



# Exploring the Continuance Intention of Young Chinese Females to Use Social Media: The Case of Xiaohongshu

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**Abstract.** Chinese netizens' social media demand is continuously rising, with young users receiving increased attention from social media companies and researchers. However, few studies have conducted in-depth research concentrated on the demand intentions of young Chinese women. Xiaohongshu is a representative female-oriented social network in China. We collected 329 valid questionnaire responses to conduct an empirical study on Xiaohongshu, analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling. The results show that: (1) perceived ease of use, reputation, and the perception of self-improvement are crucial for retaining young women's intention; (2) perceived entertainment is an important intermediary for perceived ease of use to affect reputation, while normative influence has a strong impact on reputation; (3) perceived entertainment and life assistance occupy a prominent place in perceived self-improvement on continuous use intentions; and (4) perceived entertainment, normative influence, and help with purchasing decisions play an important role in life assistance.

**Keywords:** Social media · Use intentions · Young Chinese women · Technology Acceptance Model · Uses and Gratifications Theory · Social Identity Theory

## 1 Introduction

Owing to modern mobile and network technology, social media on which users can generate, share, and discuss content in a highly interactive way have grown tremendously worldwide [1]. According to the Digital 2022 report, the number of social media users worldwide reached 4.95 billion as of January 2022 and is still growing rapidly [2]. Social media adoption has been phenomenal, especially among youth [3]. Some scholars have found that young adults are the predominant users of social networking sites (SNSs) [4]. Digital media and social networks continue to change the way we communicate, share, and consume information in our daily lives [5]. A massive number of young people use social networking sites for daily social connections. Nevertheless, the scope, motivations, and methods of using these sites are not clearly known [6]. On the one hand, individuals utilize SNSs for a variety of reasons, including social and individual needs

that vary from person to person [7]. On the other hand, the value and long-term viability of a social networking site are heavily reliant on user participation and readiness to share the site with others [8]. Numerous social media platforms fail to maintain their users' interests for long periods of time [9]. As a result, studying the factors that impact users' retention intentions is critical not only for SNS providers but also for businesses that utilize social media for marketing [10].

However, many studies have overlooked potential group differences when examining SNS users' persistent use intentions. In particular, there are considerable disparities in information-technology usage-patterns between males and females [11]. Some scholars have found that gender influences social media users' behavior and intention [12]. Based on previous research, gender differences may significantly impact users' continued willingness to use an SNS [13]. Today, women are more likely to use social media, and a differentiated approach is needed to encourage continued use [9].

We found that no prior research has investigated the factors on young female users' continued use intention of social media. Recent studies on social media users have primarily focused on the addictive effects of SNSs on youth [14, 15]. Thus, the current study focuses on gaining a better understanding of the factors leading to young females' continuous willingness to adopt social media, with an emphasis on young Chinese women's embracement of Xiaohongshu, also known as RED.

China has the world's largest information and communication network, and the number of Chinese Internet users will reach 1.032 billion in 2021 [16]. Thus, the Chinese social media market has received much attention. Xiaohongshu was founded in 2013, and users document their lives through text, pictures, and videos and share them with others online. [17], nearly 300 million pieces of content are published every day [18]. As indicated by a 2021 Xiaohongshu user report of the Qian-Gua Database [19], Xiaohongshu had more than 100 million monthly active users in 2020, with its e-commerce exceeding 10 billion [20]. Chinese female users make up the overwhelming majority of users, accounting for 90.41% of total users, and 83.31% of the active users are youths between 18 and 34 years old. Hence, Xiaohongshu is known as a representative SNS for young Chinese females. QuestMobile shows that the proportion of female mobile Internet users in China reached 547 million in 2021. With the fast growth of Chinese female users, female-dominated social media are increasing, and studies on the diverse aspects of female users' media have also arisen. Related studies are largely concerned with the commercial operation aspect of SNSs. A number of scholars use Xiaohongshu as a case study to investigate social e-commerce and provide in-depth analysis and recommendations [21]. Scholars have explored the effect of platform content on users' purchase intention [22], Xiaohongshu's female-positioned market strategy [23], and the relationship of commercialization development with platform governance [24].

In general, in the increasingly competitive SNS landscape, user research on related media has important practical significance and theoretical value. This study will extend existing theories to explore the influencing factors of young Chinese women users' willingness to continue using Xiaohongshu to stay abreast with trends in digital society. Most importantly, the study will not only fill in some research gaps mentioned above but also help online platform operators develop appropriate strategies for this segment

of the population. In addition, social media marketing businesses can also benefit from the findings on this topic.

