



Research on the Social Media Marketing Activities Based on Linear Statistics

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of skincare brands' social media marketing activities (SMMA) on potential consumers' perceived brand equity and electronic word-of-mouth and the differences in responses to social media marketing activities between consumers of different genders. A self-administered questionnaire was developed and administered to 174 social media users. The result indicated that skincare SMMA, especially those containing informational features, have significant positive effects on potential consumers' brand equity perception and electronic word-of-mouth. It also indicates that there are differences in responses to brand equity from potential consumers of different genders. Females have more positive responses to brand awareness and brand loyalty than males.

Keywords: *social media marketing activities, brand equity, electronic world-of-mouth, skincare brand.*

1. INTRODUCTION

"Social Media Marketing (SMM) is the marketing method of promoting a website, brand or business by interacting with or attracting current or prospective customers through social media channels" [1]. The rapid global penetration of social media has provided new ways for businesses to interact with consumers. According to Chaffey [2], 58.4% of the world's population uses social media, and 424 million new users have gone online in the last year (January 2022). More than one-third of online users use social media to find information about brands and products, and 71% of users refer to social media recommendations when choosing services and products [3]. Companies and brands also use social media to exchange information with existing and potential consumers, which increases brand value and helps build a positive reputation [4].

With the rapid development of China's digital market, an increasing number of companies are running marketing campaigns on local Chinese social media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, Xiaohongshu and TikTok. Skincare products belong to one of the five major categories in the cosmetic industry and have a vast market in China. In 2020, the market size of China's skincare industry reached USD 41.23 billion, a 10.1% year-on-year increase, and accounted for 56.32% of the overall cosmetics market [5]. Sanny et al. [6] stated that

about 65% of millennials rely on social media for beauty product choices— as a result, social media have a significant influence on skincare companies' marketing. Many well-known skincare brands have created accounts on Chinese social media platforms. For example, on Weibo, one of China's top social media sites, SK-II, a famous skincare brand, has a following of 1.02 million followers, and the French international brand, Lancôme, has 2.31 million followers (March 2022).

In the context of the increasing use of SMM by Chinese skincare brands, it has become essential to analyze the impact of social media on brand and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). However, few marketing studies have focused on the Chinese skincare market, a market with more skincare consumers than any other. In addition, previous research related to social media marketing has focused on social media users who already use a specific product or follow a particular brand - those who already have some preference for that brand. Unlike previous studies, this research chooses potential users of skincare brands as the target respondents to investigate whether skincare brands can increase their brand equity and e-word-of-mouth through social media marketing activities. In addition, since previous research on the skincare and cosmetics industry has focused on female consumers, research on male consumers has not been extensive. Therefore, this study also explores the gender differences in consumer feedback on SMMA.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)

Social media is a platform for people to connect and share information and emotions. The two-way interaction provided by social media plays a critical role in developing business-consumer brand relationships. The rapid growth of social media use has attracted commercial firms to use it as a communication tool for advertising and marketing [4]. As Kaplan and Haenlein [7] noted more than a decade ago, social media provides marketers access to consumers in online social communities and allows them to establish direct personal connections with those consumers. Firm-created social media contents help marketers reduce consumer prejudices and misconceptions regarding brands, and the exchange of information between marketers and users also helps increase the brand value [8].

The service-dominant theory proposed by Vargo and Lusch [9] places the customer at the center of a company's marketing, emphasizing the critical role of the consumer in establishing not only a product or service's value but also the value of the brand. Customers positively impact brand development when they are understood to be essential participants in brand value creation [10]. Social media shifts some of the power of shaping the brand image to the consumer through user-generated social media content [11]. It has also changed how branded content is developed, delivered, and consumed, allowing users to connect and create content online to shape the brand [10].

Multiple studies for different industries have categorized the components of SMMA. In Yadav and Rahman's [8] study, interactivity, personalization, word-of-mouth (WOM), informativeness, and trendiness were used to assess SMMA in e-commerce. In researching social media marketing campaigns for the luxury industry, five characteristics were highlighted in Kim and Ko's [4] study: customization, trendiness, interaction, and word-of-mouth. According to Sano [12], SMMA for the insurance services industry includes perceived risk, interaction, fashion, and customization. The airline industry's SMMA was defined by Seo and Park [13] as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, personalization, and perceived risk. This study builds on previous research focusing on the three components of informativeness, interaction, and customization in SMMA for skincare brands.

