The Digital Reconstruction of Consumer Decision-Making Pathways Due to Decentralized Brand Authority on Social Media

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Abstract. Digital advertisements are shaping customer decision-making pathways on social media like Xiaohongshu, driving a shift from centralized advertising to decentralized, community-driven conversations. The objective of the research is to examine the reconstruction of Chinese Customer Decision Journey through the emergence of decentralized brand authority on Xiaohongshu. This study adopts a case study approach focusing on Dior, analyzing its Firm-Generated Content (FGC) on Xiaohongshu, User-Generated Content (UGC) and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) collaborations, supplemented by secondary consumer research data. The findings illustrate that marketing strategies of Dior replace traditional linear funnel with a dynamic, looped pathway, fostering a decentralized system of brand authority. Customer behavior evolves from passively receiving advertising to actively searching for information, thereby achieving precise conversion. The research provides theoretical framework of a "Decentralized-Authority-Driven Decision Loop Model" to understand a new customer decision model in digital environment and practical guidance for luxury brands to formulate a digital strategy on social media in Chinese market.

Keywords: Decentralized Authority, Customer Decision Journey, Social media marketing

1 Introduction

The effects of digital advertising and social media have been intensively debated in the field of luxury brand marketing, because they are pivotal not only to customer engagement, but also for sustainable value of luxury brands [1]. This dynamic is particularly significant in China, because the evolution of social media in China leads to the emergence of integrated social commerce, weakening boundaries between brand content, community interaction and online transactions. Social platforms, especially Xiaohongshu's unique positioning as a "lifestyle community", have disrupted the traditional Customer Decision Journey (CDJ) by fostering continuous and spontaneous interaction [2].

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The Customer Decision Journey refers to customers' experience across all touchpoints and decision-making phases, which has undergone a fundamental evolution driven by digital channel proliferation and social influence [3]. Due to the development of technology, traditional customer decision funnel cannot describe the behavioral mode of present customers due to the oversimplification of sequent actions [3, 4]. Diversification of digital channels prompt researchers to the circulation of Consumer Decision Journey and the outline of interaction. The refinement experiences the fundamental evolution from traditional funnel model to dynamic and non-linear one [5]. This evolution transforms customer behaviors from "passively receiving advertisements" to "actively searching for inspiration," finally to "precise decisioning" [6]. This shift is often concluded as a pathway of "Recommendation-to-Conversion" in the wide discussion. However, prevailing models often describe this phenomenon without fully explaining the mechanism, thereby the internal mechanism remains under explored. The gap lies in the position shift within this pathway: brand authority is no longer centralized but has become decentralized with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), Firm-Generated Content (FGC), and User-Generated Content (UGC), raising questions about how credibility and influence are redistributed in digital ecosystems [7, 8]. The construction of brand authority is not solely controlled by the brand. The research examines how brand transparency, a central dimension of authority, depends on consumers' subjective perceptions [9]. Therefore, the central challenge for luxury brands transforms into how to influence Customer Decision Journey by integrating authoritative advertising with other voices to improve conversion in the context of Chinese social media.

To address this research gap, the research will employ the case of Dior's marketing campaigns on Xiaohongshu to discuss how decentralized brand authority digitally reconstructs consumer decision-making pathways based on current surveys and data. The aim will be discussed by following research questions: (1) how this influences consumer behaviors at each phase of Consumer Decision Journey. (2) how Dior established a decentralized system by a marketing ecosystem including official content-marketing and KOL collaborations. By answering these questions, the study aims to propose a novel "Decentralized-Authority-Driven Decision Loop Model". The model is designed to eliminate the identified theoretical gap by eliminating the internal mechanical transition of consumer decision-making journey under decentralized authority on social media and suggesting several solutions for luxury brands to enhance their digital marketing effectiveness in the Chinese market.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Consumer Decision Journey Evolution

An understanding of the Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ) is fundamental for enterprises seeking to facilitate successful customers transactions. The AIDA model describes a linear psychological progression that potential customers experience from initial brand contact to final conversion [10]. This model categorizes the consumer decision making process into four phases: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action [10].

