The Impact of the Credibility of Recommendation Content on Generation Z's Post-Purchase Behavior on Xiaohongshu: Based on the S-O-R Framework

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Abstract. Based on the S-O-R framework, this study examines how perceived credibility of product recommendation content relates to purchase approach-avoidance conflict and post-purchase relationship maintenance among 414 Gen Z users on Xiaohongshu. Perceived credibility significantly predicted stronger purchase approach-avoidance conflict. Dimension-specific analyses showed that conflict did not significantly predict purchase abandonment, purchase persistence, or post-purchase evaluation, but significantly reduced repurchase intention ($\beta = -0.147$, $p = 0.003$) and trust restoration intention ($\beta = -0.146$, $p = 0.003$) after false-discovery-rate adjustment. The bootstrap indirect effect of perceived credibility through conflict was not significant at the 95% confidence level; therefore, the mediation hypothesis was not supported under conventional significance criteria. A supplementary analysis using a composite purchase-response index found a negative association with critical information evaluation, but this result is treated as exploratory because the index combines conceptually distinct response dimensions. The findings suggest that credible recommendation content may coexist with unresolved risk concerns and may not translate into stable consumer relationships. Platforms and brands should strengthen commercial labeling, risk disclosure, and after-sales transparency.

Keywords: Xiaohongshu; credibility of product recommendation content; purchase avoidance conflict; post-purchase relationship behavior; Generation Z

1 Introduction

Xiaohongshu is a major source of product information for Generation Z, who assess recommendation credibility through content, influencer, and platform cues.

Prior research largely treats trust as a driver of purchase, overlooking whether credible content can simultaneously activate purchase attraction and risk concerns and whether this tension affects post-purchase relationship maintenance. Using the S-O-R framework [1], this study focuses on perceived credibility, purchase approach-avoidance conflict, repurchase intention, and trust restoration intention. Critical in-

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formation evaluation and a composite purchase-response index are retained only for supplementary exploratory analysis.

2 Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Perceived Credibility and Purchase Avoidance Conflict

Within the S-O-R framework, external environmental and informational stimuli influence consumers' cognitive and affective states, which subsequently shape behavioral responses [1, 2]. The credibility of recommendation content is informed by content quality, blogger trustworthiness, and platform reliability. Although these cues are conceptually distinct, users encounter them simultaneously within a platform-mediated recommendation episode and may integrate them into a global credibility judgment. Accordingly, this study models perceived credibility as an overall evaluation while retaining the three dimensions for measurement diagnostics. Although trust can reduce uncertainty and facilitate purchase behavior in social-media retail settings [3], the commercial nature of recommendation content may still activate risk concerns, creating tension between purchase desire and avoidance motivation.

H1: The perceived credibility of product recommendation content positively predicts purchase approach-avoidance conflict.

2.2 Purchase Avoidance Conflict and Post-Purchase Behavioral Patterns

Purchase approach-avoidance conflict reflects consumers' struggle between approach and avoidance motives. Although such conflict may not necessarily prevent an initial purchase, it can increase decision burden and encourage avoidant responses [4]. Unresolved risk concerns may also undermine the continuity of consumer-brand relationships and make subsequent trust restoration more difficult [5].

H2: Purchase approach-avoidance conflict negatively predicts repurchase intention and trust restoration intention.

A mediation hypothesis is additionally examined to assess whether the internal conflict associated with credibility translates into less favorable downstream responses. Because the measured response dimensions are conceptually heterogeneous, the indirect-effect analysis is interpreted cautiously and is supplemented by dimension-specific outcome analyses.

H3: Purchase approach-avoidance conflict mediates the relationship between perceived credibility and post-purchase relationship behavior.

2.3 The Exploratory Role of Critical Information Evaluation

Dual-processing theory proposes that individuals may rely on rapid, intuitive processing or engage in slower, more deliberate analysis [6]. Critical information evaluation refers to actively verifying product information, comparing sources, identifying persuasive intent, and recognizing commercial promotions. It therefore represents a

cautious information-processing tendency rather than a direct measure of post-purchase relationship behavior.

Critical evaluation may expose consumers to conflicting information and prompt reconsideration of product risks and purchase necessity. In influencer-marketing contexts, it includes scrutinizing source credibility and questioning the authenticity of commercial content [7]. Because such evaluation may affect purchase abandonment, persistence, evaluation, repurchase, and trust restoration in different ways, combining these responses into a single score is not treated as a theoretically unitary outcome.