## 2 Literature Review

In the literature, few studies specifically focus on young women's willingness to use social media. To provide a theoretical basis, we developed a conceptual model for the current study, drawing on Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) [11, 25] and Social Influence Theory [26]. Our conceptualization is also explained in terms of Uses and Gratifications Theory [27], concentrating on the factors that may motivate female users to continue using social media.

### 2.1 Social Influence

Social Influence Theory states that media may stimulate interaction and communication but in lack of personal experience, potential users rely more on peers and significant others such as family and friends before actually engaging with the medium [28]. In other words, social influence is a determinant of human behavior [29] even if the main value proposition of SNSs is to facilitate interpersonal relationships [9]. Whether individuals use SNSs is not solely due to their own desires but is influenced by other people's views or social evaluation [29]. This conceptual thinking is based on a person's desire to conform to the opinions of others to strengthen ties with group members. Normative influences play a crucial role in individuals' use of social networking technologies [30, 31]. In addition, reputation can also influence users' active engagement with social media [32].

It is worth noting that existing research findings support that for SNSs, social influences are more important to females' identity formation than they are to males [33]. When adopting innovative technologies, women are more influenced by other people's opinions and relationship applications [34]. Women also place a higher value on social connections when using social networking services [35], and may go to virtual communities to seek social support [36].

### 2.2 Technology Acceptance Model

Many previous studies have explored and confirmed the relationship between the TAM model and the continuous use of SNSs, along with their social impact [37, 38]. TAM is commonly used to forecast the predictors of people's adoption of information technology [11, 25], and is the most widely accepted framework for interpreting the user's technical understanding processes. Perceived convenience and usefulness are determinants that influence youth's acceptance and use of SNSs [3]. Certain scholars claim that both perceived usefulness and perceived entertainment will motivate people to utilize social media [39]. Perception has been shown to influence attitudes and is a direct predictor of motivation for sustained stimulation [40]. Furthermore, the role of perceived utility as a moderator in the relationship between perceived convenience and motivation to use has been confirmed by a large body of empirical research [41, 42]. Perceived playfulness is another main reason for young people to actively use social media [43–45]. Fun and

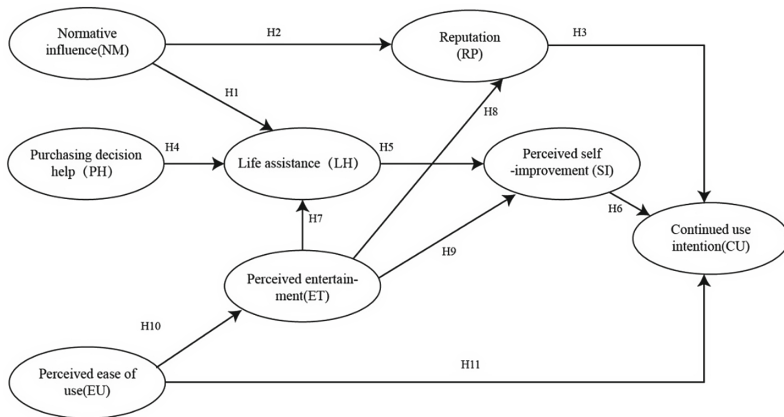
relaxation received by playing or connecting with others could be defined as perceived entertainment [46]. Entertainment explains why young people enjoy using SNSs [47], which helps to understand why young women are generally willing to use social media. Although the TAM model aids in discovering the various factors that affect people's intentions to use technology, it also has limitations in practice to fully explain the reasons why young women continue to utilize a particular technology. Therefore, this study will also incorporate Uses and Gratifications for in-depth analysis.

