

Driving COBRAs: the power of social media marketing

Social media
marketing

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the impact of social media marketing (SMM) efforts, including entertainment, customisation, interaction and trendiness via WeChat, on consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs) and their related outcomes, including on-going search behaviour and repurchase intention.

Design/methodology/approach – The theoretical framework is tested for luxury cosmetics brands. Data were collected in China from 433 WeChat users utilising a self-administered online survey. Data analysis uses partial least squares–structural equation modelling.

Findings – Entertainment and interaction drive consumers' consuming, contributing and creating behaviours, whilst trendiness drives creating behaviour only. Inconsistent with previous research findings, customisation has a non-significant impact on consumers' consuming, contributing and creating behaviours. Consuming and creating behaviours assist in driving on-going search behaviour and repurchase intention. Contributing behaviours assist in driving on-going search behaviour only.

Research limitations/implications – Cross-sectional in nature, this research adds to the marketing literature by explaining how to use SMM to drive COBRAs for luxury cosmetics in China using WeChat. To enhance the generalisability of the findings, future research might consider a longitudinal design, including comparisons between countries with diverse cultures as well as other industries and product types.

Practical implications – COBRAs may be heightened by using entertaining and trendy content. Incorporating interactive content on social media platforms encourages consumers to consume, contribute and create content on social media brand communities, further driving their on-going search behaviour and repurchase intention.

Originality/value – Examination of SMM's role in the marketing literature largely overlooks the impact of SMM elements on COBRAs. This study contributes to the SMM research by empirically testing a theoretical model, confirming that specific SMM elements – including entertainment and interaction – are key factors in driving consumers' consuming, contributing and creating behaviour on social media brand communities, influencing consumers' on-going search behaviour and repurchase intention.

Keywords Social media, COBRAs, On-going search, WeChat, Mobile social media, Luxury cosmetics, China

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Social media plays a considerable role in shaping consumers' behaviours, warranting brands to change their marketing communication strategies by allocating more resources to social media and less to traditional marketing activities (Cheung *et al.*, 2019). Social media marketing (SMM) has become one of the most important areas of marketing strategy.



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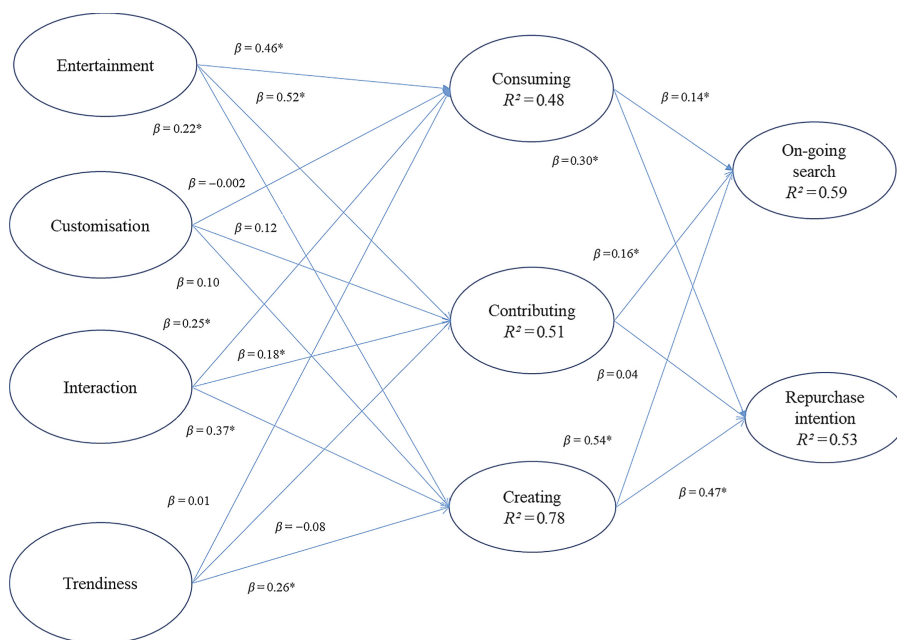
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Its interactive nature makes it useful in building consumer–brand relationships and in driving consumers' loyalty (Valos *et al.*, 2016). Taking advantage of the advancement of mobile devices, brands engage with SMM to build relationships with consumers through collaborative interaction on mobile social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and WeChat (Yadav *et al.*, 2015). Accordingly, brands communicate brand-related information on their Facebook pages, interacting with existing and potential customers to build strong and positive brand knowledge in their minds (Seo and Park, 2018).

