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**A comparison of different channels for promotion of luxury brands to Chinese
millennials**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Bachelor of Science in Global Business

by

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to explore Chinese millennials' preferences and motivations of being attracted by different online channels, to purchase products considered to be luxury brands. Chinese millennials are a growing demographic with strong purchasing power and awareness of luxury brands, and a very high internet and smart phone penetration and usage rates. Luxury brands have focused less on online promotion and to sell their products with the exception of cosmetics. Online marketing channels could offer a huge opportunity for luxury brands to appeal to Chinese millennials. Paid, owned and earned media are major channels of online promotion, which Chinese millennials have different attitude to. Data was quantitative, gathered through online surveys, which were completed by 216 Chinese millennials. A pilot study was conducted before the survey and the data was gathered through 15 Chinese millennials. The results are used to identify different products to match different promotional channels. The findings of this study contain several theoretical and practical contributions to the development of luxury brands on online promotion. Advertisers, marketers, social media-related practitioners may benefit from the findings on the preferences, motivations as well as which product match which channel.

Keywords: *Luxury brands, Chinese millennials, online promotion, promotional channels*

INTRODUCTION

Most of Chinese millennials now are economic independent and this group becomes a huge consuming power in the market. Millennials are more individualistic and emphasis of their own styles. Thus, they have more desire of luxury goods which have the expressions of symbolism (Catry, 2003).

With the growth of competitiveness in the market, brands need to promote their products. Chinese millennials live in a digital era, where networking is one of their major lifestyles. Many industries soon capture the opportunity of online marketing. Among them, social media marketing is one of the most influential. However, comparing with other industries, luxury brands have showed their hesitation and fell behind. Internet feels like cheap, but the most experienced online consumers have similar image of luxury consumers: rich and young (Tossmann, 2000). If luxury brands want to be successful in China, they need to increase the budget on digital marketing by 60% to 70% of their total marketing spending (Pratten, 2019).

For the promotion of luxury goods, cosmetics is a special category. The unit price of luxury cosmetics is much lower than others like handbags, shoes or jewelries. Thus, to market different products, firms should take different marketing strategy. Firms need to choose different promotional channels to reach consumers more precisely.

When considering the nature of social media marketing, there is much existing literature that shows different channels including paid media, earned media and owned media.

LITERATURE REVIEW - BACKGROUND

There appears to be some in the existing literature related to the youth of Chinese luxury consumers and digital marketing has grown rapidly in recent years in China. Chinese consumers have spent 770 billion RMB, which is predicted to raise to 1.2 trillion RMB, in personal luxury goods with 6% compound annual growth rate, and Chinese millennials are new as well as powerful among this group (Luan, Aimee, & Daniel, 2019). These consumers live in a digital era where online shopping has

become a major lifestyle. According to *China Luxury Digital Playbook*, which is done by BCG and Tencent, 82% of luxury purchase journeys are ROPO (research online, purchase offline) (Seara et al., 2019). Online purchase of luxury goods is predicted to 25% of sales by 2025, up from 8% in 2018, and more shoppers are taking the whole journey only through Internet, from discovery to purchase (Gossage, 2019).

Chinese Millennials

Although there are various definitions to “Millennials,” the most wild-spread one is that they are post-80’s and post-90’s, who are born in 1980-2000 (Luan et al., 2019). Most of them are at the age of 20s and 30s, which is the time of financially independent, so they become powerful in the luxury market.

The Chinese millennials are growing up in a more open and diverse environment. They have more opportunities to go to the college and go abroad, which helps them to generate diversity of ideals, beliefs and viewpoints (Ngai & Cho, 2012). They are individualistic and more willing to spend money on luxury goods compare to the older generation. They do not only use the social media but also spend lots of time on it (Seara et al., 2019).

