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Marketing Touchpoints and Consumer Purchase Intention on Douyin: A Comparison of Mass-Market and Luxury Cosmetic Brands

Dawei Wu

School of Finance, Accounting and Management, University of Nottingham Ningbo China, Ningbo, China
biydw11@nottingham.edu.cn

Abstract. Social commerce, specifically short videos, now form the backbone of short video conversion in the beauty sector in China, but brands don't have any evidence to base differentiated touchpoint allocation on different levels of brands. This study ranks the three main marketing touchpoints of Douyin according to 328 valid consumer surveys to analyses the uneven influence of the three marketing touchpoints on consumers' purchase intention. Results support that three touchpoints have a significant positive effect on purchase intention, and that influencer seeding has the significant effect on the margin. There is a clear moderating effect: influencer seeding and feed ads work well in terms of conversions for mass cosmetics, but only official brand live streaming can be effective for luxury brands. This paper offers an understanding of this heterogeneity by explaining it through three interacting mechanisms, and suggests a three-level resource allocation framework, based on the elaboration likelihood model and cultural capital theory.

Keywords: Douyin, marketing touchpoints, purchase intention, mass-market cosmetics, luxury cosmetics

1. Introduction

With its interest-based social commerce system, Douyin has revolutionized the cosmetics marketing in China. The gross merchandise volume (GMV) of Douyin's beauty in 2024 is more than 400 billion yuan, with over 80% of cosmetic enterprises carrying out live streaming, influencer cooperation and in-feed advertisements at the same time [1].

There are two major issues for the cosmetics industry. Firstly, the budget distribution is mainly based on experience instead of being data-oriented, because most businesses cannot determine the additional conversion value of each contact point. Traditional e-commerce search engine-based attribution model is not applicable to the transaction loop of Douyin [2]. Secondly, mass-market and luxury brands will typically use the same marketing strategy, without considering the key distinction in the consumer decision process. The theory of luxury marketing in the field of luxury brand marketing suggests that there are two different methods of profit and persuasion for two types of

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products and an indiscriminate investment strategy leads to unsynchronized communication and waste of resources [3].

This study focuses on the beauty consumers of Douyin and explores the three main touchpoints of brand live streaming, influencer seeding, and feed ads, testing the different effects they have on purchase intention at various brand levels through quantitative analysis. There are however two key gaps. Firstly, most of the studies focus on short video marketing in general or study the effectiveness of each touchpoint alone, rarely assessing it in a unified system. Second, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the difference in the effect of touchpoints for mass cosmetics and luxury cosmetics, especially in the short video market in China which is experiencing rapid growth.

To address these gaps, the present study aims for two purposes: one is to draw relative magnitudes of the three touchpoints' impacts on the purchase intention, and the other is to construct a map of their heterogeneous impacts and figure out the underlying theoretical mechanisms. This study confirms the moderating effect of brand level, clarifies the underlying mechanisms of divergent touchpoint effectiveness and offers insights for specific marketing strategies, based on structured questionnaire data and multiple regression. Theoretically, it contributes to the previous studies on touchpoint effect heterogeneity to provide evidence from the cosmetics market in China. It combines the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) in comparative analysis of mass and luxury beauty marketing and explains the different persuasion pathways, which are central and peripheral, as heterogeneous [4].

2. Literature review and hypotheses formulation

2.1. Beauty commerce touchpoints

There are two types of research on Douyin beauty marketing. The first has to do with the attributes of video content: professionalism, authenticity and utilitarian value all have a positive effect on purchase decisions, with the former two attributes having a stronger mediating effect than the latter. The second focuses on the characteristics of the influencers: vlogger credibility and parasocial interaction are the factors that affect purchase intention through trust, whereas content informativeness and source credibility are the factors that affect brand trust together [5, 6].

The majority of studies assume that short video marketing is a single entity or that they look at touchpoints individually. Perceived authenticity and parasocial interaction in live streaming are essential factors as conversion motivation factors in beauty e-commerce as confirmed by former studies [7]. However, few studies dissect the key points of Douyin and compare their efficiency in a conceptual framework, while conditions of the boundaries affecting the effectiveness have not been explored. The gap is addressed in this study by incorporating brand tier as one of the important moderate variables.