Adept to the adoption of SMM, luxury brands have increased their social media communications with consumers, seeking to strengthen consumer–brand relationships (Chen and Wang, 2017). For example, Burberry upload their catwalk show on its social media platforms, communicating trendy information and interacting with their fans (Phan *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, Lancôme established its social media brand community – the Rose Beauty Community – to interact with consumers, fostering a positive consumer–brand relationship (Heine and Berghaus, 2014). Tiffany and Co. adopted a story-giving approach to co-creation, inviting consumers to share videos, photos and stories about their love experience on their social media platforms, seeking to develop consumers' positive brand knowledge (Hughes *et al.*, 2016). Notably, luxury brands increasingly rely on SMM to drive consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs), including their consuming, contributing and creating behaviours, to strengthen consumer–brand engagement (CBE) (Arrigo, 2018; Liu *et al.*, 2019) and loyalty intentions (Piehler *et al.*, 2019). Notwithstanding extensive research on the importance of CBE for marketing (France *et al.*, 2018), scholarly examination of SMM's role in driving CBE and subsequent behaviours is limited.

China is an emerging market with a unique social media environment. Most brands use WeChat as the primary SMM channel for communicating product-related information, sharing news about the brand and discussing trendy topics with consumers (Chu *et al.*, 2019; Gong *et al.*, 2018). These are all useful activities in building a trustworthy brand image and brand loyalty (Chen and Wang, 2017). For example, Xiaomi, a leading smartphone brand in China, adopted fan-centric SMM as its primary marketing strategy, communicating entertaining and customised content, along with discussing current hot topics on its WeChat page to build brand loyalty (Shih *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, hotels in China use their WeChat page to communicate entertaining and trendy information while facilitating consumer–brand interaction to strengthen the consumer–brand relationship and their brand-building process (Denizci Guillet *et al.*, 2016). In the Chinese luxury brand context, Coach disseminates brand-related information, incorporating a SMM activity called "Surprise Friday" to invite consumers to vote for products on their WeChat brand page, aiming to strengthen their consumer–brand relationship (Ng, 2014). More recently, an examination of WeChat in the context of the marketing of international luxury brands in China recommends its use as a platform to introduce mobile SMM activities, such as storytelling, interactive activities and creative content, to enhance consumers' luxury brand experience, subsequently strengthening their brand knowledge (Liu *et al.*, 2019).

WeChat provides an unprecedented SMM opportunity for marketers to engage with consumers, justifying scholarly interest in understanding how to initiate effective SMM strategies on WeChat and how to drive CBE and consumers' behavioural intentions (Liu *et al.*, 2019). Such understanding is important for the Chinese luxury cosmetic market, because Chinese consumers are lavish shoppers highly involved in consuming luxury cosmetics, including stockpiling (Kang *et al.*, 2020). However, empirical research on how to use SMM (and WeChat) to drive consumer–brand relationships and subsequent behaviours is still limited. As COBRAs play a considerable role in driving CBE and shaping consumers' positive behaviours, luxury cosmetics brands need to understand how to influence COBRAs in the Chinese context (Chen and Wang, 2017). Seeking to address this research gap, a theoretical framework (Figure 1) is provided to examine the impact of SMM efforts on



Note(s): paths significant at * $p < 0.05$

Figure 1.
Conceptual model results

COBRAs, along with the associations between COBRAs and behavioural outcomes, including on-going search behaviour (OSB) and repurchase intention in the Chinese luxury cosmetics context.

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses development

Following the discussion of mobile social media and SMM efforts, COBRAs' conceptualisation is discussed, followed by the development of hypotheses related to OSB and repurchase intention.

2.1 Mobile social media

Social media involves a group of internet-based applications that build on Web 2.0 technological foundations and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Brands increasingly exchange product-related information with consumers using social media, because its interactive nature encourages consumer-brand interaction, useful in building the consumer-brand relationship (Valos *et al.*, 2016). Brands have utilised a combination of social media platforms to communicate with consumers, seeking to build strong positive brand knowledge in consumers' minds (Algharabat *et al.*, 2019; Chen and Wang, 2017).

Reflecting the prevalent digital-age uptake of mobile devices, consumers embrace mobile social media platforms to search for brand-related information, warranting the use of mobile social media communication for brand-building (Humphreys, 2013; Kaplan, 2012). Hence, Yadav *et al.* (2015) encouraged consumer-brand interactions on mobile social media platforms as a means to drive consumers' awareness and CBE. In support, Hew *et al.* (2016) highlighted the perceived usefulness of mobile social media communication in driving consumers'

satisfaction and subsequent strengthening of brand loyalty for business success, calling on marketers to increase the provision of useful information when engaging in consumer–brand interactions. More recently, [Liu et al. \(2019\)](#) recognised the importance of mobile social media communication in driving brand image and consumer loyalty in the luxury brands context. Overall, the importance of mobile social media communication in driving positive business outcomes is acknowledged in the literature, justifying the need to deepen understanding of SMM use on mobile social media platforms in the brand-building process.

