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ACCOUNTING, BUSINESS and MANAGEMENT**

The Impact of Servant Leadership on Trust, Team Efficacy, and Intrinsic Motivation in Healthcare	
Salma Hayat, Siti Norida Wahab, Norashida Othman and Nikram Subramaniam	1-11
Student-led Classroom: Review on the Advantages and Disadvantages	
Ummi Habibah Mohd Shakil and Nurul Syifaa Mohd Shakil	12-22
Augmenting Consumer Acceptance of Robot-Assisted Technologies in Retail Industry: An Interdisciplinary Approach	
Khalufi Nasser Ali M.	23-36
Impact of Building Information Modelling in Achieving Sustainable Efficiency	
Linsy Kavanancheeri	37-47
Pandemic to Endemic: Changing Learning Styles as Coping Mechanism	
Nurmala Mustaffa Kamal, Mahfudzah Mohamed, Puteh Mariam Ismail, Asyaari Elmiza Ahmad and Roslina Abdul Rahim	48-65
Adaption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to Enhance Business and Collaboration between Countries, Focusing on Saudi Arabia	
Nisar Ahmed Zafar	66-75
Crucial Elements in the Development of Cyber Security Strategies in Saudi Arabia	
Alhashmi Aboubaker Lasyoud and Lawrence Awopetu	76-83
Analyzing the Influence of Dividend Policy on Corporate Value: A Financial Perspective with Haier as a Case Study	
Wang Danni and Zhong Qi	84-90
Digital Financial Capability Towards Improving Entrepreneurial's Business Performance	
Nainatul Farzuha Nor, Noor Saidatul Natrah Saaidun and Noorkartina Mohamad	91-99
Exploring the Impact of Flexible Work Arrangements on Turnover Intention: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction and the Moderating Effect of Perceived Supervisory Support	
Joanna Benjamin George and Nitin Vihari Poluru	100-123
Household Budgets Among Different Income Groups in Klang Valley	
Al Sarah Alyaa Al Buhari, Kamisah Supian and Sharifah Hilmi Syed Abdullah	124-136

Exploring Strategies For Expanding The Xiaohongshu App In Malaysia And Singapore: A Study On Developing Chinese Social Media Overseas

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Abstract

This article discusses China's unique social media landscape, which is shaped by the country's culture, politics, and regulatory environment. Chinese social media platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and Xiaohongshu are deeply integrated and innovative, with features such as virtual red envelopes and mini-programs that significantly boost user engagement. However, expanding these platforms overseas presents challenges, such as cultural differences, regulatory environment, and competition. The article focuses on the case of Xiaohongshu (RED). It proposes strategies to improve customer loyalty and functionality in the context of e-commerce, utilizing the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) as the theoretical framework. The article highlights the importance of understanding the cultural norms and preferences of the target audience, complying with local laws and regulations, and finding ways to differentiate Chinese social media platforms from established players in the market.

Keywords: Chinese social media landscape, WeChat, Weibo, Xiaohongshu (RED), cultural differences, regulatory environment, customer loyalty, e-commerce functionality, UTAUT2, PLS SEM, expansion strategies, user-generated content, user satisfaction, perceived usefulness, social influence, trust, online shopping, COVID-19 pandemic, market competition, differentiation strategies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Xiaohongshu, also known as Little Red Book or RED, is a widely popular social e-commerce platform that originated in China. Launched in 2013, Xiaohongshu has quickly become a go-to app for Chinese consumers interested in fashion, beauty, lifestyle, and travel. The platform combines social media and e-commerce platform, enabling users to share their experiences, discover new products, and make purchases within the app. With its high-quality user-generated content, strong community aspect, and gamification features, Xiaohongshu has attracted millions of users and has become a valuable marketing tool for businesses looking to reach Chinese consumers. As this application got popular in a comparatively short time, it is good to review it from the perspective of user behaviour and engagement on this application.

Xiaohongshu, often called the "Chinese Instagram," operates as a hybrid social media and e-commerce platform. By 2019, it had amassed over 300 million registered

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users, with more than 85 million active monthly users. Around 70% of its user base was born after 1990, and nearly 70% of them are female.

The platform enables users and influencers to share product reviews, focusing mainly on beauty and health. Travel bloggers also contribute by showcasing tourism and leisure destinations. Xiaohongshu's RED Mall functions as its e-commerce division, connecting Chinese consumers with international products.