2.2. Heterogeneity of marketing effectiveness

Luxury brands are not the ones which are based on the principles of mass marketing. Official sources and high-end communications are significant to sustain the brand's equity since excessive publicity in common ads dilutes the uniqueness of the brand and lessens its premium value. This is now confirmed by the study of short videos, which found that too much publicity outside of the official channels leads to a reduced sense of uniqueness and willingness to pay the higher price [8].

Previous research on short video marketing has mostly been conducted using mass cosmetics brands without systematically comparing with luxury brands. In this study, brand positioning is

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considered as a moderate variable to test the differences in the effect of touchpoints empirically at different tiers.

2.3. Theoretical base and hypotheses

Based on ELM and cultural capital theory, and with the SOR as an initial conceptual guide, three hypotheses are drawn up for testing the validity of the model.

H1: Both brand live streaming and influencer seeding and feed advertisements have significant positive effects on overall cosmetic purchase intention.

All three are external marketing stimulus. Live streaming provides real-time interactive product information, which helps to decrease information asymmetry. Influencer content creates peer trust by means of relational persuasion and parasocial interaction which is considered as heuristic quality cue. Feed ads allow algorithm-based targeting, which can show product information to the right person with the tag of their interest efficiently.

H2: Influencer seeding and feed ads have more positive impact on purchase intention towards mass-market cosmetics than luxury cosmetics.

H3: Brand live streaming has a stronger positive effect on purchase intention for luxury cosmetics than for mass-market cosmetics.

According to the ELM framework, consumers are using peripheral persuasion routes while using mass cosmetics which are low-involvement frequently purchased products. Consumers do not do much thinking when they make a purchase on a daily basis; a few maybe, but influencer endorsement and promotional ads are the perfect heuristic cues to induce impulse purchasing. Luxury products require high cognitive involvement, central route processing. However, non-official mass communication can appear less credible and adversely affects the perceived exclusivity of the brand, which affects its persuasive power. Thus, luxury consumption is a statement of identity signaling and status symbolization, in line with the cultural capital theory [9]. Official live streaming is the most standardized and brand-controlled channel, with its high level of brand identity which accords with the symbolic consumption motives of high involvement luxury buyers and the central route processing logic.

3. Empirical analysis

3.1. Variable definition and model setting

The overall cosmetic purchase intention, mass-market cosmetic purchase intention, and luxury cosmetic purchase intention (measured by a validated scale based on previous studies is specifically identified as the dependent variable in this study. The independent variables consist of three fundamental touchpoints of Douyin: Brand Live Streaming (BLS), Influencer Seeding (IS) and Feed Advertisements (FA). Operationalization of each is done using the consumers' exposure frequency and perceived influence. Moderating variable brand positioning (BP) is a binary dummy variable coded as typical unit purchase price ≥ 600 yuan = 1 (luxury tier); < 600 yuan = 0 (mass tier). This cut-off is the common perceptual line between mass and luxury cosmetics for Chinese consumers, and it has been adopted by a lot of existing research.

The Gender, Age, Educational status, Monthly Disposable income, Monthly Cosmetic spending, and Monthly purchasing frequency are Controlled variables. All multi-item variables are measured on 4-point Likert scales (3 items). To examine the moderating effect of brand positioning, an interaction model with interaction terms between each touch point and BP is examined. The

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interaction coefficient is significantly positive, indicating luxury positioning increases the impact of the touchpoint and significantly negative, indicating luxury positioning decreases the impact of the touchpoint.

3.2. Sample profile and data collection

The respondents were those who bought cosmetics on Douyin, to whom questionnaires were sent. Finally, 328 valid data were selected from the total 400 questionnaires, the efficiency rate was 82.0% after eliminating the invalid answers. The proportion of females is 74.09% and 82.93% of the consumers are aged between 18 and 35 years. 73.48% of them usually buy those cosmetics below 600 yuan, which means that the mass market products are the ones that are in the current demand.

3.3. Preliminary tests

The results of reliability analysis indicate that Cronbach's alpha values of all the variables are higher than 0.75, which is satisfactory. According to the single factor test suggested by Harman, the common method variance of the first unrotated factor is 34.7%, which is less than 40%, indicating that there is no serious common method bias problem. Pearson correlation tests suggest that there is a strong positive correlation between each touchpoint and purchase intention, in order of strongest to weakest: influencer seeding, brand live streaming, feed ads. The variance inflation factor values for all the variables remain below the value of 2, which indicates that there is no problem of multicollinearity.