2.2 Social media marketing efforts

SMM's recognised role in the brand-building process, justify examining how SMM efforts can be used in various contexts – e.g. luxury brands ([Godey et al., 2016](#)), airlines ([Seo and Park, 2018](#)) and e-commerce ([Yadav and Rahman, 2018](#)) – resulting in diverging SMM conceptualisations. [Kim and Ko \(2012\)](#) conceptualises SMM as a multidimensional construct, comprising entertainment, customisation, interaction, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and trendiness. An alternative view is that SMM comprises only four dimensions – entertainment, customisation, interaction and trendiness – viewed as critical in driving COBRAs for luxury brands available on social media platforms ([Liu et al., 2019](#)). This is because eWOM (the omitted dimension) is deemed a behavioural CBE outcome in response to brands' SMM. Hence, eWOM should be integrated into COBRAs in evaluating brands' SMM performance. This study adopted [Liu et al.'s \(2019\)](#) SMM conceptualisation in examining the relationship between SMM and COBRAs. Each of the four SMM dimensions is discussed next.

2.2.1 Entertainment. Important in building the consumer–brand relationship, brand knowledge and purchase intention ([Seo and Park, 2018](#)), entertainment occurs when marketers use social media platforms to create fun and playful consumer experiences, such as games, photos, videos and contests ([Cheung et al., 2019](#)). Thus, entertaining content is increasingly used in SMM strategies seeking to build consumers' awareness and loyalty intention ([Barger et al., 2016](#)).

2.2.2 Customisation. Customisation is the extent to which services are tailored to satisfy consumers' personal preferences ([Godey et al., 2016](#)). Social media technologies enable message customisation, supporting marketers' personal dialogue with consumers ([Merrilees, 2016](#)). Hence, marketers offer personalised messages and services incorporating customised marketing efforts to create value for a specific group of consumers, facilitating customisation ([Zhu and Chen, 2015](#)) and contributing to consumer–brand relationship-building ([Kim and Ko, 2012](#)).

2.2.3 Interaction. Interaction involves opportunities for two-way communication and information sharing on social media platforms ([Dessart et al., 2015](#)), allowing consumers to exchange their ideas about specific products or brands with like-minded others ([Kim and Ko, 2012](#)). Consumer–brand interaction helps improve consumers' cognitive understanding of product attributes and brand benefits ([Cheung et al., 2020a](#)) and can be enhanced by messages encouraging the sharing and dissemination of brand-related information amongst consumers ([Seo and Park, 2018](#)), such as discussion of news, usage experiences and new product development for brands ([Godey et al., 2016](#)).

2.2.4 Trendiness. Trendiness refers to the extent to which a brand communicates the latest, up-to-date and trendy (i.e. current “hot topics”) brand information ([Naaman et al., 2011](#)). Trendy information includes brand-related updates and novel ideas about brands initiated by marketers and consumers ([Gallaughier and Ransbotham, 2010](#)), contributing to building consumers' awareness and driving brand loyalty ([Godey et al., 2016](#)).

2.3 Consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs)

Based on [Shao \(2009\)](#) and advanced by [Muntinga et al. \(2011\)](#), the COBRAs concept refers to the “set of brand-related online activities on the part of the consumer that vary in the degree to

which the consumer interacts with social media and engages in the consumption, contribution, and creation of media content” (Schivinski *et al.*, 2019, p. 66). For example, engagement occurs when consumers read brand-related content, comment on the brand’s products or posts and upload content on the brands’ social media platforms (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011).

Reflecting the CBE level (Simon and Tossan, 2018), COBRAs involve three usage types encompassing a consuming, contributing and creating behaviours continuum, regarded, respectively, as the minimum, medium and highest levels of online engagement behaviour (Piehler *et al.*, 2019). Consuming occurs at the minimum level, when consumers read, view or watch brand-related information without actively contributing or creating user-generated content (Schivinski *et al.*, 2019). At the medium level, contributing occurs when consumers adopt online engagement behaviours, such as liking, commenting and sharing brand-related information (Piehler *et al.*, 2019). At the highest level, creating involves the uploading, publishing and posting of content on their own and on the brand’s social media pages (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011). Overall, the three usage types are deemed effective in creating positive brand/business outcomes, including commitment, satisfaction, brand loyalty, purchase intention and positive referrals (Gensler *et al.*, 2013; Mishra, 2019; Piehler *et al.*, 2019). This view of COBRAs as linked with consumers’ motivation in enjoying entertainment, interaction and useful information available on social media platforms (Dolan *et al.*, 2016; Piehler *et al.*, 2019), supports the existence of associations between SMM efforts and COBRAs, as addressed in the hypotheses that follow.