While the AIDA model's logic clarity provides instructive value for sales process optimization, its rigid sequence structure is proved inadequate in social media environment [3]. However, in these decentralized contexts, each phase is non-sequential and iterative, which is difficult to capture the complexity of contemporary digital consumer behaviors [10]. The AARRR funnel model represents a digital adaptation of funnel concept, which aims to track user lifecycle in the social platforms, including Acquisition, Activation, Retention, Revenue, and Referral [11]. The model describes the user lifecycle but with limitations in capturing the complex source of recommendations and long-term brand value co-creation in social media ecosystems [12]. The evolution from AIDA and AARRR reflects the shift in consumer decision models from a linear progression to a digital user lifecycle, whereas neither framework fully explains for the nonlinear, multi-source nature of decision paths on social media or the decentralization of brand authority.

The literature reveals an evolution from a linear funnel model to a circulated feedback-driven loop with the transformation of brand authority from centralized to decentralized co-creation mode [2, 5]. However, a gap persists in integrating two research outlines. To address the gap, the research proposes a "Decentralized-Authority-Driven Decision Loop Model". The model synthesizes the dynamics of decentralized brand authority with non-linear features of Consumer Decision Journey. The model clarifies how official content, KOL endorsements, and UGC interactively shape perceived brand authority, which explains the dynamic, non-linear circulation triggered by decentralization.

2.2 Decentralization of Brand Authority

Brand authority refers to the capability of a brand to attract attention, influence taste, and establish perceived legitimacy in the eyes of consumers [13]. Although traditionally reflected by Firm-Generated Content (FGC), this authority is reconstructed through multi-source content generation, co-creation, and distributed dissemination across social media platforms [8]. Multi-source generation decentralizes influence and value creation, distributing the brand voice to Key Opinion Leaders and content creators, over the sole control of the internal marketing department [7, 14]. KOL content serves as semi-professional recommendations, while UGC offers peer-based authenticity perceived as unbiased [14, 15].

The literature reveals a clear evo"utio' from linear funnel models to a more circular, feedback-driven model, corresponding with the transformation of brand authority from collectivism to decentralized co-creation mode. However, a gap persists in the integration of two research streams. Existing research cannot fully clarify decentralized brand authority, for example, how decentralized brand authority is co-created and sustained through layered content engagement remains insufficiently explained. Decentralized brand authority is constructed collaboratively by FGC, KOL content, and UGC. Specifically, dynamic non-linear circulations triggered by decentralization and the complete theoretical models focusing on how to optimize marketing conversion rate of luxury brands are undeveloped.

3 Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative case study approach supplemented by regression-based quantitative validation to investigate how decentralized brand authority reconstructs consumer decision-making pathways on social media. The design is appropriate for examining contemporary phenomenon in the realistic context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clear [16]. The research focuses on Dior's marketing ecosystem on Xiaohongshu, a platform known for blending lifestyle sharing with product discovery, which strongly influences luxury consumption decisions.

3.1 Data Collection

FGC Data. To ensure data validity and reliability, all data were sourced from publicly available channels, which contained open platform data, industry report data, and academic literature data. All posts published on Dior's official Xiaohongshu account between January 1, 2025 and June 30, 2025 were systematically scraped using a Python script on November 29. Likes were chosen for their high visibility and indicative value in measuring immediate user reactions. Authoritative whitepapers and market reports from reputable institutions focused on Chinese luxury consumer behavior were reviewed. The documents provide macro data related to Chinese luxury consumer behavior and social commerce trends. These external sources helped contextualize insights derived from Xiaohongshu content analysis within broader market trends. A systematic review of existing academic literature was conducted to provide the theoretical framework and analytical approach, particularly related to Consumer Decision Journey models and brand authority.