In the Xiaohongshu community, users actively engage by sharing vlogs, shopping experiences, and creative content through photos, text, videos, and live streams. Bloggers on the platform cover a wide range of topics, including beauty, fashion, food, travel, entertainment, fitness, parenting, and more.

Xiaohongshu's social aspect centers on discovering new brands, products, and ideas. The platform also features an integrated shopping interface, enabling users to seamlessly browse, search, and purchase products within the app.

According to publicly available data, Xiaohongshu's daily active users surged from 20 million to 40 million in 2021. During the same period, its monthly active user base doubled, surpassing 200 million. To put this into perspective, it took Xiaohongshu seven years from its inception to reach 100 million monthly active users, but only one year to jump from 100 million to 200 million.

Founded in 2013 by Miranda Qu and Charlwin Mao, Xiaohongshu initially started as an online guide for Chinese shoppers, providing a platform for users to review products and share shopping experiences within the community. By October 2014, the founders pivoted to connecting Chinese consumers with global retailers, leading to the creation of their cross-border e-commerce platform, which allows Chinese consumers to purchase products directly from overseas.

In fact, Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) has long followed the footsteps of Chinese students studying abroad, entering popular study destinations such as Malaysia, Singapore, the United States, Canada, and Spain. Xiaohongshu evidently values these countries greatly. According to data from the international version of AppGrowing, between February 19, 2021, and June 19, 2023, Xiaohongshu placed over 17,000 advertising materials, with many copies in traditional Chinese characters. Malaysia, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the United States were all key target countries.

Overseas-bound students share their life experiences, document cuisines, and check-in at various establishments on Xiaohongshu, making it almost a second information search tool for them. The saying "When in doubt, check Xiaohongshu" applies to everything from travel and TV series recommendations to exploring new shops and skincare advice. In the Southeast Asian region with a larger Chinese population, Xiaohongshu entered Malaysia around 2018, a country where nearly one-third of the population is Malaysian Chinese, more and more local Chinese have been using Xiaohongshu, especially since the outbreak of the pandemic, leading to a significant increase in the number of Chinese users on the platform.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) is a widely recognized model for analyzing technology adoption and usage behavior. Developed by Venkatesh et al. (2012), this model expands on its predecessor, UTAUT, by introducing additional constructs such as hedonic motivation and price value. UTAUT2 offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors that influence an individual's decision to adopt and use technology, as well as how these

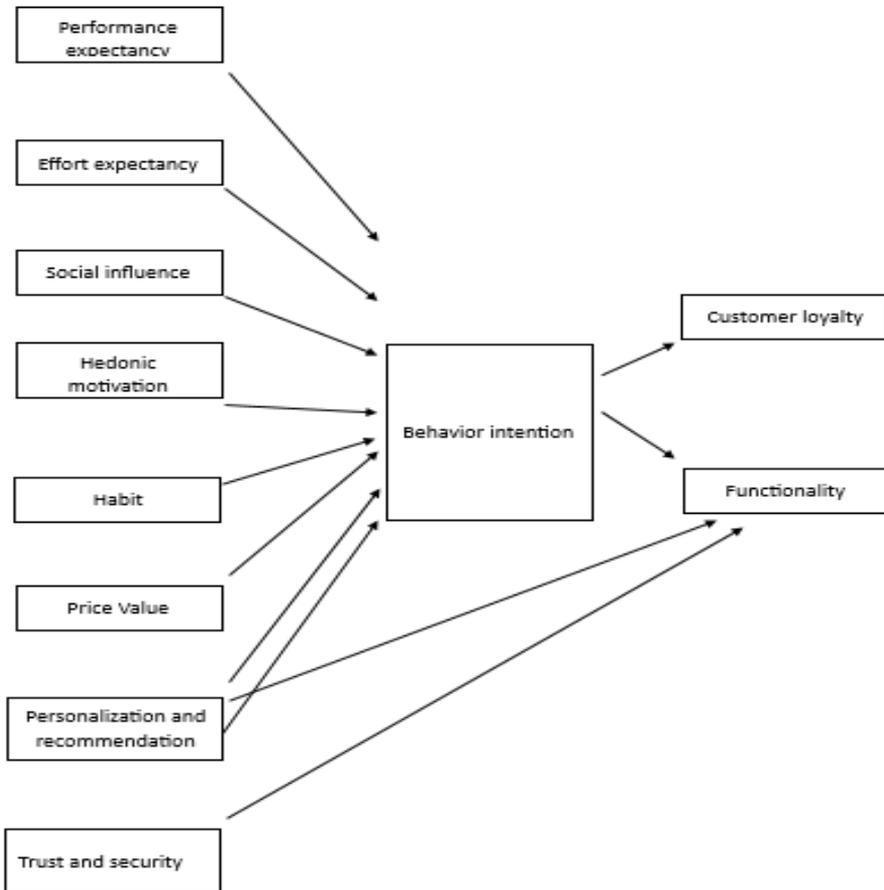
factors interact. This literature review will provide an overview of the UTAUT2 model, its key constructs, and its application in previous research to explore technology adoption and usage behavior.