### 2.3 Uses and Gratifications

According to Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), individuals use media according to their diverse demands [48]. Due to needs and expectations that motivate audiences to use media, use intentions can be vaguely equated with audience needs or expectations [49]. Individuals will continue to utilize social media if they feel satisfied [50]. Therefore, this theory helps to explain the factors influencing continued use [51]. Specifically, McQuail, Blumler, and Brown [52] proposed that environmental monitoring, interpersonal maintenance, personal identity, and entertainment are the main types of media motivation. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch [27] summarized media-user behavior impact-factors as "social influences, user psychology, user expectations, media exposure with demand satisfaction." Relationship building, self-improvement, knowledge access, and enjoyment are important social media usage gratifications [9]. Young users are motivated by self-improvement to actively participate in SNSs [53]. The value that users gain from being able to develop themselves is defined as self-improvement and both men and women rely on SNSs for self-improvement [54]. Although their areas of interest differ, users feel self-improvement when they communicate information about careers [55] and appearance [33, 56]. Although women and men achieve self-improvement through social media in different ways, they both gain satisfaction. Information should be used to motivate users to seek information content, while information benefits satisfy users' purposeful information needs, for example, obtaining financial advantages or valuable information in everyday life. Women's attitudes toward social information and patterns of behavior in social settings differ from those of men [57]. Combining insights from UGT and TAM, we divided perceived usefulness of the TAM model into life assistance and help with purchase decisions, as well as self-improvement. Next, we introduce a model of factors that impact social media use among young females, assuming that continued use intentions toward Xiaohongshu is fed by, among other, perceived ease of use, perceived entertainment, and factors pertaining to social influence.

## 3 Research Model and Hypothesis

Figure 1 proposes two usage-related perceptual factors from TAM, namely, perceived ease of use and usefulness, while refining usefulness as perceived entertainment, help with purchasing decisions, and life assistance. In addition, social influence factors (subjective norms and social reputation) were added as factors that affect young Chinese women's willingness to continue using Xiaohongshu. The definitions and interrelationships of the variables in the research model are discussed below.



**Fig. 1.** Factors theoretically feeding into continued use intentions.

### 3.1 Normative Influence and Reputation

Previous research has identified that social influence is a key mechanism for users' intention to adopt social media [58]. In this study, social influence is divided into normative influence and social media reputation.

#### Normative Influence

The impact of subjective norms on SNS users' adoption willingness has been studied extensively. Normative influences could be regarded as the impact of following the opinions of people around users [59], and users may continue to use social media even if they do not develop positive attitudes toward SNSs. For example, evaluations from social influences such as friends can influence attitudes toward SNSs [60]. Individuals may adopt social media to create or maintain a steady relationship with the communities to which they belong [61]. In this way, the influence of other people's opinions may also be reflected in the individual assessment of reputation and the life assistance of social media. In general, individuals are more likely to perceive social media as having a good reputation and being helpful to their lives (e.g., social interaction or information provision) when the SNS has a good reputation in the context in which the individual lives. Therefore, Fig. 1 exhibits the following hypotheses:

H1: Normative behaviors positively impact life assistance.

H2: Normative behaviors play a positive role in terms of reputation.

#### Reputation

Users' sentiments and continued intentions are significantly influenced by the reputation of an SNS [62]. Because reputation represents the social recognition of that medium, it can greatly influence the user's initial assessment. In the preliminary stages of adopting social media, a good or bad reputation may be an important factor in young people's attitudes while deciding whether to continue to use the platform. Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated: H3: Reputation has a positive impact on users' continued intentions to use.

### 3.2 Perceived Usefulness

Perceived usefulness reflects the user's subjective assessment of whether the use of a particular technology will improve personal performance [25]. We will break down perceived usefulness into several dimensions. Specifically, people can use social media to facilitate the interchange of information and promote the advancement of ideas through social networks and virtual communities [63]. It is worth noting that although the manners in which young people spend their time have transformed in the digital era, their core self-developmental goals have not [6]. Thus, knowledge sharing and collaborative learning have become commonplace among youth on social media. The perceived usefulness of Xiaohongshu can be defined as the degree to which young females believe that the SNS can help them with their life, make purchasing decisions more easily and effectively, pursue self-improvement, and enjoy entertainment.

#### Purchasing Decision Help

Social media can be used to study users' internet usage habits, product information searching and browsing, and consumer decision-making processes [8]. Additionally, social media are increasingly considered a marketing platform, and companies advertise on social media to imperceptibly alter consumers' purchasing decisions [64]. By using social media platforms, advertisers can better tailor their distribution of social media content to customers' preferences to facilitate their purchasing decisions [65]. In other words, users rely on information from social media to consume and exercise purchase decisions; in this manner, social media is helpful to users' lives. Currently, Xiaohongshu is one of the world's largest shopping sharing communities and is a must-have "shopping tool" for billions of young consumers in more than 200 countries and regions [66], which illustrates the high degree of assistance in purchasing decisions that this SNS offers to users. Thus, Fig. 1 features the following hypothesis: H4: Help with purchasing decisions has a positive effect on life assistance.