Questionnaire Data. To further quantitively analyze the effects of different content (UGC, FGC, and KOL content) on each stage of customer decision, the research designs a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed through the professional survey platform "Wenjuanxing" and was distributed online via various social platforms: Wechat, Xiaohongshu, and Tencent QQ. It targeted active users of Xiaohongshu in mainland China. N= 146 valid responses were collected. The demographic profile closely mirrors Dior's primary target audience on Xiaohongshu, ensuring contextual relevance: 64.38% female, whose age mainly concentrated between 18 and 34 years old, with monthly disposable income of 5,000-20,000 CNY.

The questionnaire was designed in four sections. First, demographic information including gender, age**, income and usage frequency was collected. The questionnaire sets up multi-dimensional questions specifically for FGC, KOL content, and UGC, using a 7-point Likert scale to measure their influence on each stage of the consumer decision-making process. In addition, behavioral intentions**

such as future purchase, referral willingness, and actual purchase possibility were investigated. Interactive conditions were surveyed in whether the interviewees browsed Dior and the number of following KOLs.

3.2 Data Cleaning

Data from the Official Account. The data analysis complies with a systematic and multi-phase process, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods. The raw platform data was cleaned by removing duplicate and ineffective data. For instance, repeated promotional posts by Dior were identified to avoid distorting the analysis. Posts were categorized based on communicative goals: product information, celebrity influence, and brand value projection. FGC were classified into three content types based on a content analysis approach: (1) product promotion, (2) celebrity endorsement, and (3) brand philosophy. This categorization helped identify patterns in Dior's content strategy aligned with the research questions. An engagement metric (likes) was analyzed to identify which content forms drove the most interaction and infer their effects on decentralized authority.

Data from the Questionnaire. Due to the resubmission of several respondents and incomplete responses on 7-point Likert-scale questions, 163 pieces (52.7%) of data were cleaned. The effective data was collected as follow in Table 1:

Table 1. Different effects of content types on customer behaviors in different phases of Customer Decision Journey

Phase	FGC	KOL content	UGC
Cognitive Resonance	Understand product features, Positive perception from brand stories	Understand pros/cons from reviews, authentic/credible	Influence decision-making, Boost purchase confidence
Emotional Connection	Positive perception from brand stories, Stimulate purchase desire	Reduce product doubts via "Grass-planting", Identify with brand value	Build trust in the product, Motivate to share experiences
Identity Conversion & Purchase	Stimulate purchase desire, Repurchase intention	Reduce product doubts via "Grass-planting", Stimulate repurchase	Promote final purchase, Build trust in the product
Loyalty Deepening	Repurchase intention, Stimulate repurchase	Identify with brand value, Stimulate repurchase	Stimulate repurchase behavior
Value Alignment	Willingness to participate in interactions	Willingness to follow KOL content in brand-related topics	Motivate to share experiences

Repurchase & Community Symbiosis	Repurchase intention, Willingness to participate in interactions	Repurchase intention, Willingness to participate in interactions	Repurchase behavior, Motivate to share experiences

For further analysis, the research calculated the average influence score of each respondent on FGC, KOL content, and UGC as the independent variables.

The data analysis follows the theoretical assumption of Decentralized-Authority-Driven Decision Loop Model. Specifically, the research examined how the interactions between different content types (FGC, KOL content, UGC) to create decentralized influence patterns, and how the patterns are reflected by engagement metrics and user interactions. The model is applied to interpret the non-linear path and feedbacks loops in the consumer decisions process.

3.3 Research Ethics and Limitations

All data used by this research comes from publicly accessible sources. Any user-generated content in the paper will be anonymized to protect privacy, and the research adheres to academic integrity standards. However, the limitation of secondary data research and anti-crawling technology restrictions of Xiaohongshu mean that the data are not specifically designed and sufficient for this study and therefore may not fully address all research questions. Nevertheless, the use of multiple data sources helps mitigate these concerns and strengthens the overall credibility of the study.