Luxury Brands

Luxury goods have high price, excellent quality and specialized distribution channel (Kapferer, 2001; Vigneron, Johnson, & Mt, 1999). The characteristics of value, quality, aesthetics and symbolism distinguish luxury products from ordinary goods (Heine, 2009). More and more consumers are willing to spend on luxury products. Compare with other categories, the price of luxury cosmetics is much lower. Thus, even some consumers cannot afford other luxury products like accessories, clothes, shoes, bags or jewelries, they are willing to buy luxury products. For many consumers, especially women, luxury cosmetics add up exquisiteness (Ajitha & Sivakumar, 2017).

Digital Marketing and Channels

Online promotion is regarded as one of the most effective promotion approaches with the advantages of affordable costs and long-term effect (Pocol, 2012). It is a subset of digital marketing.

Social media belongs to digital marketing channels. Digital marketing channels are systems that normally based on Internet connect sellers to customers and transmit the value of products (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Social media contains a huge amount of data including customer's personal data, opinions and feedbacks, which are valuable for marketing strategy (Coulter, 2012; Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). In China, there are several promotional channels of luxury goods including social media, official APPs and mini-programs, digital brand advertising, TVC, magazines, marketing campaigns, etc (Seara et al., 2019). Also, according to this report, among these channels, social media, especially KOL (key opinion leaders) and official accounts of the brands on Weibo and WeChat, attracts most of consumers' attention.

Among those social media channels, KOL and official Weibo/WeChat account fall into two different categories. KOL belongs to paid social media while official Weibo/WeChat account are owned social media.

Paid media refers to firms pay third party to transmit to your target consumers. Paid social media now is popular where allows flexible budgets and quick feedback ("Research and Markets Adds Report," 2012). In China, KOL now is the most popular channel for brands to promote their products. Not only because KOL can bring sales, but also establish a good reputation which refers to positive Word of Mouth.

Owned social media refers to brands communicate with customers through their own online channels, like a Twitter/Facebook fan page or YouTube channels (Colicev, Malshe, Pauwels, & O'Connor, 2018). In China, instead of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, people are more use of Weibo, WeChat, Tik Tok and Little Red Book.

Earned social media refers to the brand-related content that consumers create and spread through online channels (Colicev, Malshe, Pauwels, & O'Connor, 2018).

Source Reliability

In real life, it's important to combine all the information to make better decisions (Jiao, Pan, Liang, Feng, & Yang, 2016). Due to the source limitation, the reliability of different sources becomes one

evidence of decision making (Hégarat-masclé, Bloch, & Vidal-madjar, 1998; Milisavljevic & Bloch, 2003).

STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

For several reasons, luxury goods categories are common segments regarding marketing strategies. Cosmetics and other categories have different target consumers. They need different marketing strategies and promotional channels.

Based on the existing body of knowledge reported above, the following hypotheses are derived.

Research Question (RQ): What channels should luxury brands choose for different products?

H1: Regarding Social Media Marketing

1a – Social media marketing has positive impact on Chinese millennials' purchase intention.

2a – Chinese millennials prefer marketing through owned media.

H2: Regarding Luxury Goods

2a – Cosmetics are more suitable to promote through paid media, earned media and owned media.

2b – Other categories are more suitable to promote through earned and owned media.

METHODOLOGY

This paper used quantitative research. Quantitative research is the systematic empirical investigation through statistical techniques (Given, 2008), and qualitative research is to gather

nonnumerical data through observation and is often used to answer “why” (Babbie, 2013). The instrument of this paper to do the quantitative research is online survey. In this paper, quantitative research aims to understand what channels consumers are most trusted in and generate purchase intention. This paper chooses interviews as instrument.

Pilot Study

Pilot study is a small-scaled study pre-conducted to evaluate feasibility (Thabane et al., 2010). In order to identify the most frequently used responses to the research inquiries, a qualitative pilot study combining interviews and discussions was undertaken. A pilot study with 15 Chinese millennials who are luxury goods consumers were conducted. This pilot study has used the same survey questions as quantitative method.