#### Life Assistance

The satisfaction of using social media to find and obtain relevant information is one of the main factors that motivate social media use [67]. Women show interest in topics on social media [68]. Individuals are increasingly using social media to gain information [69]. Through social media, users can easily search for news and life information [70]. For example, Xiaohongshu has an abundance of content on shopping, beauty, food, traveling, and users' personal experiences [71]. This information that is relevant to users' lives may influence young women's desire to improve their appearance or professional life. Therefore, Fig. 1 proposes the following hypothesis: H5: Life assistance has a positive impact in terms of perceived self-improvement.

#### Perceived Self-improvement

Self-improvement, which represents the goal to improve individuals' self-esteem and social status, is a major motivation of young social media users [53]. Therefore, users make conscious information choices on SNSs to be seen and presented in a positive light to others [72], which has a practical effect on self-improvement. These benefits motivate

users to continue using social media. Therefore, Fig. 1 claims that: H6: Perceived self-improvement has a positive impact in terms of intention to continuously use social media.

### **Perceived Entertainment**

People are increasingly turning to social media platforms for amusement and entertainment [73]. Perceived playfulness is subjective, personal [74, 75], experiential and emotional[76]. Perceived entertainment has a more important impact than perceived usefulness on young people who use the internet mainly for pleasure [8]. Perceived entertainment experiences may influence multiple perceptions. Figure 1, then, proposes that: H7: Perceived entertainment has a positive impact in terms of helping users in their daily lives; H8: Perceived entertainment has a positive impact on reputation; H9: Perceived entertainment has a positive impact on perceived self-improvement.

### **3.3 Perceived Ease of Use**

The positive impact of perceived convenience also influences users' continuous intentions [77]. Users do not want to encounter any difficulties when using technology, so the more difficult it is to use technology, the less likely that it will be used. If users find it easy to operate and learn how to use social media, then they will be able to accept and use it. The ease of use of this technology indirectly interferes with users' experience and directly influences their perception of entertainment [78]. In Fig. 1, this reasoning is represented as follows: H10: Users' perceived ease of use has a positive effect on perceived entertainment; H11: User perceived ease of use has a positive impact in terms of intention to continued use.

## **4 Method**

### **4.1 Questionnaire Development**

To select the target audience, the first part of our questionnaire collected demographic information. After screening, selected respondents rated Likert-type items on a six-point rating scale for (Appendix 1): Purchasing decision help, Life assistance, Perceived self-improvement, Perceived entertainment, Perceived ease of use, Normative influence, Reputation, Perceived usefulness, Continued use intention). Respondents scored these perceptions of Xiaohongshu on a scale from 1 to 6, representing completely disagree, disagree, partially disagree, partially agree, agree, and completely agree, respectively. Measurement scales and literature sources can be found in Table 1.

### **4.2 Data Collection**

After obtaining approval from the institutional Ethical Review Board (filed under HSEARS20200204003), the questionnaire was distributed online via platforms such as Xiaohongshu and WeChat, resulting into a total of 478 responses. After screening for target-group members, 329 valid questionnaires remained, filled out by female Chinese

users between the ages of 18 and 34, who gave their consent to use their anonymized data for research purposes. The largest proportion were between the ages of 18–25, accounting for approximately 77.5% of the sample. Additionally, 66% of the respondents were undergraduate students.

**Table 1.** Items of Questionnaire Design

<b>Fit indices</b>	<b>Recommend value</b>	
Life assistance (LH)	LH1: I will browse the life suggestion posts on Xiaohongshu	[71]
	LH2: The life-suggestion posts on Xiaohongshu give me advice	
	LH3: If I encounter problems in my daily life, I will search and check the experience posts shared by others on Xiaohongshu	
Purchasing decision help (PH)	PH1: I am willing to buy products recommended by the Xiaohongshu platform	[64, 66]
	PH2: I bought something I like because of content on Xiaohongshu	
	PH3: Sometimes, I don't have certain demands, but after browsing Xiaohongshu, I will have a desire to buy	
Perceived entertainment (ET)	ET1: When I'm bored, I will use Xiaohongshu to pass the time	[38, 79, 80]
	ET2: Being recommended by Xiaohongshu is a happy experience	
	ET3: I think Xiaohongshu community is very interesting	
Perceived self-improvement (SI)	SI1: I think Xiaohongshu is helpful for self-improvement	[53]
	SI2: Xiaohongshu helps to improve personal image (such as makeup, dressing)	
	SI3: I got information on Xiaohongshu that is helpful for study/career	
Perceive ease of use (EU)	EU1: Xiaohongshu App is easy to download and install	[31, 79]
	EU2: It is not hard for me to use Xiaohongshu	
	EU3: I can use the regular functions of Xiaohongshu proficiently	
Normative influence (NM)	NM1: Many people in my social network (friends, family, and classmates) use Xiaohongshu	[31, 43]
	NM2: Many friends recommended Xiaohongshu to me	