4 Case Description

4.1 Case Background of Dior and the Xiaohongshu Platform Synergy

Dior is a high-end luxury brand emphasizing French fashion, elegance, and craftsmanship. Most Xiaohongshu users are female, predominantly born in the 1990s and live in top-tier, who actively seek quality lifestyle in beauty, make-up, and fashion [17, 18]. As a blue-blooded brand, Dior invites many celebrities and models as endorsement, which causes a large advertising volume. Due to the traits of Xiaohongshu, Dior makes a typical attempt in brand marketing to construct a decentralized brand authority.

4.2 Dior's Different Content Strategies on Xiaohongshu

Dior's Firm-Generated Content Strategy. Dior's official account (@Dior迪奥) with 6,019,000 followers was the central media of its marketing ecosystem, publishing 439 notes in the first two quarters of 2025. The general interactive metrics, estimated 1,670,320,000 page views, nearly 6,019,000 likes, 112,800 favorites, and 36,100 shares. As shown in Table 1, the FGC was categorized into three primary types: product promotion, celebrity endorsement, and brand philosophy. Dior shows its brand

philosophy by the cooperation with multi-dimensional artists, inserting new artistic meanings to classic series (as Table 2 follows).

Table 2. Categorization and Basic Engagement Metrics of Dior's FGC Posts on Xiaohongshu from January to June in 2025

	Product Promotion	Celebrity Endorsement	Brand Philosophy	Total
Number of posts	288	103	48	439
Number of likes	324,332	348,034	14,520	686,886
Percentage of posts for the type	65.60%	23.46%	10.93%	100.00%
Percentage of likes for the type	47.22%	50.67%	2.11%	100.00%

The table illustrates product promotion posts (288 posts, 65.6%), such as hair fragrance spray, provided the functional information to motivate users' needs. Celebrity endorsement (103 posts, 23.46%) leveraged the influence of brand ambassadors to create discussions and transfer trust, eliminating the gap between the brand and popular culture. Among luxury brands, Dior distributes identities to its endorsers, as Figure 1 follows [19].

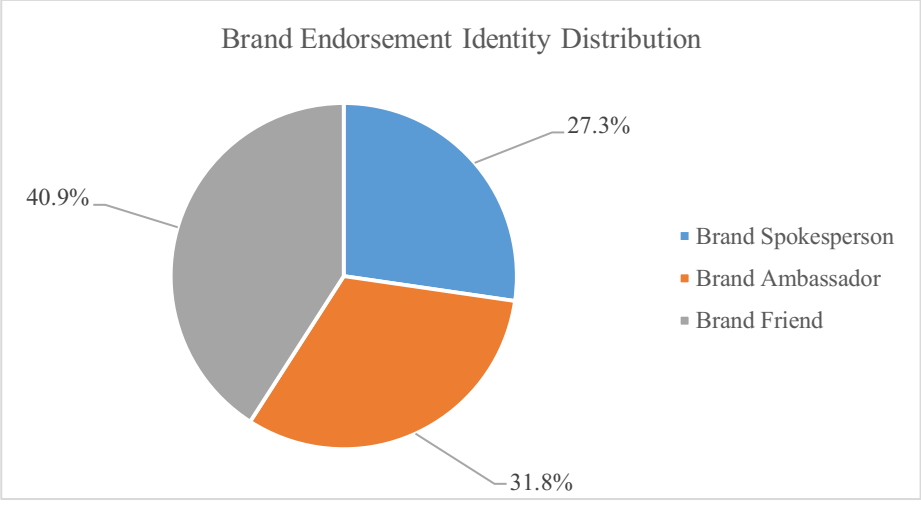

Fig. 1. Brand endorsement identity distribution of Dior's FGC on Xiaohongshu platform.

Although the lowest proportion, brand philosophy posts (48 posts, 10.93%) built up long-term emotional connections and improved the brand image beyond products by exhibiting fashion styling inspiration and brand story as an example.