Accordingly, the association between critical information evaluation and the composite purchase-response index is examined as an exploratory research question rather than as a confirmatory hypothesis. The overall research framework is illustrated in Fig. 1.

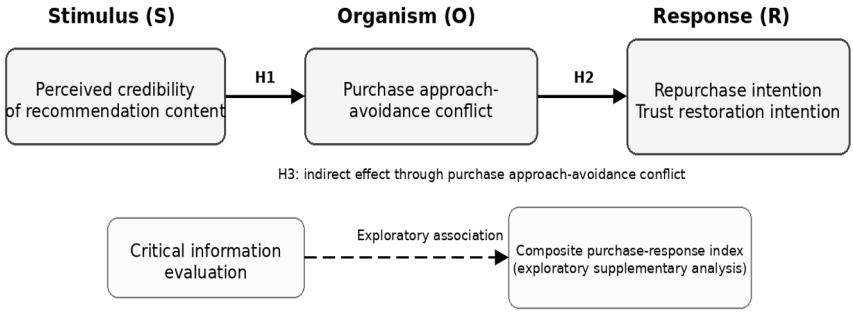


Fig. 1. distinguishes the primary S-O-R pathway from the supplementary exploratory analysis.

3 Research Methods

3.1 Data Collection and Sampling

This study employed a questionnaire survey method, distributing questionnaires to Xiaohongshu users via WeChat and other channels from March to April 2025, utilizing both convenience sampling and snowball sampling for data collection. The questionnaire included attention detection items and minimum response time requirements to exclude invalid responses.

A total of 548 questionnaires were collected; after screening based on age range, response completeness, and quality of responses, 414 valid questionnaires were retained. Women accounted for 55.3% of the sample, as did undergraduate students (55.3%). The majority of respondents (37.7%) had an account usage period of 1–2 years (Table 1). Due to the use of non-probative sampling, the study findings are primarily applicable to this sample and should not be directly generalized to all Gen Z users.

The data cleaning process included: missing value detection (no missing values in key variables), Mahalanobis distance-based outlier identification (no outliers detected at the $p<0.001$ level), and normality assessment. The final sample exhibited a skewness range of [-0.428,0.231] (mean |skewness| <2) and a kurtosis range of [-1.009, -

0.370] (mean |kurtosis| <7), meeting the distribution assumptions required for parameter testing.

3.2 Variable Measurement

Perceived recommendation-content credibility was measured with nine 5-point Likert items covering content credibility, blogger credibility, and platform credibility (Cronbach's α = 0.937). These dimensions represent distinct sources of credibility cues but were theoretically treated as facets of an integrated credibility judgment in the platform-mediated recommendation context. Critical information evaluation was measured with four binary items, and purchase approach-avoidance conflict was measured with nine 5-point Likert items (Cronbach's α = 0.947). Purchase responses were measured on 6-point Likert scales across five distinct dimensions: purchase abandonment, purchase persistence, post-purchase evaluation, repurchase intention, and trust restoration intention. Repurchase intention and trust restoration intention were designated as the primary post-purchase relationship-maintenance outcomes. The remaining dimensions were analyzed separately. A composite purchase-response index was retained only for supplementary analyses and was not interpreted as a unidimensional measure of post-purchase relationship behavior.

3.3 Data Analysis

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample (N=414)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	185	44.7%
	Female	229	55.3%
Education level	High school or below	34	8.2%
	Junior college	135	32.6%
	Undergraduate	229	55.3%
	Graduate or above	16	3.9%
Monthly income	Below 1000 yuan	56	13.5%
	1000–2000 yuan	144	34.8%
	2000–3000 yuan	88	21.3%
	3000–5000 yuan	83	20.0%
	More than 5,000 yuan	43	10.4%
Account usage duration	Less than 1 year	62	15.0%
	1–2 years	156	37.7%
	2–3 years	125	30.2%
	Over 3 years	71	17.1%

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and reliability and validity tests were conducted. Second, the primary outcome analysis estimated the effects of purchase approach-avoidance conflict on each purchase-response dimension separately, with false-discovery-rate adjustment for multiple tests. Third, a supplementary path model examined the association between per-

ceived credibility and conflict, the exploratory association between critical information evaluation and the composite purchase-response index, and the indirect effect through conflict using 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrap resamples. Control-variable, multicollinearity, and nonlinearity checks were also performed. Harman's single-factor test was used only as a preliminary diagnostic and not as evidence that common method variance was absent.