SMM with entertaining content creates playful experiences that motivate consuming, with consumers enjoying pleasure, fun and relaxation from the content on social media brand pages (Pöyry *et al.*, 2013; Tsai and Men, 2017). Entertaining content encourages consumers to visit social media brand pages and consume brand-related content, such as watching interesting videos, viewing amusing pictures and reading funny posts (Liu *et al.*, 2019). Content that is entertaining is more likely to motivate consumers to contribute to social media brand pages, including sharing and recommending information to their peers (Gensler *et al.*, 2013), hence driving consumers’ creating behaviour on social media brand pages (Piehler *et al.*, 2019), justifying H1:

H1. Entertaining SMM has a positive effect on consumers’ (a) consuming, (b) contributing and (c) creating behaviours on social media brand pages.

Customised, personalised content on social media platforms assists consumers as they search for needed information (Godey *et al.*, 2016). Consumers are more willing to browse relevant information that is available on social media platforms (Schulze *et al.*, 2015). Indeed, when brands provide information customised to consumers’ preferences, this positively influences consumers’ intention to share the brand-related information with peers, as well as posting and uploading their favourite information on social media brand pages (Liu *et al.*, 2019), justifying H2:

H2. Customised SMM has a positive effect on consumers’ (a) consuming, (b) contributing and (c) creating behaviours on social media brand pages.

Consumer–brand interaction is a significant motivator of online engagement behaviour (Yadav and Rahman, 2018). In the social media context, interactive brand posts attract consumers’ attention, stimulating consumers’ intention to read and share them (Simon and Tossan, 2018). Additionally, when consumers are highly involved with the interactive brand posts, they are more willing to upload and post their opinions or ideas on a brand’s social media pages, resulting in the creation of user-generated content (Liu *et al.*, 2019). This justifies H3:

H3. Interactive SMM has a positive effect on consumers’ (a) consuming, (b) contributing and (c) creating behaviours on social media brand pages.

Trendy and useful information available on social media brand pages drives consumers' intention to read and to share that information (Liu *et al.*, 2019). Consumers prefer reading trendy information on social media platforms, including current trends, brand-related news and other hot topics related to their products of interest (Cheung *et al.*, 2020a), thus influencing the number of reads and views on social media brand pages (Liu *et al.*, 2019). Seeking to contribute to social media brand communities, consumers may share trendy information with peers and like-minded users on social media platforms (Mishra, 2019). Engaged consumers are also willing to upload fashionable, iconic and stylish information about their brands of interest on social media brand pages (Ramadan *et al.*, 2018), resulting in creating behaviour (Liu *et al.*, 2019). This justifies H4:

H4. Trendiness SMM has a positive effect on consumers' (a) consuming, (b) contributing and (c) creating behaviours on social media brand pages.

2.4 On-going search behaviour

OSB refers to customers' external search behaviour that occurs on a regular basis, but that is not associated with the solving of a recognised and immediate purchase problem (Bloch *et al.*, 1986). Empirical research supports the association between consumers' intrinsic motivation and OSB (Beatty and Smith, 1987; Schmidt and Spreng, 1996), suggesting that consumers who are interested in specific products/brands are willing to exert considerable cognitive efforts in searching for brand-related information (McColl-Kennedy and Fetter, 2001). Arguably, the three COBRA usage types reflect consumers' interest in engaging with the focal brands (Liu *et al.*, 2019), being linked with consumers' behavioural intention, including referral intention and commitment (Piehler *et al.*, 2019; Pinto and Yagnik, 2017). In other words, highly engaged consumers participate actively in online brand-related activities, being motivated to search for brand-related information on an on-going basis to continuously interact with brands and other like-minded users (Bloch *et al.*, 2009). This justifies H5:

H5a. Consuming has a positive effect on OSB.

H5b. Contributing has a positive effect on OSB.

H5c. Creating has a positive effect on OSB.

2.5 Repurchase intention

Repurchase intention represents consumers' loyalty behaviour, reflected in their intention to buy the same product from the same firm on more than one occasion (Hellier *et al.*, 2003). The literature confirms the link between consumers' engagement with brands on social media and repurchase intention (Cheung *et al.*, 2020c). Accordingly, highly engaged consumers involve themselves in reading and watching brand-related information, which reflects a stronger repurchase intention (Algharabat *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, highly engaged consumers are motivated to share and upload their comments about brands on social media, driving loyalty intention through the consumer-brand interaction process (Piehler *et al.*, 2019). As consumers' social media activities – including reads, visits, likes and shares – relate positively to brand equity, which drives repurchase intention (Lim *et al.*, 2020), this justifies H8:

H6a. Consuming has a positive effect on repurchase intention.