2.2. Brand Equity

Companies brand their products and services to distinguish them from competitors and facilitate consumer purchase decisions [14]. A strong brand creates sustainable competitive advantages for a company; it builds a barrier to restrain competitors and helps a

company maintain a price premium [15]. Brand equity in marketing refers to the value of a brand; substantial brand equity helps organizations build long-term connections with consumers and enhance positive word-of-mouth communication [14]. Kim & Ko [4] indicated that corporate marketing activities based on social media help to enhance customer-based brand equity. Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between brand equity created by social media marketing campaigns and future purchase behavior [4].

This research focused on three dimensions of brand equity: brand awareness, brand loyalty, and perceived quality.

- Brand awareness refers to the ability of consumers to identify and understand a brand. [16]. Consumers' high brand awareness implies a higher likelihood and convenience of a particular brand appearing to consumers [17]. Moreover, brand awareness stems from brand knowledge formed by consumers' beliefs, feelings, and prior consumer experiences, which strongly impacts consumers' intention to choose a brand and reduces product selection and evaluation risks [17].
- Brand loyalty refers to consumers' purchase tendency caused by attachment to brands [18]. Positive output created by consumers can increase brand loyalty, leading to further brand preference [19]. Furthermore, brand loyalty can increase a company's ability to raise prices, reduce switching costs and retain customers [14].
- Consumers evaluate a brand's image and value by comparing it to competing brands, which is known as perceived quality. [15]. Gaber and Elsamadicy [14] stated that when measuring perceived quality, the actual quality of the product is not crucial, while expectations and evaluations of the brand quality in consumers' minds are essential measurement indicators. Perceived quality has a positive role in securing product premiums, improving brand extensions, and increasing consumer purchase intentions [14].

2.3. Electronic word-of-mouth

Seo and Park [13] divided consumer responses to SMMA into behavioral and emotional responses, where behavioral responses specifically refer to consumers' electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) about the brand. Electronic word-of-mouth, the exchange of information between individuals through social networking channels, is one of the primary sources of information for purchase decisions [20]. Traditional advertising has less of an impact on consumers than word-of-mouth advertising. Compared to traditional advertising, word-of-mouth has higher relevance, empathy, and credibility for consumers

[20]. Therefore, before purchasing a product or service, consumers often seek advice from familiar people or browse information posted by previous users online as a reference.

"Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth is the unrestricted generation and dissemination of relevant information about brands and products among online users based on social media" [4]. Given where the electronic word-of-mouth is published, i.e., on the Internet and the written form of the reviews, it has the advantage of fast dissemination and ease of access compared to the traditional word of mouth [20]. Opinion seeking, opinion giving, and opinion passing are the three main perspectives on using electronic word-of-mouth in social media [21]. Considering that opinion-seeking behavior usually occurs before the purchase decision, this study explores the effectiveness of SMMA by considering opinion giving and opinion passing in electronic word-of-mouth as consumers' responses to SMMA.

3. METHOD

3.1. Sample

This study used a survey to collect data through an online questionnaire. A total of 194 questionnaires were collected over three weeks (from February 26, 2022, to March 18, 2022). After invalidating 20 questionnaires that took less than one minute to answer or selecting the no option to the question 'Do you use social media', 174 questionnaires were analyzed.

The demographic distribution of respondents is shown in Table 1. Approximately 70% of the respondents were female, and 30% were male. Respondents were predominantly Chinese, with three-quarters between 18-22 years old and one-fifth between 23 and 19 years old. This indicates that the research was carried out with a younger demographic of consumers who are potentially open and more inclined to new things and to learn about and choose new brands. The average monthly personal disposable income of the respondents was RMB 3,500 per month. Of these, 36% had a disposable income of less than RMB 1,500 per month and 51% were in the RMB 1,500 - 3,500 range.

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHICS

		n	%
Gender	Female	121	69.54
	Male	53	30.46
Age	18-22	132	75.86
	23-29	39	22.41
	30-45	2	1.15
	45-59	1	0.57
Monthly disposable	Below 1500	63	36.21
	1500-3500	89	51.15

income	3500-5500	12	6.9
	5500-10000	9	5.17
	Above 10000	1	0.57

3.2. Composition of the questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of three main sections. The first section consisted of basic information about the respondents, including demographic information (age, gender, and income) and the use of social media and skincare products. The second section asked respondents to determine the importance of the different SMMA elements (informativeness, interaction, and customization) and two primary content sources (firm-created and user-generated). The third section examined respondents' post-SMMA reactions to brand equity and eWOM.