Indeed, the UTAUT2 model stands as a widely acknowledged framework employed to grasp technology adoption and usage behavior. Conceived by Venkatesh et al., in 2012, UTAUT2 advances its precursor, UTAUT, by integrating additional elements like hedonic motivation and price value.

This model presents a comprehensive framework for understanding the myriad factors shaping an individual's inclination towards adopting and utilizing technology, along with the interplay between these factors. By encompassing constructs including performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, and price value, UTAUT2 offers a nuanced comprehension of technology adoption dynamics.

H₈: Personalization and recommendation positively impact Xiaohongshu's functionality.

Figure 1.



This conceptual framework outlines the eight factors that impact users' behavioral intentions towards the loyalty and functionality of the Xiaohongshu application. By analyzing factors such as user satisfaction, perceived usefulness, and social influence,

businesses can gain a better understanding of how to attract and retain users on the platform, ultimately leading to increased user loyalty and engagement.

Performance Expectancy: Performance expectancy is the degree to which users believe that using technology will assist them in achieving their goals (Tamilmani et al., 2017). Several factors can affect users' perceptions of the platform's effectiveness in helping them reach their objectives.

Effort Expectancy: Effort expectancy pertains to the perceived ease of using technology. Tamilmani et al., (2021) stated that various factors can influence users' perceptions of effort expectancy. For example, Complexity: If a system is seen as unduly intricate or difficult to grasp, users are more likely to perceive it as demanding a significant amount of work. Simplicity and user-friendliness are critical in producing a favorable effort expectation impression (Escobar-Rodríguez et al., 2014). The next factor could be, clear directions and guidance: Well-designed help documentation, tutorials, and tooltips may make a technology easier to use and improve users' perceptions of effort expectation (Razak et al., 2017). On Xiaohongshu. One factor that can influence effort expectancy is the user interface design. An intuitive and user-friendly interface can simplify navigation and help users find the information they need more easily. This includes factors such as the layout of the platform, clear labeling of buttons and icons, and the use of familiar design patterns (Turetken et al., 2019). Ease of navigation and search is another factor that can impact effort expectancy. If users can quickly find what they are looking for on the platform, they are more likely to view it as easy to use. This includes features such as a clear and concise menu structure, search functionality, and filters to refine search results. The availability of help resources or customer support can also impact effort expectancy. If users feel that they can easily access help resources or get support when needed, they are more likely to view the platform as easy to use. This includes features such as FAQ sections, user guides, and customer service chat or phone support (Oh et al., 2009).

Social Influence: Social influence refers to the degree to which users perceive that significant others believe they should use the technology (Raman & Don, 2013b). In other words, the impact of other people's views (peers, teachers, and friends) on individuals' intentions or user behaviour is reflected in social influence. Employees are socially impacted by their peers' opinions about e-commerce platforms, which impacts their behavioral intention to utilize them (Ain et al., 2016a). Specifically, the factors that influence users' perceptions of social influence on Xiaohongshu are the roles of influencers and key opinion leaders (KOLs). Xiaohongshu has a huge number of influencers and KOLs who create content and recommend products to their followers. Users may perceive that these individuals are important and credible, and may be more likely to use the platform if they see them using it and recommending it to others (Fulk et al., 1990; Valente, n.d.). Word-of-mouth and referral programs can also impact social influence. If users hear positive things about the platform from their friends or family members, they may be more likely to use it themselves. Referral programs can further incentivize users to recommend the platform to others and can help to increase the user base. Social network effects can also impact social influence. As more people use the platform, it becomes more valuable to users because there are more opportunities to engage with others, share information, and discover new products. This can lead to a positive feedback loop where the more people use the platform, the more valuable it becomes, and the more likely others are to use it as well (Okazaki, 2009).