H6b. Contributing has a positive effect on repurchase intention.

H6c. Creating has a positive effect on repurchase intention.

3. Methodology

Data collection used a self-administered, online survey in Chinese, hosted on Qualtrics. The survey questionnaire featured seven-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), using measurement items adopted from previous studies (Table 1). For SMM efforts, the study adapted 12 items to measure entertainment, customisation, interaction and trendiness (Kim and Ko, 2012); six items to measure the COBRAs of consuming, contributing and creating (Simon and Tossan, 2018); three items to measure repurchase intention (Cheung *et al.*, 2020b); and five items to measure OSB (McColl-Kennedy and Fetter, 2001).

Construct	Loading
<i>Entertainment</i>	
The content found in brand <i>X</i> 's social media seems interesting	0.93
It is exciting to use brand <i>X</i> 's social media	0.96
It is fun to collect information on products through brand <i>X</i> 's social media	0.95
<i>Customisation</i>	
It is possible to search for customised information on brand <i>X</i> 's social media	0.92
Brand <i>X</i> 's social media provide customised services	0.94
Brand <i>X</i> 's social media provide lively feed information I am interested in	0.94
<i>Interaction</i>	
It is easy to convey my opinion through brand <i>X</i> 's social media	0.95
It is easy to convey my opinions or conversation with other users through brand <i>X</i> 's social media	0.94
It is possible to have two-way interaction through brand <i>X</i> 's social media	0.93
<i>Trendiness</i>	
Content found on brand <i>X</i> 's social media are up-to-date	0.94
Using brand <i>X</i> 's social media is very trendy	0.94
The content on brand <i>X</i> 's social media is the newest information	0.94
<i>COBRAs – consuming</i>	
I would like to visit the WeChat page of brand <i>X</i>	0.95
I would like to read content posted by brand <i>X</i> on WeChat	0.95
<i>COBRAs – contributing</i>	
I would like to share content posted by brand <i>X</i> on WeChat page	0.97
I would like to comment on content posted by brand <i>X</i> on WeChat page	0.97
<i>COBRAs – creating</i>	
I would like to write reviews related to brand <i>X</i> on WeChat page	0.95
I would like to upload posts related to brand <i>X</i> on WeChat page	0.95
<i>Repurchase intention</i>	
The probability that I will use brand <i>X</i> again is high	0.90
I consider myself a loyal customer of brand <i>X</i>	0.93
If I had to do it over again, I would choose brand <i>X</i>	0.93
<i>OSB</i>	
I am interested in browsing catalogues, advertisements and articles about luxury cosmetic products	0.87
I am interested in visiting stores, just to look around or get information, rather than to make a specific purchase	0.81
I would like to discuss luxury cosmetic products with salespeople	0.85
I would be interested in reading information about how luxury cosmetic products can be used	0.90
I have compared attributes and characteristics among brands that provide luxury cosmetic products	0.88

Note(s): All loadings are significant at $p < 0.001$

Table 1.
Outer model results

The institutionally ethics-approved survey was promoted on WeChat by the research team along with an email sent to an extended network of Chinese contacts. An invitation to participate in the survey and the link to the questionnaire was posted on several WeChat pages for 12 weeks in the first quarter of 2019. Those who had no experience in using luxury cosmetics were excluded from the survey. Respondents were invited to answer questions about their perceptions of their nominated luxury cosmetics brand.

A total of 654 consumers were invited to take part in the survey; 506 customers agreed to participate, but 73 incomplete questionnaires were discarded. Therefore, 433 useable responses were received from Chinese WeChat users experienced in using luxury cosmetics (a 66% response rate).

The sample comprised 24% male (76% female) respondents, aged from 18 to over 66 (mean = 26–30 years). The majority was aged between 18 and 40 (78%). Respondents were typically engaged in full-time employment. All respondents owned the focal product at the time of data collection. In terms of brand stimuli, most respondents nominated Dior (28%) or Chanel (28%) as their most familiar luxury cosmetic brand, followed by Lancôme (11%), Armani (10%), Estée Lauder (9%), Shiseido (6%) and Givenchy (6%). Only 2.8% nominated other brands.

Regarding social media usage, all respondents were experienced WeChat users, reporting regular daily usage, with nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) signed into WeChat all the time, 12% accessing WeChat 6–10 times a day and 10% using WeChat 2–5 times per day on average. In sum, the respondents were heavy WeChat users, thus deemed suitable for addressing the data requirements for testing the study's hypotheses.