To increase the conversion of advertising, Dior simplifies the purchase actions by introducing a mini-program on Xiaohongshu, and includes a link to the product on the

Xiaohongshu mini-program within Xiaohongshu at the end of corresponding promotional posts. This might effectively improve the conversion rate of each product advertising posts. The research illuminates that social media advertisement faces the dilemma of "high Click-Through Rate (CTR), but low conversion rate" [20]. The critical bottleneck lies in the experience gap and the loss of trust users encounter after clicking on the ad. This underscores that the importance of integrating marketing and ordering within the same social media platform. This reduces consumer decision friction, thereby enhancing conversion rate from ad exposure to final purchase by eliminating platform hoops and maintaining a consistent interaction environment.

Dior's Key-Opinion-Leader Strategy. Luxury brands also invited KOLs in the fashion field to "Grass Planting". Grass planting refers to recommending the product by various content formats and motivating the audience's purchasing and intimation desires, ultimately prompting a purchase decision [21]. Dior has categorized their KOLs into four levels: Nano-influencer, Mid-tier influencer, Top-tier influencers, and Celebrity influencer. According to the data from a report, a Nano-influencer has followers ranging from 5,000 to 50,000, while a Mid-tier influencer with fans from 50,000 to 500,000, with the reach of a top-tier KOL over 500,000 [22]. Celebrity influencers refer to accounts with the verified information as actors, entertainers, and singers [22].

Influencers specializing in beauty in the top-tier and mid-tier demonstrate strong effectiveness in driving product discovery and purchase intent [21]. In particular, beauty tutorials, product reviews, anime content, and drama-related notes tend to generate higher engagement.

Dior's User-Generated Content Strategy. Differing from the authority of the brand and professional bloggers, a vibrant User-Generated Content (UGC) ecosystem thrives. 30 makeup brands featured in March 2023 collectively promoted 130,296 posts on Xiaohongshu. According to the report, the total interactions of Dior exceeded one million, which ranks second among 30 brands, as shown in Table 3. The high volume of UGC (21,502) highlights the vibrant, decentralized content ecosystem surrounding Dior. The following chart illustrates data of top 10 brands in detail.

Table 3. Interactive Data for 10 Most Active Brands on Xiaohongshu Platform

Ranking	Brand	Interaction volume (10k)	Total number of related notes	Total likes (10k)	Total saves (10k)	Total number of comments
1	Chanel	356.31	45436	247.52	69.74	390600
2	Dior	234.69	21502	167.81	47.24	196300
3	YSL	115.46	6263	77.73	26.89	108500
4	Tom Ford	59.26	4608	38.87	14.97	54200
5	MaisonMargiela	54.96	5296	40.31	10.14	45100
6	M·A·C	53.26	4966	34.31	13.44	55100

7	MAOGEPING	51.54	2973	30.83	17.99	27200
8	MAKE UP FOR EVER	51.51	2211	35.66	10.58	52600
9	Perfect Diary	48.13	787	35.06	10.36	27100
10	INTO YOU	42.99	1572	28.03	11.45	35100

4.3 Regression Analysis of Different Content on Different Stages of the Model

To quantitatively evaluate the functions of different content sources within the "Decentralized Authority-Driven Decision Cycle" model, the research employs multiple linear regression analysis. The six stages represent cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and post-purchase processes as conceptualized in the proposed model. The average influence scores of FGC, KOL content, and UGC act as independent variables. The analysis was conducted using Excel based on 136 valid questionnaire responses. Results are summarized in Table 4 and elaborated as follows.

All six regression models have high significance ($p < 0.001$). Adapted R^2 values ranging from 0.783 to 0.864 indicates strong explanatory power of the models. The analysis result clearly illustrates the differentiated roles of three types of content in each stage of Consumer Decision Journey.