3.4. Regression results

3.4.1. Baseline regression: general effect of all touchpoints

The results of the baseline regression are shown in Table 1. Model 1 has only the control variables as baseline and Model 2 has the three touchpoint variables added. The sum of the three touchpoints explains a substantial amount of variance in purchase intention as adjusted R^2 increases from 0.076 to 0.304. The three have all positive and significant values, thus verifying H1. Influencer seeding is the most impactful, brand live streaming is the second most impactful and feed ads is the least impactful.

Table 1. Results of the overall purchase intention baseline regression

Variable	Model 1 (Controls only)	Model 2 (Full model)
BLS	—	0.228* (0.091)
IS	—	0.302*** (0.084)
FA	—	0.164* (0.076)
Controls	Yes	Yes
N	328	328
Adjusted R^2	0.076	0.304
F-statistic	3.152*	11.276***

*Note. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. All models control gender, age, education, monthly income, monthly cosmetic expenditure and purchase frequency.*

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3.4.2. Group heterogeneity analysis

It tests the heterogeneous touchpoint effects by dividing the full sample into a mass-market group (unit price <600 yuan) and a luxury group (unit price ≥600 yuan). Table 2 reveals significant differences in the coefficient: in the case of mass cosmetics, IS and FA have significant positive coefficients, while BLS is not; in the context of luxury cosmetics, only the coefficient for BLS is significant and positive, and IS and FA are non-significant.

Table 2. Group regression results by brand positioning

Variable	Mass-market group	Luxury group
BLS	0.158 (0.103)	0.356*** (0.097)
IS	0.287** (0.095)	0.121 (0.118)
FA	0.265** (0.088)	0.084 (0.112)
Controls	Yes	Yes
N	241	87
Adjusted R^2	0.318	0.279
F-statistic	9.043***	3.721**

*Note. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

3.4.3. Moderation effect test

Table 3 also confirms the moderating effect of brand positioning based on the regression of the interaction term. The BLS×BP coefficient value is significant and positive, which shows that the luxury brand positioning enhances the conversion effect of the official live streaming and thus H3 is supported. Both IS×BP and FA×BP are significantly negative, indicating that the influence of influencer seeding and feed ads are less for luxury cosmetics, supporting H2.

Table 3. The results of interaction term regressions

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error
BLS	0.161	0.098
IS	0.290**	0.092
FA	0.257**	0.086
BP	-0.412**	0.153
BLS × BP	0.207*	0.104
IS × BP	-0.182*	0.097
FA × BP	-0.194*	0.095
Controls	Yes	—
N	328	—
Adjusted R^2	0.342	—
F-statistic	10.859***	—

*Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

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3.4.4. Robustness checks

There are three robustness checks that confirm the stability of the results: using purchase frequency instead of purchase intention as the dependent variable, dropping the extreme samples of high consumption and re-estimating the model using an ordered logit specification. All three return coefficient directions and significance levels are the same as the baseline regression.

4. Discussion

4.1. Mechanisms underlying the heterogeneous effects

4.1.1. Economic dimension: price sensitivity and profit logic differences

Mass-market cosmetic lines use a mass production low margin approach. The influencer's contents and feed ads, of small expense and wide coverage, sit well with their main objective of increasing market share. For those kinds of brands, a lot of publicity and pricing benefits have a greater conversion result than product advantages. Beauty brands have big margins and longer purchase decisions. The official company will live stream, giving in-depth and detailed explanations about the values, and ensuring that there is always a controlled and consistent message from the brand. Thus, this is the reason for the higher marginal conversion effect in luxury goods. However, general and less specific approaches diminish the exclusive character; rarely make impactful conversions and can dilute the premium position over time.