*(continued)*



**Table 1.** (continued)

Fit indices	Recommend value	
	NM3: After using Xiaohongshu, it's easier to integrate into the social circle (for example, have more chat topics)	
Reputation (RP)	RP1: Many people have good comments on Xiaohongshu	[62]
	RP2: I rarely read bad news about Xiaohongshu	
	RP3: I think Xiaohongshu has a good social reputation	
Continued Use Intention (CU)	CU1: I plan to continue using Xiaohongshu	[25]
Reputation (RP)	RP1: Many people have good comments on Xiaohongshu	[62]
	RP2: I rarely read bad news about Xiaohongshu	
	RP3: I think Xiaohongshu has a good social reputation	

## 5 Data Analysis and Results

### 5.1 Reliability and Validity Analysis

#### Reliability and Convergent Validity

Reliability, validity, and model fit were analyzed to test the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The data shows the results of these tests. Cronbach's alpha ranged from .81 to .93, all above the .70 cut-off point, indicating a high degree of reliability of the internal consistency of the measurement scales. Convergent validity was evaluated through item factor-loadings (k), composite reliability (CR), and average variation extraction (AVE). The factor loadings (k) for all items exceeded .60 and were significant. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was greater than .50, and the composite reliabilities (CR) exceeded .70. All coefficients met the normative criteria. In summary, the measurement model was reliable.

#### Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity requires that a measure does not reflect other variables than the one intended and so for each construct, the square root of the AVE must be greater than the correlation with the other constructs. It shows that the average variance value was consistently greater than the correlations. All variables are distinguishable to some degree.

#### Model Degree of Fit

Model Degree of Fit shows the results of construct validity, which is important to the model as a measure of fit, coefficients meeting the relevant requirements. Goodness-of-fit index (GFI) is .843, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .070, and the comparative fit index (CFI) is .927. All of these values indicate that the model provided good fit.

## 5.2 Hypotheses Test

To test the 11 hypotheses, we conducted Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in AMOS. *R*-square and path coefficients indicate the extent to which the data support the hypothetical model. Table 2 shows that all paths were significant, confirming all of our hypotheses.

Figure 2 shows the *R*-square and path coefficients for the theoretical model. The results indicate a moderately influential relationship between most variables. Intention to continue using the platform was influenced by three variables: reputation and perceived self-improvement. All three variables were directly influenced by perceived ease of use, which is the most positively contributing factor. For continued use intention,  $R^2 = .79$ , meaning that the three incoming variables explained 78.7% of its variance (Fig. 2). It is worth noting that perceived entertainment had a certain degree of influence on life assistance, reputation, and perceived self-improvement. The path coefficient for perceived ease of use on perceived entertainment was .80, showing a large contribution: Easier to use was having more fun.

**Table 2.** Path Analysis

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	t	S.E.	Sign.	Support
H1: Normative influence → Life assistance	0.273	4.574	0.050	***	Yes
H2: Normative influence → Reputation	0.445	7.536	0.059	***	Yes
H3: Reputation → Continued use intention	0.296	5.574	0.050	***	Yes
H4: Purchasing decision help → Life assistance	0.427	5.716	0.067	***	Yes
H5: Life assistance → Perceived self-improvement	0.460	6.464	0.085	***	Yes
H6: Perceived self-improvement → Continued use intention	0.297	4.824	0.058	***	Yes
H7: Perceived entertainment → Life assistance	0.278	3.737	0.068	***	Yes
H8: Perceived entertainment → Reputation	0.486	7.749	0.068	***	Yes
H9: Perceived entertainment → Perceived self-improvement	0.485	6.773	0.077	***	Yes
H10: Perceived ease of use → Perceived entertainment	0.800	12.445	0.069	***	Yes
H11: Perceived ease of use → Continued use intention	0.414	6.623	0.068	***	Yes