The first section collected basic information through single-choice and multiple-choice questions. In the second and third sections, this study used a five-point Richter scale to measure and assign values to the scale. The Richter scale is an interval scale that measures complex attitudes in multiple dimensions and allows researchers to perform various statistical analyses [22]. In the second section, the scale ranged from 1-very unimportant to 5-very important, and it ranged from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree in the third section. When setting up the second part of the questionnaire, questions related to brand equity referred to Godey et al., [23] research questionnaire, and in the third section, questions related to brand equity and eWOM referred to the research questionnaires by Gaber & Elsamadicy [14] and Kim & Ko [4].

3.3. Data Analysis Method

This study used SPSS software to perform descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, linear regression analysis, and T-test on the collected data. The study first used descriptive statistics to understand respondents' demographic information, basic information about social media and skincare use, and SMMA content and source preferences. Secondly, Pearson correlation analysis was used to analyze whether there was a correlation between SMMA, brand equity and, eWOM. Two linear regression analyses followed correlation analysis to examine the effect of the independent variable (SMMA) on each of the two dependent variables (brand equity and eWOM). In addition, a T-test was conducted to explore gender differences.

4. FINDING

4.1. Basic Data

The study collected basic information about respondents' use of social media and skincare products.

Respondents spent approximately 3 hours per day on social media, higher than the world average of 2 hours and 27 minutes [24]. Data from the study showed that the top three most popular local social media platforms in China are WeChat, QQ and Weibo. In terms of skincare product selection and use, most respondents had used skincare products (94%). Respondents had a high frequency of skincare use, with more than three-fifths of respondents saying they use skincare products daily, and about 16% use at least 3-5 days a week. In terms of channels to learn and choose skincare products, recommendations from familiar people and social media had a strong influence. More than four-fifths of all respondents said they choose skincare products based on recommendations from people they know, and nearly half (47%) of respondents used social media to learn about and choose skincare products. Considering that SMMA and word-of-mouth greatly influence consumers' brand selection behavior, it is necessary for brands to pay attention to marketing activities on social media.

TABLE 2. SMMA CONTENT AND SOURCE

Items	Mean
Firm-created content	3.765
User-generated content	4.115
Informativeness	4.050
Interaction	3.865
Customization	3.915

Table 2 indicates the content and source preferences of potential consumers for SMMA. By comparing the means, the components of SMMA that consumers value most were informativeness (4.05), followed by customization (3.91) and interaction (3.87). Potential consumers expected a brand's SMMA can provide adequate and reliable information. In terms of the source of content, user-generated content was more important to potential consumers than firm-created content. When viewing content from SMMA, potential consumers were more likely to follow content generated by other users.

4.2. The role of SMMA in brand equity and eWOM

Reliability analysis

This study analyzed the internal consistency of the measurement scale by conducting reliability through Cronbach's α . Hair et al. [25] stated that the construct has reliability when Cronbach's α value is more than 0.700. In analyzing the validity, this study determined the validity by determining the value of KMO through factor analysis. The data were convincing when the KMO values exceeded 0.600 [26].

TABLE 3. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY ANALYSIS

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's α	KMO
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Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)	Informativeness 1	0.786	0.881	0.865
	Interaction 2	0.784		
	Customization 1	0.820		
	Informativeness 2	0.748		
	Interaction 2	0.788		
	Customization 2	0.829		
Brand Equity	Brand awareness 1	0.837	0.936	0.920
	Brand awareness 2	0.833		
	Brand awareness 3	0.858		
	Brand loyalty 1	0.902		
	Brand loyalty 2	0.878		
	Perceived quality 1	0.876		
	Perceived quality 2	0.770		
Electronic word-of-mouth	eWOM 1	0.902	0.886	0.740
	eWOM 2	0.918		
	eWOM 3	0.887		

From Table 3, the Cronbach's α values for each variable ranged from 0.881 ~ 0.936 and were above 0.700. Therefore, the survey instrument of this study was reliable and free from random error. Table 2 further demonstrates that the KMO values for all variables were significantly higher than 0.600, indicating that the data was reliable.