In the initial stage of Cognitive Resonance and Emotional Connection, UGC and the KOL content demonstrate the core influence. For Cognitive Resonance stage, UGC exhibited the largest coefficient ($\beta = 0.465$, $p < 0.001$), significantly higher than FGC ($\beta = 0.285$) and KOL content ($\beta = 0.222$). This underscores the critical role of UGC in initiating brand awareness through peer validation and trust heuristics when originally generating the brand awareness. The decentralized information network is shaped by Xiaohongshu's algorithmic content feed and user community engagement. At the stage of emotional connection, unstandardized coefficient of KOL content ranks first ($\beta = 0.346$, $p<0.001$), slightly higher than UGC ($\beta = 0.430$) and FGC ($\beta = 0.240$). This illustrates that KOL content plays a pivotal role in establishing trust and emotional resonance via scenario-based narratives.

As entering conversion and deepening stages (Identity Conversion & Purchase, Loyalty Deepening), the authoritative tone and consistent messaging of FGC reinforce brand value and purchase justification. At the stage of Identity Conversion and Purchase, FGC ($\beta = 0.243$) and KOL content ($\beta = 0.304$) are similarly important to collectively decrease decisive risks, while UGC ($\beta = 0.420$) maintains the strongest influence. FGC's influence coefficient reached its peak among the all stages ($\beta =0.460$, $p<0.001$) in Loyalty Deepening. It becomes the core motivation to maintain customer relationship and encourage repeated engagement. This verifies the sustained value provided by the brand is foundational for cultivating long-term loyalty.

In the post stages (Value Alignment and Repurchase & Community Symbiosis) of the journey, the convergence of FGC, KOL content, and UGC inputs reflects a synergistic structure in decision reinforcement and advocacy. At the stage of Value Alignment, KOL content shows the strongest influence ($\beta = 0.422$), followed by FGC ($\beta = 0.370$), which jointly shape and send the brand value. The effect of UGC in this stage was diminished while still significant ($\beta = 0.212$), suggesting users'

internalization of brand value and proactive dissemination. In the final close-looped Repurchase & Community Symbiosis, the influence of FGC (β = 0.403) and KOL content (β = 0.382) becomes nearly equivalent to incentive repurchase and community engagement. UGC (β=0.230) nourishes the continuous cycle of the entire ecosystem.

Table 4: Regression analysis results on the influence of three content types on each stage of consumer decision-making

Decision Stage	Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F-value
	(Constant)	0.210	0.122	1.716	0.089	0.810	0.806	187.856
Cognitive Resonance	FGC	0.285	0.073	3.922	0.000			
	KOL	0.222	0.077	2.869	0.005			
	UGC	0.465	0.078	5.990	0.000			
	(Constant)	0.113	0.113	0.998	0.320	0.845	0.841	239.428
Emotional Connection	FGC	0.240	0.067	3.567	0.001			
	KOL	0.346	0.071	4.840	0.000			
	UGC	0.430	0.072	5.983	0.000			
Identity Conversion & Purchase	(Constant)	0.052	0.100	0.521	0.603	0.862	0.859	275.393
	FGC	0.243	0.060	4.071	0.000			
	KOL	0.304	0.063	4.790	0.000			
	UGC	0.420	0.064	6.591	0.000			
	(Constant)	(0.101)	0.104	(0.971)	0.333	0.867	0.864	286.969
Loyalty Deepening	FGC	0.460	0.062	7.463	0.000			
	KOL	0.324	0.065	4.950	0.000			
	UGC	0.243	0.066	3.698	0.000			
	(Constant)	(0.210)	0.134	(1.563)	0.120	0.788	0.783	163.581
Value Alignment	FGC	0.370	0.080	4.628	0.000			
	KOL	0.422	0.085	4.975	0.000			
	UGC	0.212	0.085	2.486	0.014			
Repurchase & Community Symbiosis	(Constant)	(0.064)	0.117	(0.548)	0.585	0.833	0.829	218.797
	FGC	0.403	0.070	5.772	0.000			
	KOL	0.382	0.074	5.156	0.000			
	UGC	0.230	0.075	3.091	0.002			

Note: $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.001$; FGC = Firm-Generated Content, KOL = Key Opinion Leader Content, UGC = User-Generated Content.