4. Results

The data analysis was done by partial least squares–structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), using SmartPLS v.3.2.8 (Ringle *et al.*, 2015). Data were analysed in two stages using the 5,000-bootstrap procedure, measuring (1) the (outer) model and (2) the structural (inner) model (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Using a two-tailed test, a hypothesis was supported when the *t*-value exceeded the critical value (i.e. $t \geq 1.96$, $p \leq 0.05$) in the structural model.

4.1 Outer model results

For the measurement model, all item loadings were >0.80 and significant ($p < 0.001$), and the results confirmed a satisfactory level of internal consistency for Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with values >0.88 (Table 1). Additionally, the loadings of indicators on the target constructs were stronger than the loadings on other constructs, ruling out cross-loading issues. The convergent validity of the model was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE), with all AVE scores greater than the recommended 0.50 threshold. Discriminant validity was satisfied using the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion, with the square roots of AVE larger than the corresponding correlations (Table 2). Additionally, all constructs' variation inflation factor (VIF) values were less than the recommended 5.0 threshold, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a concern (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Finally, because the data came from a single source (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), we assessed the potential for common method bias (CMB) by conducting Harman's single-factor test. The test results revealed that the single largest factor accounted for 40.7% of the variance, hence lower than the 50% threshold. This suggests that the questionnaire used in this study was free from CMB.

4.2 Inner (structural) model results

The hypotheses were assessed using the inner (structural) model results, by examining the *t*-values, standardised coefficient beta values and coefficient of determination (R^2 values). The results supported 12 of the 18 hypotheses. Regarding the relationship between SMM efforts and COBRAs, the impact of entertainment on consuming ($\beta = 0.46$, $p = 0.000$),

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	Composite reliability	AVE
1. Consuming	0.95									0.95	0.90
2. Contributing	0.84	0.97								0.97	0.93
3. Creating	0.65	0.68	0.95							0.95	0.91
4. Customisation	0.63	0.66	0.81	0.93						0.95	0.87
5. Entertainment	0.68	0.71	0.83	0.89	0.95					0.96	0.89
6. Interaction	0.65	0.65	0.85	0.86	0.86	0.94				0.96	0.88
7. OSB	0.62	0.64	0.74	0.79	0.82	0.79	0.86			0.94	0.75
8. Repurchase intention	0.64	0.61	0.69	0.73	0.76	0.72	0.76	0.92		0.94	0.85
9. Trendiness	0.58	0.56	0.81	0.79	0.80	0.81	0.79	0.74	0.94	0.96	0.88

Note(s): Diagonals (ITALICS) represent the square root of the AVE, while the off-diagonals represent the correlations

Table 2.
Discriminant validity of measurement model

contributing ($\beta = 0.52, p = 0.000$) and creating ($\beta = 0.22, p = 0.003$) was positive and significant. Thus, H1a–H1c are supported. The impact of interaction on consuming ($\beta = 0.25, p = 0.007$), contributing ($\beta = 0.18, p = 0.038$) and creating ($\beta = 0.37, p = 0.000$) was positive and significant, supporting H3a–H3c. Regarding the influence of trendiness, it had a positive and significant impact on creating ($\beta = 0.26, p = 0.003$) only, as its effects on consuming ($\beta = 0.01, p = 0.917$) and contributing ($\beta = -0.08, p = 0.197$) were non-significant. Thus, H4c was supported, but H4a and H4b were not supported. Surprisingly, the impact of customisation on consuming ($\beta = -0.002, p = 0.984$), contributing ($\beta = 0.12, p = 0.247$) and creating ($\beta = 0.10, p = 0.156$) was non-significant, with H2a–H2c not supported.

We also examined the impact of COBRAs on OSB and repurchase intention. The impact of consuming on OSB ($\beta = 0.14, p = 0.03$) and repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.30, p = 0.000$) was positive and significant, supporting H5a and H6a. The impact of creating on OSB ($\beta = 0.54, p = 0.000$) and repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.47, p = 0.000$) was positive and significant, supporting H5c and H6c. Contributing had a significant impact on OSB ($\beta = 0.16, p = 0.024$), supporting H5b. However, contributing's impact on repurchase intention was non-significant ($\beta = 0.04, p = 0.523$); thus, H6b was not supported.