4.1.2. Cultural dimension: daily pleasure – status symbolic consumption

Consumption of mass cosmetics primarily fulfils basic beauty demands and hedonistic pleasures. To make the sharing more authentic, relatable, and to reduce psychological distance, nothing is more effective than the influencers to activate emotional resonance, which is the most efficient conversion touchpoint for mass market goods. The consumption of luxury is a way of social distinction and accumulation of cultural capital. Official live streaming maintains a noble and uniform brand image and satisfies consumers' requirement of status expression. A high level of influencers undermines the rareness value of luxury goods and the symbolization of luxury as an identity marker is diminished by non-official mainstream communication.

4.1.3. Channel dimension: two persuasion paths and platform algorithm

This allows cosmetic contents to be effectively linked with the general interest tags of users, to take full advantage of the benefits of influencer contents and feed ads. Their profiles are more specific and fragmented, and the platform prioritizes the official live rooms of the ones with high intentions for luxury customers [10]. Perception pathway theory suggests that consumers of low involvement mass products engage in peripheral route processing and have a fast response to influencer and ads stimuli as predicted in ELM. High-involvement luxury buyers use central processing logic: they only perceive the official brand channels as credible quality signals and do not trust mass communication channels which are not official.

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4.2. Theoretical dialogue and boundary extension

According to the classic luxury marketing theory, Kapferer and Bastien, luxury brand elite communication and strict control over the official channel must be conducted to avoid a loss in brand exclusivity and premium perceptions through mass-market communication. However, much of the framework was established in the offline, boutique retail context, as well as traditional, high-end media, and was not empirically tested in the new market of short videos for social commerce, such as China's market.

This study is an attempt to go beyond the theoretical horizons of luxury marketing by incorporating the analysis in the context of Douyin's ecosystem. The results are not homogeneous, and in the context of short videos with a lot of traffic, non-official touchpoints lose their conversion value for luxury cosmetics, and official brand live streaming becomes the only channel that is effective in converting in the digital world. In addition, the study confirms and explicate the ELM dual-route persuasion model to the beauty live-streaming e-commerce context and the boundary condition of brand tier to determine the persuasion pathway.

4.3. Practical strategic implications

4.3.1. Tiered marketing resource allocation

For brands looking to mass-market, marketing efforts should be directed mainly towards mid-tier influencers which can then feed into advertising, alongside a discount cut to encourage people to buy things they did not plan. The basic official live streaming should be allocated smaller budget share to capture and convert traffic from other touchpoints [11]. Luxury brands should focus on investing in their live room professionalism and premium experience to increase the average order value and repurchase rates, with a priority on official live streaming. To prevent brand premium being compromised, the number of broad feed placements and mass influencer partnerships need to be reduced.

4.3.2. Different content, collaborative operation

To content strategy, mass-market brands are recommended to focus on showcasing product effectiveness and value for money, in a friendly and understandable way. The brands can build a full conversion mechanism by the three contact points: the middle-level KOLs are responsible for stimulating initial interest, targeted feed ads attract interested users, and the brand's live streaming is responsible for conversion and after-sales. Luxury brands need to be creating content in the areas of brand heritage, exclusive formulations and premium experiential. Live streams should highlight professional service, customize the service and signal identity, rather than casual narration. A two-stage approach is suggested: use only the best and most tone-matching influencers for brand awareness and use official live streaming for all touch points of the conversion.

5. Conclusion

Firstly, all three touchpoints have a strong positive effect on the purchase intention of cosmetics on Douyin, with the following sequence of strength: seeding by influencers over live streaming by brands over feed advertisements. Second, there is great brand-tier heterogeneity in touchpoint effects and influencers, and feed ads have strong conversion effects for mass cosmetics, while only official live streaming produces a substantial conversion effect for luxury brands. Third, brand positioning

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plays a critical role in moderating the effectiveness of the different touchpoints: official live streaming has a stronger effect on luxury purchase intention, while influencer and feed ads have weaker effects on luxury purchase intention, which were confirmed by the interaction terms analysis. There are four main limitations of this study. Firstly, self-reported measurement might create subjective response bias, and cross-sectional questionnaire data can only show correlation, and not a strict causal relationship. Second, the luxury group sample is small, and the age group focus (18-35) is not representative. Third, the 600 yuan tiering threshold is perception-based and is a bit subjective. Fourth, the study only targets Douyin and it does not compare across platforms. Longitudinal and experimental designs could be used in future studies to establish causality and to examine how varying levels of influencers, type of content and platform variations affect the effectiveness of the contact points.

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