5 Discussion

The research discussed how decentralized brand authority on social media restructured the Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ). The study exposed the limitations of traditional linear funnel model (e.g., AIDA, AARRR) based on the research of Dior on

Xiaohongshu and illuminated how the collaborative ecosystem of FGC, multi-layered KOL metrics, and UGC induces the non-linear decision path. To illustrate the phenomenon, the research proposed a model of "Decentralized-Authority-Driven Decision Loop Model" (see Figure 2).

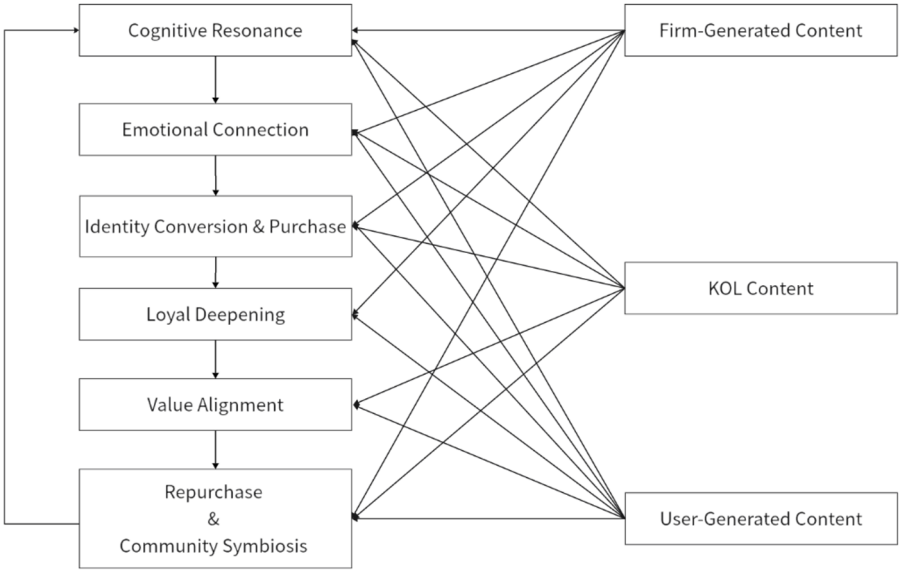

Fig. 2. The Decentralized-Authority-Driven Decision Loop Model: A Framework for Consumer Decision-Making journey on Social Media under Decentralized Brand Authority

5.1 Phase 1: Cognitive Resonance

The cognitive resonance is the start point of customer journey. The core is rooted in customer's deep cognition of a brand's essence through diverse content sources. FGC provides authoritative storytelling and value base, while KOL content broadens and deepen brand recognition through professional and personalized interpretation, and UGC supplies genuine and spontaneous perspectives to collaboratively construct a multi-dimensional and decentralized information network of brand. Customers proactively explore information rather than passively receiving it, reflecting increased agency in decision-making.

5.2 Phase 2: Emotional Connection

Based on cognition, the journey moves to the phase of emotion deepening. The brand official account narrates emotional brand stories through FGC. KOL content establishes personalized trust through intimate interactions and scenario-based interpretations, and UGC shares authentic experience. Three stakeholders construct a content ecosystem. Customers arise psychological correlations and emotional attribution with the brand

and other users, upgrading objective recognition to emotional preference. It is the foundation of subsequent conversion behaviors.

5.3 Phase 3: Identity Conversion & Purchase

The phase signifies that consumer's internal identification externalizes purchase actions. This phase represents the behavioral realization of prior cognitive and emotional identification. It is not merely a commodity transaction, but a public alignment and affirmation of consumers' personal identity, aesthetic preferences, and brand values. FGC provides direct conversion guidance and trust assurance, while KOL "grass-planting" content decreases decision risks and UGC provides extensive social proof. Three forces collaboratively accomplish customers' identity transformation from "admirers" to "owners", which incentivizes actual purchase behaviors when identification deepens to a certain degree.