Hedonic Motivation: There are many definitions of hedonic motivation, for example, according to Nikolopoulos, Hedonic Motivation (HM) is a synonym for felt

enjoyment. (Nikolopoulou et al., 2021). Yuan defined hedonic motivation as pertains to the extent to which users find technology enjoyable and fun to use (Yuan et al., 2015). Also, individuals' hedonic motivation is defined as the pleasure or enjoyment experienced when using technology. In information system (IS) research, hedonic motivation has been characterized as subjective enjoyment and has been found to have a direct influence on technology usage (Ain et al., 2016b). There are various factors can influence users' perceptions of hedonic motivation in Xiaohongshu. One factor that can influence hedonic motivation is the platform's entertainment value. Users are more likely to perceive the platform as enjoyable if it provides engaging and entertaining content, such as videos, photos, and stories. The platform's ability to provide a diverse range of content and interesting experiences can increase users' enjoyment of the platform. Another factor impacting hedonic motivation is the satisfaction of discovering new products. Xiaohongshu offers a wide range of products from various brands, and users can browse and discover new products through the platform's content and recommendations. This discovery process can be enjoyable for users, and the satisfaction they derive from finding new and interesting products can contribute to their overall enjoyment of the platform. Engaging with like-minded individuals through the platform's social features is also crucial to hedonic motivation. Users can follow and connect with other users who share similar interests, allowing them to engage in discussions, share experiences, and receive recommendations. This social interaction can enhance users' enjoyment of the platform, as they can connect with like-minded individuals and build a sense of community (Kim & Forsythe, 2007).

Habit: Habit refers to the degree to which users perform a behavior automatically as a result of repeated experience (Tamilmani et al., 2017). In another definition, habits are described as behavioral patterns that are engaged automatically in response to a scenario in which the behavior has previously been performed frequently and consistently.

Price Value: Price value is a critical factor for e-commerce platforms, as it represents the perceived cost-benefit trade-off of using the technology. Price has become an important aspect of customer responses to product values. Customers are usually satisfied if the quality of the items outweighs the expenses that they pay. Several studies have found a link between pricing and consumer happiness (Sudari, 2019). On the other hand, for digital e-commerce platforms, promotion is one of the most essential marketing mix components while promoting their products or services. Promotion involves actions that highlight a product's benefits and persuade target consumers to make a purchase. The public will learn about the items and services being advertised as a result of promotional efforts. Customers are expected to know extensive information about the items and services given by executing promotions. Customers will be satisfied if they have complete knowledge about these items and services. Because the buyer will be happy if he or she has comprehensive knowledge about the goods (Qomariah, 2021). For Xiaohongshu users, this may be considered in terms of competitive pricing, discounts, promotions, and loyalty programs. By offering attractive prices and incentives, Xiaohongshu can enhance its appeal to users and foster customer loyalty, which is essential for the platform's growth and sustainability in a highly competitive e-commerce landscape. By balancing affordability with quality products and services, Xiaohongshu can attract diverse users and maintain a loyal customer base, ensuring its continued success in the online shopping ecosystem (Busalim et al., 2021).

Trust and security: Trust and security are commonly viewed as crucial factors in determining whether new technology services will be accepted (Borghouts et al., 2021a).

Trust is used to relate to a wide range of structures. Trust is an issue that has attracted investigation from many domains, including sociology, economics, psychology, cognitive sciences, and more recently, computer science. However, trust is a complex issue to analyze or clearly define due to its interdisciplinary nature. There has been considerable debate about what trust is, how it is influenced, and how it is represented. This complexity makes it difficult to narrow it down to a single, static definition. Trust encompasses various meanings and functions across different contexts. For instance, Psychologists investigate it as a personal characteristic. On the other hand, IT often addresses the subject of trust from two unique approaches. One that illustrates the inclination to see Trust through a more deterministic lens, viewing it as a set of reasonable options rather than a quantitative risk. Examples may be found in the literature addressing topics such as trust management or computational trust as they relate to security, reputation, and privacy. Another viewpoint associates trust with human cognitive and emotive qualities. A strategy centered on qualifying trust traits and comprehending possible trust consequences among human users. Examples can be found in the literature on topics such as computer-assisted collaborative work, communities of practice, designing for trustworthy interactions, and social capital. and so on (Sousa et al, 2014). Overall, trust and security are indispensable aspects of an e-commerce platform's functionality, as they directly impact users' willingness to engage in transactions on a platform. Also, trust and security are portrayed as a method of creating, building, and improving customer connections and are viewed as a strategic essential for achieving long-term competitive advantage (Agyei, 2020). Xiaohongshu must prioritize maintaining a secure environment for its users to attract and retain customers. This involves ensuring data privacy and protection by implementing robust data encryption and adhering to strict privacy policies, providing secure payment methods through partnerships with trusted payment providers and offering multiple payment options, and developing transparent policies regarding refunds and returns to foster a sense of reliability and credibility among users. By focusing on these crucial elements, Xiaohongshu can build trust with its user base, resulting in a loyal customer base that continues to engage with the platform's e-commerce features and contributes to its ongoing success (Belanger et al., n.d.; Kim et al., 2011).