Correlation analysis

The study examined the correlation between the three variables SMMA, brand equity and eWOM through Pearson correlation analysis. For correlation and regression analysis, the average score of numerous construct elements was utilized. In determining the correlation α , p (2-tailed) value less than 0.05 implies a strong correlation. The value of r represents correlation, with $r > 0$ indicating positive correlation and $r < 0$ indicating negative correlation, and the larger the r , the stronger the correlation. Table 4 presents the data from correlation analysis, with p values less than 0.05 and positive r values from 0.443 to 0.712. Therefore, the correlation between SMMA, brand equity and eWOM was significant and positive. The strongest correlation was found between SMMA and brand equity ($r= 0.712$, $p<0.01$), followed by the correlation between brand equity and eWOM ($r=0.548$, $p<0.01$), and the correlation between SMMA and eWOM ($r=0.443$, $p<0.01$).

TABLE 4. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

	1	2	3	n	Sig. (2-tailed)
(1) SMMA	1			174	.000
(2) Brand Equity	0.712**	1		174	.000
(3) eWOM	0.443**	0.548**	1	174	.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Effects of SMMA on brand equity and Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)

The study used SMMA as the independent variable and explored the effect of SMMA on brand equity and e-word-of-mouth separately through two linear regression analyses. Table 5 shows the analysis output with brand equity as the dependent variable. The Adjusted R Square= 0.505 indicates that the dependent variable's variance is explained by 50% by the independent variable, and the data adequately fits the regression model. Since $F=117.191$, $p<0.001$, the model was appropriate and corresponds to the data collected. In addition, the covariance statistics with each variance inflation factor (VIF) value below ten and tolerance values above 0.10 verified the absence of multicollinearity between the independent variables [19]. Overall, the model fit the collected data. Further analysis of the numbers yielded that $\beta_1=0.712$, $t<0.001$, which means that for this population, SMMA significantly and positively affects brand equity. The analysis results showed that a high-quality SMMA helps improve the perception of brand equity by potential users of the brand.

TABLE 5. LINEAR REGRESSION 1

	Standardized Coefficient β	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
				Tolerance	VIF
SMM A	0.712	13.311	.000	1.000	1.000
Adjusted R square	0.505				
F value	117.191 ($p<0.01$)				
Dependent variable: Brand equity					
Notes: VIF, Variance inflation factor					

Using the same analysis method, Table 6 shows the output of eWOM as the dependent variable. The Adjusted R Square= 0.192; $F=42.114$, $p<0.01$ and $VIF=1.00$, so the model fits the collected data. Since $\beta_2=0.443$, $t<0.001$, SMMA also has a significant positive effect on eWOM. SMMA can help to increase eWOM among potential consumers. In addition, since $\beta_2<\beta_1$, SMMA has a greater positive impact on brand equity than eWOM.

TABLE 6. LINEAR REGRESSION 2

	Standardized Coefficient β	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
				Tolerance	VIF
SMMA	0.443	6.490	.000	1.000	1.000
Adjusted R square	0.192				
F value	42.114 ($p<0.01$)				
Dependent variable: eWOM					
Notes: VIF, Variance inflation factor					

4.3. Gender Difference

In this study, independent T-tests were conducted to compare the responses of potential consumers of different genders on SMMA in terms of brand equity and eWOM for skincare products. In terms of the impact on brand equity, both males and females believed that a brand's SMMA was beneficial in improving the perception of brand equity. The SMMA of skincare brands was more conducive to increasing the perception of brand equity among female consumers, especially in two dimensions of brand awareness and brand loyalty. In the three dimensions of brand equity, there was a significant difference in brand awareness between females ($M= 4.09$, $SD= 0.61$) and males ($M= 3.75$, $SD= 0.92$); $t(73) = 2.42$, $p= 0.018$. Meanwhile, in brand loyalty, the difference between females ($M= 4.07$, $SD= 0.65$) and males ($M= 3.72$, $SD= 0.96$) also differed significantly; $t(73) = 2.48$, $p= 0.015$. However, the data showed that there was no significant difference in perceived value between females ($M= 3.99$, $SD= 0.65$) and males ($M= 3.77$, $SD= 0.85$); $t(172) = 1.89$, $p= 0.061$. Overall, female consumers tend to give more positive feedback to brands that have undergone SMMA than males. Among potential consumers of skincare brands, females had significantly higher brand awareness and brand loyalty with a high-quality SMMA than males.