5.4 Phase 4: Loyalty Deepening

The customer relationship management enters the phase to maintain and deepen. The brand intensifies consumer belonging and perceived exclusivity through consistent FGC messaging and personalized services. Meanwhile, new users share the content of unboxing and user experience to integrate the ecosystem of UGC. It solidates the rationality of purchase behaviors, and influences other potential customers. In this circumstance, a one-time transaction is transferred into a long-term stable loyalty.

5.5 Phase 5: Value Alignment

When the loyalty is accumulated, consumers internalize the brand value and disseminate proactively. They make word-of-mouth recommendation through UGC, acting as brand advocates in groups, driven by recognition and pride. KOL content continues to advocate brand values during the phase, while the brand encourages this identity-driven advocacy through the mechanism of incentivization and recognition, which FGC designs. At this phase, consumers evolve from customers into brand advocates, reinforcing the feedback loop of the decision cycle.

5.6 Phase 6: Repurchase and Community Symbiosis

This is the final phase of the circulation, which represents a perfect mixture of customers and the brand. Customers not only repurchase the products, realize the life-long value, and engage more deeply into the brand ecosystem. Customers create high-quality UGC, actively engage in the co-creation activities, and organize community interaction with KOL and other users. The content and behaviors continuously enrich and update the brand's overall content ecosystem to insert materials for new cognitive resonance. FGC, KOL content and UGC collaboratively build a dynamic and mutually nourishing symbiotic community.

6 Conclusion

The research aimed to investigate how decentralized brand authority on social media restructure the Customer Decision Journey (CDJ). The research identified the limitations of traditional linear final models (e.g., AIDA and AARRR) in this context and demonstrated how Dior establishes a decentralized brand authority system by the collaboration of FGC, a layered KOL matrix, and an active UGC ecosystem to foster a dynamic, non-linear decision pathway. To address the gap, the research introduces a Decentralized-Authority-Driven Decision Loop Model and briefly describes how six stages of the model reflect mentioned circulation and collaboration.

The key theoretical contribution of the research is to propose an integrated decision model. The model eliminates the theoretical gap between "the evolution of customer decision" and "brand authority decentralization", which provides a new analytical framework of customer behaviors with social media background. The research specifically exposes how the brand authority is dispersed, co-created, and intensified to motivate the decision circulation. The study applies the theoretical questions to the context of China's luxury social e-commerce, thereby enriching the theoretical knowledge of digital marketing.

The research provides a strategic guidance to practitioners (luxury brand managers and social media marketing directors in particular). The position of the brand is transmitted from "an information controller" to "an ecosystem moderator", which emphasizes the content ecosystem which balances the brand authority, KOLs and customers. KOL collaboration strategies should be categorized, combining the extensive audience of popular celebrities and customers' deep trust in Nano-influencers and Mid-tier influencers to achieve comprehensive effects. Meanwhile, the brand should motivate and involve UGC proactively, regarding UGC as the core asset to incentive community resonation. Due to diverse stakeholders involved, the marketing touchpoints should support decision leaps of non-linear decisions to decrease the conversion friction.

However, the research solely focuses on Xiaohongshu as a research subject, which may not have the universal value of user behaviors across other platforms. Additionally, the data was mainly collected from industry reports with little original post on Xiaohongshu due to the anti-crawling technology with lack of in-depth interviews or experimental data from the consumers. The research selected likes as the sole metrics to measure customer engagement, which was insufficient for comprehensive analysis. More importantly, social media changes rapidly, illuminating the necessity of continuously monitoring data changes.

Despite the limitations of the research, valuable suggestions are provided for further research. It is suggested future research could validate this model through comparative cross-brand studies on different platforms and explore the impact of emerging technologies such as AI on decentralized authority structures. This study explores a pathway for deeper research into the evolving symbiosis between brands and consumers in the digital age.

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