Personalization and recommendation systems: They are vital components in enhancing user experience and satisfaction on e-commerce platforms, as they enable a more customized and engaging online shopping experience. Xiaohongshu can leverage advanced algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to meticulously analyze user preferences, browsing history, and purchasing patterns, allowing the platform to provide highly tailored product suggestions and content that cater to personal tastes and interests. By offering personalized experiences that resonate with users, Xiaohongshu can increase user engagement, foster deeper connections with its user base, and encourage repeat purchases, ultimately driving customer loyalty and satisfaction. Moreover, a sophisticated personalization and recommendation system can streamline the shopping process for users, making it easier for them to discover relevant products and content, which further contributes to the platform's overall appeal and competitive advantage in the rapidly evolving e-commerce landscape (Choi, 2014).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

PLS SEM is used to analyze the relationships between different variables related to the performance of Xiaohongshu. We would first need to identify the 4 indicator variables of interest and their relationships with Xiaohongshu. We investigate the effect of 4 variable indicators related to performance of Xiaohongshu.

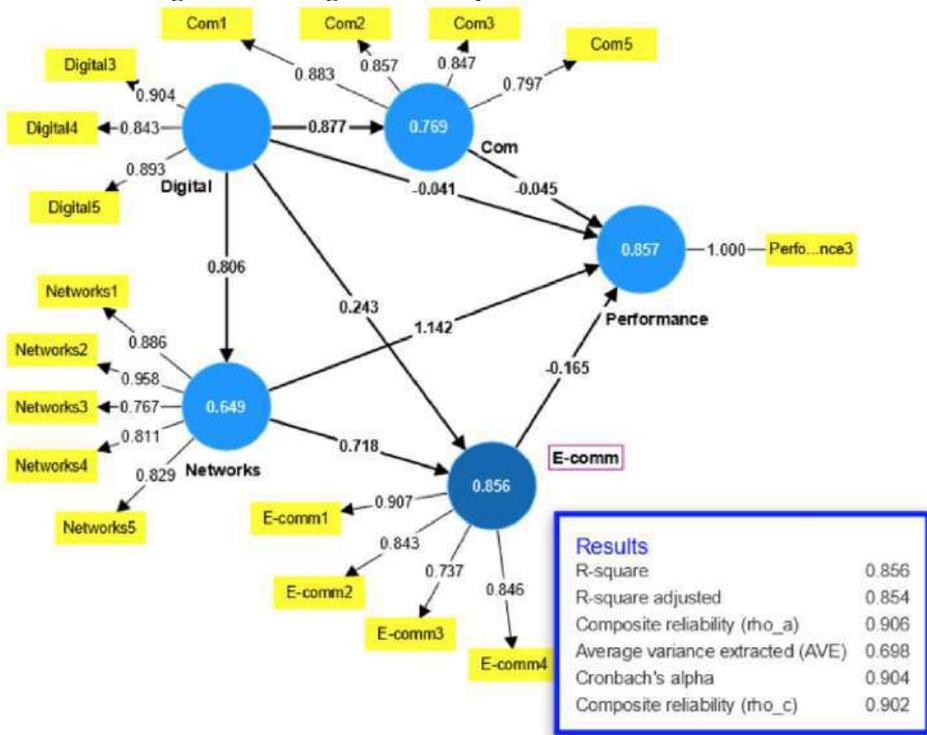
In this study, a questionnaire survey was used as the primary research method. The authors conducted a comprehensive literature review, including both domestic and international sources, focusing on perceived risk, trust, and consumer purchasing behavior. Building on insights from previous research and considering the unique context of the Xiaohongshu app, the questionnaire was developed based on existing findings.