In terms of eWOM, there was no significant gender difference in the effect of SMMA on it, $t(172) = 1.75$, $p = 0.082$. Despite women ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.88$) attained higher scores than men ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.02$). Female potential consumers had better eWOM for brands under the SMMA than men, but this gender difference in eWOM was not significant.

TABLE 7. INDEPENDENT T-TEST

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Brand Awareness	F	121	4.0882	0.61278
	M	53	3.7547	0.91789

Brand Loyalty	F	121	4.0744	0.64763
	M	53	3.7170	0.95831
Perceived Quality	F	121	3.9959	0.64710
	M	53	3.7736	0.85241
eWOM	F	121	3.5179	0.87976
	M	53	3.2516	1.02304

TABLE 8. INDEPENDENT T-TEST

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Brand Awareness	2.419	73.077	0.018	0.33344	0.13784
Brand Loyalty	2.478	73.609	0.015	0.35740	0.14420
Perceived Quality	1.886	172	0.061	0.22228	0.11784
eWOM	1.747	172	0.082	0.26633	0.15243

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of social media marketing activities for skincare brands on potential consumers' brand equity perceptions and electronic word-of-mouth and the differences in feedback on the effects of SMMA among potential consumers of different genders. The study results indicated that SMMA helps increase perceived brand equity and electronic word-of-mouth for potential users. In addition, there were significant differences in feedback on brand awareness and brand loyalty among prospective consumers of different genders under social media marketing. Females tended to provide more positive feedback compared to males.

The findings from this study complement those from previous social media marketing research. In terms of brands, this study complemented the current SMMA literature by using a sample of potential consumers of the brands. Most of the existing studies were geared toward existing consumers who were already spending money on a brand, and these studies indicated the correlation of SMMA in improving the brand experience [27] and the positive impact of SMMA on the brand association, brand awareness, brand consciousness, and brand image [4, 19]. This research indicated that SMMA has the same effect of increasing brand equity for potential consumers as it does for existing consumers of the brand. Furthermore, this study examined the skincare industry in the Chinese market, and unlike previous studies, this study added to explore the differences in feedback on the effects of SMMA by gender. This gender difference

analysis revealed that female consumers are more positively influenced by SMMA than male consumers from SMMA than male consumers, and this difference was particularly evident in the increased brand awareness and brand loyalty from SMMA.

This study has significant implications for managers, especially those working on skincare brands that plan to engage potential consumers through SMMA in China. Firstly, in terms of social media marketing platform selection, WeChat, QQ, and Weibo can be the primary choices. Considering the high frequency of use by consumers, SMMA on these platforms is more likely to be noticed by consumers. Secondly, in terms of SMMA content selection, for skincare brands that want to attract potential consumers, it is essential to focus on the informativeness in SMMA. Brands should focus on the ability of SMMA to provide information and ensure that the information is reliable and accurate. Thirdly, given the positive effects of SMMA on brand equity and word-of-mouth, skincare brands can connect with potential consumers through social media. Effective use of digital media can help increase brand equity and improve eWOM through potential consumers. Finally, considering the differences in SMMA feedback by gender, skincare brands can increase social media marketing targeting female consumers. For example, a company can increase the frequency of marketing female-oriented products on social media platforms.

The limitations and future directions of this study are shown below. The sample age of the study was focused on the young consumer group of 18-29 years old, who were highly adaptable to accepting new technologies. At the same time, the study mainly focused on consumers at low and middle-income levels, with the sample data concentrated at income levels below RMB 3500. Middle-aged and older consumers, as well as consumers at higher income levels, were not studied. Considering the demand for skincare products among middle-aged and elderly consumers and the high purchasing power of high-income consumers, these groups need to be further studied. Differences between different income levels and ages could also be studied. This will help brands tailor the content of marketing campaigns to different consumers. Finally, in terms of SMMA content, only three components and two generalized sources (companies and users) were covered in this study. Future studies could be conducted to analyze the specific content of SMMA in detail. For example, the analysis of content generated for the celebrity effect and key opinion leaders could be considered in terms of user-generated content.

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