We checked the R^2 values to assess explanatory power of the conceptual model (Figure 1), with $R^2 > 0.10$ being the recommended criterion benchmark (Chin, 1998). Regarding COBRAs, the R^2 values were as follows: consuming ($R^2 = 0.48$), contributing ($R^2 = 0.51$), creating ($R^2 = 0.78$), repurchase intention ($R^2 = 0.53$) and OSB ($R^2 = 0.59$), along with an average variance accounted for (AVA) = 0.58. This suggests that the exogenous variables explain a meaningful proportion of the variation in the endogenous variables.

5. Discussion

Four key findings emerge from the study results, highlighting the impact of SMM activities in driving COBRAs and influencing OSB and repurchase intention in the Chinese luxury cosmetics context.

The first finding establishes the relationship between SMM activities and COBRAs, related to consumers' consuming of, contributing to and creating of content on social media platforms, in response to firm-initiated SMM. It highlights the importance of allocating sufficient resources in preparing SMM communications with entertaining, interactive and trendy content.

The second finding identifies entertainment as the best predictor of consumers consuming and contributing brand-related content, whilst interaction is the best predictor of consumers creating brand-related content. Accordingly, entertaining content encourages consumers to read, view, comment and share brand-related content, whilst interaction encourages consumers to create their own content for brands.

The third finding is that consuming and creating are key behavioural drivers of repurchase intention, indicating that consumers' willingness in reading and creating brand-related information on social media platforms relates closely to their intention to repurchase the same brand in the future.

Finally, the fourth finding is that all of the COBRAs are significant predictors of consumers' OSB, implying that consuming, contributing and creating brand-related content on social media platforms help in shaping consumers' motivation when searching for more brand-related information, influencing their buying decision process.

6. Theoretical implications

The marketing literature advances SMM and COBRAs as important topical areas in marketing research. Notwithstanding, the relationship between individual SMM elements

and COBRA dimensions, along with the latter's role in driving consumers' behavioural intentions, remain as a gap in the literature, which this study seeks to address. This study provides theoretical SMM insights by investigating how the various SMM efforts (i.e. entertainment, customisation, interaction and trendiness) contribute to COBRAs (i.e. consuming, contributing and creating brand-related content), shedding new light on the drivers and outcomes of COBRAs by linking various SMM efforts with all three COBRAs dimensions.

In line with Pöyry *et al.*'s (2013) identification of entertainment as a driver in strengthening consumers' intention to browse and to participate on social media brand pages, our findings advocate the importance of using entertaining and interactive content in driving consumers' intention to consuming, contributing and creating brand-related content. Hence, our findings also provide important support to the importance of interaction in driving consumers' engagement and value co-creation behaviours (Cheung *et al.*, 2020a; Piehler *et al.*, 2019).

Our findings also indicate that trendiness is particularly useful in strengthening consumers' intention to create content, partially supporting Ramadan *et al.*'s (2018) argument that trendy information encourages consumers to create content and share their brand experience with like-minded users on social media platforms. Also, in contrast with Liu *et al.* (2019), our finding is that trendiness is not useful in building consumers' consuming and contributing on social media platforms.

Our findings also identify a non-significant relationship between customisation and the COBRA dimensions. This is in line with Dennis *et al.*'s (2009) findings that customisation is not useful in driving satisfaction and loyalty in an e-service context, also providing some explanation for Liu *et al.*'s (2019) inability to identify the impact of customised content on social media brand pages on consumers' COBRA intentions. However, these findings contrast with existing studies, showing that customised and personalised content on social media brand pages is useful in driving consumers' intentions to visit and share their brand experience on social media brand pages (Merrilees, 2016; Simon and Tossan, 2018).

One reason for the disparity between our findings and the extant literature may be the level of consumers' involvement with the focal product. As noted earlier, Chinese consumers are highly involved with luxury cosmetics, with a culture namely of "fear of missing out" in experiencing luxury cosmetics. Thus, they are motivated to search for information about luxury cosmetics on an on-going basis, along with stockpiling patterns (Kang *et al.*, 2020). In other words, as highly involved consumers who prefer to access more comprehensive information, they are interested in comprehensive information acquisition from brands and in learning from like-minded peers on social media platforms through interaction (Cheung *et al.*, 2020a) rather than creating content. In addition, we suggest that interactive content is much more important than customised content in encouraging consumers to read, share and create online brand-related content, especially for high-involvement products. Thus, our findings contribute to the literature by revealing that customisation may not be a useful driver of creating activity in the high-involvement, luxury cosmetics context of this study.