Among the 296 valid samples, 210 were female Xiaohongshu users, accounting for 70.9%, indicating that women make up the majority of the platform’s user base. Most Xiaohongshu users are in the 18–25 age range, followed by the 26–30 age group, suggesting that the platform is primarily used by financially capable young adults. Additionally, data from the questionnaire revealed that a significant proportion of Xiaohongshu users have a bachelor’s degree or higher education, totaling 240 individuals, or 81.08%.

The highest frequency of shopping activity among Xiaohongshu users was "0 times," with 112 individuals, or 37.84%. This supports the hypothesis of the main issue in this research, suggesting that Xiaohongshu users rarely make purchases on the platform.

Figure 2.

Performance of Xiaohongshu PLS Algorithm Analysis Result2



In figure 2, there are two indicator items with loading < 0.70 are removed. performance of Xiaohongshu item 2, with loading 0.355 and livingstd3 with loading 0.359. After these modifications, the PLS-SEM model has 17 indicating items. Digital, Social network, E-commerce, Communication are 4 factors of higher performance for us. 85.7% (R2 = 0.857) of performance is caused by the 4 factors. The positive path coefficient (beta) indicates that increasing in 4 factors will cause performance increased.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

E-commerce: Previous studies have extensively explored how product quality, authenticity, and safety influence consumer trust and satisfaction in online shopping environments (e.g., Gefen et al., 2003; Zhou et al., 2007). Our findings align with these studies, emphasizing the critical role of these factors in the performance of social commerce platforms like Xiaohongshu. However, our research further delineates the specific concerns within the Xiaohongshu platform, providing targeted insights for improvement.

Communication: Literature on online communities often highlights the importance of communication in building relationships and fostering trust among users (e.g., Casaló et al., 2010). Our study corroborates these findings, showcasing the positive impact of effective communication on Xiaohongshu's performance. Moreover, it adds to the literature by exploring the nuances of privacy concerns within the platform's communication dynamics, a relatively underexplored area in existing studies.

Social Networks: The value of social networks in enhancing user engagement and content dissemination has been well documented (e.g., Kietzmann et al., 2011). Our research supports this view, highlighting the significant role of Xiaohongshu as an information-sharing and community-building platform. It adds to the literature by offering empirical evidence of the platform's effectiveness in leveraging social networking to boost performance, an aspect that is often theorized but less frequently quantified.

Digital Experiences: The importance of a user-friendly and intuitive digital experience has been emphasized in the context of user satisfaction and platform loyalty (e.g., Cyr, 2008). Our findings affirm the significance of digital experiences in Xiaohongshu's performance, aligning with previous research. Additionally, our study offers a more nuanced understanding of how digital experiences compare with those of other shopping apps, thereby enriching the literature with comparative insights.

V. CONCLUSION

This academic study delves into the distinctive social media environment of China and its ramifications for platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and Xiaohongshu. It scrutinizes the hurdles encountered by Chinese social media platforms during their global expansion, encompassing cultural disparities, regulatory frameworks, and market competition. With a specific focus on Xiaohongshu (RED), the paper proposes tactics to enhance consumer loyalty and platform functionality within the e-commerce realm, using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) as the conceptual framework.

Through the implementation of these strategies, Xiaohongshu positions itself as a premier social media platform boasting robust e-commerce capabilities, thereby attracting and retaining devoted clientele. Such endeavors bolster Xiaohongshu's ongoing growth and prosperity within the fiercely competitive realms of social media and e-commerce, not only within China but also across global markets. This study furnishes valuable insights into the factors shaping consumer loyalty and platform functionality as Chinese social media platforms extend their reach abroad. The discoveries and proposed tactics offer practical guidance for enterprises operating within the Chinese market or seeking expansion via platforms like Xiaohongshu. By comprehending and tackling the distinct challenges and opportunities in foreign markets, organizations can make informed decisions, optimize their performance, enhance user satisfaction, and achieve sustainable growth.

While our study lays the groundwork for comprehending the factors influencing Xiaohongshu's performance, these recommendations for methodological advancements underscore the vast potential for further refinement in social commerce research.

Embracing advanced techniques not only enriches the depth of analyses but also positions future studies to uncover novel insights, contributing to the continual improvement of social commerce platforms. In conclusion, the amalgamation of advanced methodologies with substantive research efforts holds the key to creating more engaging, trustworthy, and innovative social commerce platforms, ultimately shaping the trajectory of the digital commerce landscape.

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