, we employed the bootstrap resampling technique, recognized for its robustness and reliability in assessing indirect effects. We set the number of bootstrap samples at 2,000 and established a 95% confidence interval. This approach allows for a more accurate estimation of the indirect effects by repeatedly resampling the data and calculating the indirect effects in each resample. The bootstrap method generates estimates for the indirect effects and their associated confidence intervals. If the confidence interval for an indirect effect does not include zero, the mediation effect is considered statistically significant. The results are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3 *Bootstrap Mediation Test Results*

Hypothesis Path	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	p
H_{1c}: Social media marketing → Trust → Purchase intention	.11	0.04	.05	.19	**
H_{1d}: Social media marketing → Brand awareness → Purchase intention	.08	0.03	.04	.13	**
H_{2c}: Customer experience → Trust → Purchase intention	.07	0.03	.03	.13	**
H_{2d}: Customer experience → Brand awareness → Purchase intention	.08	0.03	.03	.14	**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Discussion

This study was conducted to address four primary research objectives. First, the study aimed to examine the influence of social media marketing (SMM) on consumer trust and brand awareness. The results demonstrated that SMM significantly enhanced both trust and brand awareness among consumers, thereby supporting hypotheses H_{1a} and H_{1b}. Additionally, SMM had both a direct and indirect impact on purchase intentions. The indirect effect was mediated by trust and brand awareness, suggesting that while SMM can directly influence consumer behavior, the strength of its influence is amplified when trust and brand awareness are established as mediators. These findings aligned with

previous research, which indicated that well-executed SMM strategies can build consumer trust through personalized and authentic content (Wibowo et al., 2021) and significantly increase brand awareness (Hu et al., 2023). In practical terms, businesses can leverage these findings by investing in tailored SMM campaigns that resonate with target audiences, fostering trust and brand recognition.

Second, the impact of customer experience on consumer trust and brand awareness was assessed. According to our analyses, hypotheses H_{2a} and H_{2b} were supported, consistent with the findings of Saputra et al. (2023) and Biedenbach and Marell (2010). These studies indicated that the better the customer experience, the higher the customer's trust in the company, and vice versa. Moreover, customer experience positively influenced brand awareness. For businesses, this underscores the importance of delivering superior customer experiences across all touchpoints.

Third, the relationships between consumer trust, brand awareness, and purchase intentions were investigated in the study. The results supported hypotheses H_3 and H_4. These findings corroborated previous studies, such as a study by Sembiring and Ananda (2019), which demonstrated that trust fosters stronger consumer commitment and purchase intentions by reducing perceived risk and increasing confidence in the brand. Similarly, Sivaram et al. (2020) highlighted how brand awareness increased purchase intentions by enhancing brand recall and perceived value. However, while these studies have predominantly focused on other industries, this research extends their findings by examining these relationships within the rapidly growing Chinese "ready-to-drink" tea industry. Our study provides new empirical evidence showing that in this context, trust and brand awareness not only play a pivotal role in driving purchase decisions, but also mediate the effects of social media marketing and customer experience.

Finally, the study aimed to determine whether trust and brand awareness mediated the influence of SMM and customer experience on purchase intentions. The results confirmed that trust and brand awareness served as mediators between both SMM and customer experience on purchase intentions, supporting hypotheses H_{1c}, H_{1d}, H_{2c}, and H_{2d}. This indicates that SMM and customer experience not only have a direct impact on purchase intentions, but their influence is also significantly strengthened when mediated by trust and brand awareness. A comparison of direct and indirect effects revealed that the indirect path, mediated by trust and brand awareness, exerted a stronger overall influence on consumer purchase intentions. This finding aligned with prior research, suggesting that trust (Aloqool & Alsmairat, 2022) and brand awareness (Angelyn & Kodrat, 2021) are key mediators in the relationship between marketing efforts and consumer behavior. From a practical standpoint, this implies that businesses should not only focus on SMM and customer experience, but also ensure that these efforts effectively build trust and brand awareness to drive purchase intentions. These strategies can be applied across various industries, particularly in the rapidly evolving digital marketplace, where consumer trust and brand visibility are paramount.

Limitations and Implications

This study had some limitations that should be acknowledged. It focused exclusively on the Chinese market and the Mixue Ice Cream & Tea brand, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or brands. The data collection relied on self-reported questionnaires, which may introduce biases such as social desirability or recall biases, potentially affecting response accuracy. Additionally, the study concentrated on specific dimensions of social media marketing and customer experience, omitting other influential factors like economic conditions, competitor actions, and broader market trends.

The study contributes to the existing literature by empirically demonstrating the influence of social media marketing and customer experience on consumer purchase intentions. It incorporates constructs from Kim and Ko (2012) and the consumer experience framework by Schmitt (2000), offering a comprehensive model that elucidates the multidimensional effects of these factors on consumer behavior. The mediation analysis provides deeper insights into the indirect pathways through which marketing efforts influence purchase intentions, emphasizing the roles of trust and brand awareness. This integrated approach offers a robust framework for understanding consumer

behavior dynamics, contributing valuable knowledge applicable to various marketing contexts.

The findings have practical implications for managers and marketers, especially in the ready-to-drink tea industry. Enhancing social media strategies is crucial. Brands should innovate their social media presence, create engaging content, leverage influencers, and encourage user-generated content to boost visibility and credibility. Improving customer experience across all touchpoints is also vital. Managers should focus on building and maintaining trust through transparent practices and high-quality products. Effective communication, both online and offline, and targeted marketing campaigns can enhance brand awareness, making the brand more recognizable and appealing. By implementing these strategies, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea and similar businesses can achieve sustainable growth and competitive advantage in the dynamic ready-to-drink tea market.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The impact of social media marketing and customer experience was examined on consumer purchase intentions, with trust and brand awareness as mediating factors, using Mixue Ice Cream & Tea as a case study. The results from the structural equation modeling confirmed that both social media marketing and customer experience significantly and positively influenced purchase intentions. There are some recommendations for future research. First, extend the research to different regions and cultures to improve generalizability and identify unique consumer behavior factors. Second, include variables like economic conditions, competitor actions, and market trends to gain a comprehensive understanding of purchase intentions. Third, explore the role of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, and Augmented Reality in enhancing social media marketing and customer experience.

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