Our findings also confirm OSB and repurchase intention as consequences of COBRAs. Whilst prior studies identify the importance of COBRAs in driving consumers' referral intention (Piehler *et al.*, 2019), brand equity (Schivinski *et al.*, 2019) and purchase intention (Mishra, 2019), discussion of the behavioural consequences of COBRAs is limited to brand loyalty outcomes. Therefore, our findings contribute to the literature by empirically presenting the distinct effects of COBRA dimensions – consuming, contributing and creating – on consumers' brand loyalty (i.e. repurchase intention), along with consumers' intention in engaging in on-going search. Specifically, consuming and creating have a significant positive impact on consumers' behavioural intentions, as reflected by OSB and repurchase intention.

The study findings support De Vires and Carlson's (2014) and Piehler *et al.*'s (2019) findings of a positive impact of consuming and creating of brand-related content on social

media platforms in driving consumers' loyalty behaviour. However, our finding is that contributing has a positive impact on OSB only, and the relationship between contributing and repurchase intention is weak and non-significant. This contrasts with previous studies (e.g. [Jahn and Kunz, 2012](#); [Cvijikj et al., 2013](#)) regarding the importance of contributing in driving consumers' behavioural intention.

Overall, this study contributes to the marketing literature by showing that COBRAs play an important role in driving consumers' intention to repurchase and engage in on-going search for a high-involvement, luxury product using social media.

7. Managerial implications

From a managerial perspective, this study suggests that SMM strategies are worth using by marketers of luxury cosmetics in China. In particular, it suggests the benefit of utilising entertaining, interactive and trendy SMM content to strengthen consumers' intention to engage in COBRAs. Hence, marketers may consider creating posts with photos, videos and animation that consumers perceive as entertaining and enjoyable, satisfying their needs for fun and pleasure, as this stimulates their intention of consuming, contributing and creating content on WeChat pages for luxury cosmetic brands. Marketers may also consider offering interactive content, such as discussions of product usage, makeup styles and product comparisons, to facilitate consumer-brand and peer-to-peer interaction on WeChat pages. The suggestion is that such interactive posts may arouse consumers' interest to read, comment and share the posts, prompting them to upload content describing their experience in using the luxury cosmetics, hence helping like-minded peers to be more familiar with and better informed about luxury cosmetics products.

Marketers may also consider communicating brand-related news and current hot topics to strengthen consumers' content-creating intention on social media platforms. Posting news about luxury cosmetics, along with information on using luxury cosmetics trends, may stimulate consumers' interest to upload and post their own content for sharing with peers and with the brand. Marketer-initiated sharing of trendy information about luxury cosmetics topics on WeChat pages can instigate consumers' intention to share their feedback, photos and videos related to their experience on WeChat pages, thereby co-creating value for luxury cosmetic brands.

In relation to content customisation, the findings do not support using customised content to foment effective COBRAs. Instead, marketers may prioritise allocating their resources in the Chinese luxury cosmetics industry, investing less effort in preparing customised content and focusing more on preparing standardised SMM communications with entertaining, interactive and trendy content to drive COBRAs and subsequent behavioural intentions.

Our findings also advocate COBRAs' importance in driving consumers' OSB and repurchase intention. In particular, OSB is driven by all three COBRAs dimensions, whereas repurchase intention is driven by consuming and creating only. Thus, marketers may consider assessing the level of consumers' consuming, contributing and creating behaviour by checking the number of visits, reads, views, shares, comments, uploads and posts on their WeChat brand pages. To increase that level, marketers should update their WeChat brand pages frequently, along with activities such as reward programmes and sweepstakes, thus motivating consumers to keep visiting and sharing their experiences with the brand-related content. Arguably, these strategic actions will help ensure that information and experiences obtained are useful for consumers, strengthening their intrinsic motivation in understanding more about a brand and their intention to search for brand-related information on an on-going basis.

Lastly, marketers may consider introducing entertaining mini-games about luxury cosmetics on WeChat, encouraging consumers to read and view brand-related information

and thereby strengthening their intention to create their own content, sharing their experience in the mini-games and other brand-related information on social media platforms. These initiatives may strengthen consumers' intention to consuming and creating online-brand related content, strengthening their repurchase intention.

8. Limitations and future research directions

Cross-sectional in nature, this study has a number of limitations that bound the generalisation of the findings, suggesting opportunities for further research. One limitation is that the survey was limited to a convenience sample of WeChat users in China. Future research could replicate this study in other contexts, using other social media platforms in different countries, such as using Facebook or Instagram in western countries. Beyond ease of access to particular social media users, the choice of social media may reflect on distinct usage patterns and distinct consumer behaviours. Future research could also adopt a longitudinal design to examine the antecedents and consequences of COBRAs to enhance the generalisability of the research model. Finally, from a theoretical perspective, as the discussion of COBRAs' consequents is only in terms of repurchase intention and OSB, future research could examine the effects of COBRAs on other brand-related outcomes, such as brand commitment and brand knowledge.

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