The significance level was set at 0.05. Results with $0.05 < p < 0.10$ are described only as non-significant trends and are not considered sufficient evidence to support a hypothesis.

4 Research Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2. The mean values for perceived recommendation-content credibility and purchase approach-avoidance conflict were 3.164 and 3.185, respectively. The mean value for critical information evaluation was 0.662. The composite purchase-response index, reported only for supplementary analyses, had a mean of 4.249.

Perceived credibility was positively correlated with purchase approach-avoidance conflict ($r = 0.397$, $p < 0.001$). Critical information evaluation was negatively correlated with the exploratory composite purchase-response index ($r = -0.277$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived credibility was not significantly correlated with critical information evaluation ($r = -0.029$, $p > 0.05$). The latter association is interpreted as supplementary because the composite index combines distinct response dimensions.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of core variables (N=414)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perceived recommendation-content credibility (S)	3.164	1.017	1.00	5.00	-0.193	-0.750
Content credibility	3.188	1.125	1.00	5.00	-0.186	-0.860
Blogger credibility	3.169	1.071	1.00	5.00	-0.197	-0.816
Platform credibility	3.135	1.046	0.67	5.00	-0.124	-0.626
Critical information evaluation (O1)	0.662	0.248	0.00	1.00	-0.428	-0.370
Purchase approach-avoidance conflict (O2)	3.185	1.043	1.00	5.00	-0.165	-0.894
Exploratory composite purchase-response index (R)	4.249	0.986	3.00	6.00	0.231	-1.009

4.2 Testing of the Measurement Model

Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$). The first factor of perceived credibility explained 66.8% of the variance, while the single-factor model for purchase approach-avoidance conflict accounted for 70.5% of the variance. All constructs exhibited Cronbach's α values above 0.79, CR values above 0.87, and AVE

values above 0.70. HTMT values among content credibility, blogger credibility, and platform credibility exceeded 0.85, indicating insufficient discriminant validity among the three dimensions [8]. The aggregation decision was based on both theory and measurement evidence: in a single recommendation episode, users may integrate content, blogger, and platform cues into an overall credibility judgment, while the observed overlap makes separate coefficients difficult to interpret and potentially unstable. The nine-item global score was therefore used in the main model. This treatment does not imply that the dimensions are theoretically identical; their potentially differential effects remain an important question for future studies using measures with stronger discriminant validity. As shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Construct	Number of items	*Cronbach's α*	CR	AVE
Content credibility	3	0.897	0.936	0.831
Blogger credibility	3	0.793	0.879	0.709
Platform credibility	3	0.807	0.886	0.722
Overall credibility scale	9	0.937	—	—
Purchase approach-avoidance conflict	9	0.947	—	—

4.3 Supplementary Structural Model Analysis

The supplementary path-model results are presented in Table 4. Perceived credibility significantly and positively predicted purchase approach-avoidance conflict (B = 0.454, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Critical information evaluation was negatively associated with the exploratory composite purchase-response index (B = -1.098, $p < 0.001$). Because this index combines distinct response dimensions, the association is not interpreted as evidence of a unitary effect on post-purchase relationship behavior. The direct effect of perceived credibility on the composite index was not significant ($p = 0.314$), and the conflict-to-composite path did not meet the 0.05 significance criterion ($p = 0.081$). The model explained 15.9% of the variance in conflict and 9.3% of the variance in the supplementary composite index.

Table 4. Supplementary path-model results

Path	*B*	SE	*z*	*p*
S → O2 (Credibility → conflict)	0.454***	0.046	9.812	<0.001
S → R (Credibility → exploratory composite response)	-0.045	0.045	-1.007	0.314
O1 → R (Critical evaluation → exploratory composite response)	-1.098***	0.186	-5.893	<0.001
O2 → R (Conflict → exploratory composite response)	-0.078†	0.045	-1.747	0.081

Note: R denotes the exploratory composite purchase-response index. *** $p < 0.001$; † $p < 0.10$. Standardized coefficients: S → R = -0.062; O1 → R = -0.276.

4.4 Mediation Effect Test

The mediation analysis was retained as a supplementary test of the originally specified indirect pathway. Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals were calculated from 5,000 resamples.