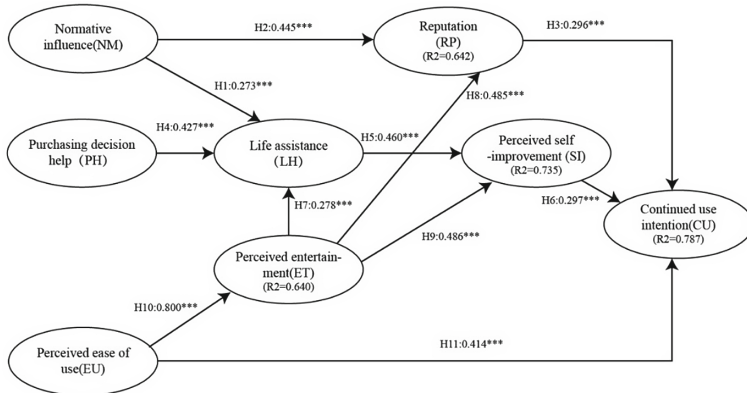


Fig. 2. SEM results.

## 6 Discussion and Conclusion

### 6.1 Key Findings

To study young Chinese females' continued intention to use the social media platform Xiaohongshu, we started from Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) [11, 24] flanked by Uses and Gratifications Theory [27] as well as Social Influence Theory [26]. We found that perceived ease of use, reputation, and self-improvement had a positive impact on users' willingness to continue using the platform. Perceived ease of use had a significant positive impact in terms of entertainment. Subjective norms had a significant positive impact in terms of reputation. In addition, entertainment and life assistance did not have a direct effect but played a strong mediating role in intentions to continuously use Xiaohongshu.

### 6.2 Practical and Theoretical Contributions

With Xiaohongshu as an example, we have made the case that continuous use of a media platform, its 'stickiness,' first and foremost is about proper software engineering and interaction design [79], enhancing ease of use, which also is conducive to having fun while shopping. Having that fun feeds into the platform's reputation while reinforcing a sense of self-improvement, which, in support of ease of use, strengthen the continued use of the social medium. Apart from entertainment, assistance in life is another central concern of these young females. Being entertained already feels like being supported but being helped in making purchase decisions is felt as assistance as well, as is looking at others and how they make their choices (i.e. the normative influence of peers), which adds to the platform's reputation. Theoretically, we successfully broke down the rather unspecified perceived usefulness of social media into perceived self-improvement, life assistance, purchase-decision support, and perceived entertainment. This higher theoretical precision paid off in predicting young women's psychology while seeking help, enjoying and improving themselves, while keeping in mind 'how others think of them.'

### 6.3 Recommendations

Young females make up the bulk of visitors of user-generated-content platforms like Xiaohongshu. Catering to their wants and needs (i.e. life assistance, self-improvement, and entertainment) may achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction and in its vein, higher revenues. Social media platforms should deeply invest in improving the online experience, providing flawless technology and design, which underlie ease of use. In its turn, ease of use proliferates into continued use and perceived entertainment, which in itself enforces continued use, life assistance, a feeling of self-improvement as well as platform reputation. Apart from providing guidance in what products and services to purchase (e.g., recommender systems), online platforms may want to generously provide options for peers and significant others to show and deliberate what is important in a certain social group, differentiating styles (e.g., gothic or manga) and activities (e.g., sports, health, music). This will be felt as assistance in life and so as self-improvement and also increases the platform's reputation, all of which stimulate to continuously use the platform. In terms of female-oriented online interactive communities, our findings may offer some constructive insights for potential business development of social media platforms. Based on our empirically corroborated model, measures can be taken to improve the user experience of young females, optimizing content recommendations, and increase customer loyalty of this most significant group of clientele.

### 6.4 Limitations and Future Studies

Although the dimensions we discerned all contributed to the explanation of young Chinese females' psychology while shopping online, there is still variance left unexplained. In other words, our factorial model is not complete yet. Moreover, we cannot claim that its reach goes beyond our particular target group. Maybe different cultural aspects such as ethnicity and region may add to the explanatory power of our attempt (cf. [43]). In a globalization context (cf. [7]), multicultural aspects may play a role as well (e.g., K-pop stars, Japanese manga, Hollywood, and Bollywood). We limited ourselves to Xiaohongshu users. Although this platform may be regarded as representative of Chinese social media, the results of our work may not be applicable to other social media platforms. The questionnaire we constructed was distributed and collected over a three-month period and so the findings may have captured some short-term scenarios. There is also the issue what the stop criterion may be for sampling more participants, although both measurement and theoretical model showed the desired significant results. Future research may therefore be conducted with different user groups, other media platforms, over longer periods of time, with more factors included into our model, perhaps using larger samples. Including (multi)cultural aspects may enhance the richness and explanatory power of our psychological model of users in settings of online purchasing.

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