The indirect effect of perceived credibility on the exploratory composite purchase-response index through purchase approach-avoidance conflict was -0.035, with a 95% confidence interval of [-0.078, 0.005]. Because the interval included zero, the indirect effect was not statistically significant. The Sobel test also failed to meet the conventional 0.05 criterion ($z = 1.884$, $p = 0.060$). H3 is therefore not supported under conventional significance standards, and the mediation estimate is not treated as a substantive finding. As shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Supplementary bootstrap mediation analysis (5,000 resamples; bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals)

Effect	Estimate	95% CI lower	95% CI upper	Conclusion
Total effect (S → R)	*-0.088*	*-0.183*	0.008	Not significant
Direct effect (S → R)	*-0.060*	*-0.158*	0.039	Not significant
Indirect effect through O2	*-0.035*	*-0.078*	0.005	Not significant

Note: A confidence interval containing zero indicates a non-significant effect at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Neither the bootstrap interval nor the Sobel test supports the proposed mediation effect. No conclusion is drawn from the magnitude or proportion of the estimated indirect effect.

4.5 Primary Dimension-Specific Analysis of Purchase Responses

The dimension-specific models constitute the primary evidence for the response outcomes. Purchase approach-avoidance conflict significantly and negatively predicted repurchase intention ($\beta = -0.147$, $p = 0.003$) and trust restoration intention ($\beta = -0.146$, $p = 0.003$), with both effects remaining significant after false-discovery-rate adjustment. Its effects on purchase abandonment, purchase persistence, and post-purchase evaluation were not significant. Thus, conflict appears to influence relationship maintenance rather than uniformly affecting all purchase responses, supporting H2 for the two theoretically specified post-purchase outcomes.

4.6 Robustness and Common Method Bias Assessment

The first factor in Harman's single-factor analysis explained 48.26% of the variance. Although this value is below the commonly used 50% heuristic, Harman's test is only a preliminary diagnostic and cannot rule out common method variance because of its limited sensitivity [10]. The study did not include a marker variable, temporal separation, or multiple data sources [9, 10]. All predictor VIF values were below 1.20, the core coefficients remained consistent after adding control variables, and the quadratic term for purchase approach-avoidance conflict was not significant. These checks re-

duce concerns about multicollinearity and model form but do not eliminate the possibility of common method bias.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion and Theoretical Contributions

The results clarify that purchase responses should not be treated as interchangeable. Perceived credibility significantly increased purchase approach-avoidance conflict, suggesting that credible recommendation cues may strengthen purchase attraction while leaving risk concerns unresolved. Dimension-specific analyses showed that conflict did not significantly predict purchase abandonment, purchase persistence, or post-purchase evaluation, but significantly reduced repurchase intention and trust restoration intention. The principal contribution therefore concerns post-purchase relationship maintenance rather than a generalized purchasing response. The proposed mediation effect was not significant at the 95% confidence level, so H3 was not supported under conventional criteria. Likewise, the negative association between critical information evaluation and the composite response index should be regarded as exploratory rather than as evidence of a general causal effect on post-purchase behavior.

The study also treats content, blogger, and platform credibility as facets of an integrated credibility judgment. This specification is theoretically plausible because the three cues are encountered jointly within the same platform episode and empirically necessary because the dimensions lacked adequate discriminant validity. Nevertheless, aggregation may conceal meaningful differential effects. Future work should develop more discriminating measures and test whether content, blogger, and platform credibility activate different forms of risk appraisal or relationship response.

5.2 Practical Implications

Platforms and brands should not focus solely on click-through rates or first conversions. The dimension-specific results indicate that unresolved conflict is more consequential for repurchase and trust restoration than for immediate purchasing responses. Platforms should therefore improve commercial labeling and content-governance systems, while brands should provide transparent product limitations, usage conditions, risk information, and after-sales policies to reduce uncertainty and support durable consumer relationships.

5.3 Limitations and Prospects

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design and non-probability sampling limit causal inference and external validity. Second, all focal variables were measured by self-report in a single survey wave. Harman's single-factor test cannot establish the absence of common method variance; therefore, method bias remains a plausible alternative explanation. Future research should incorpo-

rate a theoretically unrelated marker variable, temporal separation, multi-source data, or behavioral and transactional outcomes [10]. Third, the composite purchase-response index combines conceptually distinct dimensions and should be used only for supplementary analysis; future studies should model each dimension separately or employ a validated relationship-maintenance construct. Finally, content, blogger, and platform credibility were aggregated because of their integrated theoretical role and insufficient discriminant validity in the present data. Future research should refine the measures and estimate their differential effects across platforms, product categories, and stages of the consumer relationship.

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