Instrumentation Design (Quantitative Method)

The survey was designed based on pilot study and previous related research design (Yuan, Bare, Johnson, & Saberi, 2014). In the pilot study, same survey questions are used. It seems that for different channels, there are different relationships between source reliability and purchase intention. The survey questions are divided into three parts. One is on source reliability and aims to figure out which channels are consumers most trust. Second and third are on different luxury categories and it can show different channels’ relationships between source reliability and purchase intention. These survey questions can figure out which channel has positive relationship between source reliability and purchase intention. Then, these channels are which brands should pay attention to.

1. Survey Question on source reliability

Five options were presented as possible responses for the question

- I am very trusted in KOL/Official Weibo or WeChat Account/Weibo or friend circle advertisements/friends sharing/ordinary people sharing on Weibo or Little Red Book.
- I am trusted in KOL/Official Weibo or WeChat Account/Weibo or friend circle advertisements/friends sharing/ordinary people sharing on Weibo or Little Red Book.

- I feel normal about KOL/Official Weibo or WeChat Account/Weibo or friend circle advertisements/friends sharing/ordinary people sharing on Weibo or Little Red Book.
- I distrust KOL/Official Weibo or WeChat Account/Weibo or friend circle advertisements/friends sharing/ordinary people sharing on Weibo or Little Red Book.
- I strongly distrust KOL/Official Weibo or WeChat Account/Weibo or friend circle advertisements/friends sharing/ordinary people sharing on Weibo or Little Red Book.

2. Survey Question on luxury cosmetics

Six alternatives were provided to measure the factor of Type of Content:

- For luxury cosmetics, I am attracted by KOL.
- For luxury cosmetics, I am attracted by Official Weibo/WeChat Account.
- For luxury cosmetics, I am attracted by Weibo/friend circle advertisements.
- For luxury cosmetics, I am attracted by friends sharing.
- For luxury cosmetics, I am attracted by ordinary people sharing on Weibo.
- For luxury cosmetics, I am attracted by ordinary people sharing on Little Red Book.

3. Survey Question on other luxury categories

Six alternatives were provided to measure the factor of Type of Content:

- For other luxury categories, I am attracted by KOL.
- For other luxury categories, I am attracted by Official Weibo/WeChat Account.
- For other luxury categories, I am attracted by Weibo/friend circle advertisements.
- For other luxury categories, I am attracted by friends sharing.
- For other luxury categories, I am attracted by ordinary people sharing on Weibo.
- For other luxury categories, I am attracted by ordinary people sharing on Little Red Book.

In the context, luxury cosmetics are accepted by more consumers. It's necessary to discuss different categories under luxury brands. Through these questions, consumer's preferences to these categories can be figured out. The motivation can be answered by the interviews.

ANALYSIS / RESULTS

This paper collected primary and secondary data. Secondary data is all from WKU library and Google Scholar. Primary data contains survey and personal interviews. A total of 216 online survey questionnaire responses were collected. Basic information on age groups, genders and monthly income is provided on Table 1, 2 and 3. The Chinese millennials age group ranging from 20 to 24 years represented the majority of the survey respondents with 158 respondents out of the total. Majority of the respondents are college students. 95.43% of the respondents' income are under 10,000 yuan per month.

	Yes	No
Luxury Cosmetics Purchase	65.75%	34.25%
Other Luxury Goods Purchase	47.49%	52.51%

Table 1: Luxury cosmetics and other luxury goods purchase

Table 1 shows that 65.75% respondents have bought luxury cosmetics and 34.25% respondents have not. 47.49% respondents have bought other luxury goods before and 52.51% respondents have not. For majority of respondent, they have purchased of luxury cosmetics before but other categories not.

	Strongly Distrust	Distrust	Normal	Trust	Strongly Trust
Key Opinion Leaders (KOL)	3.65%	5.48%	60.73%	25.11%	5.02%
Official Weibo/WeChat Accounts	3.2%	4.57%	33.33%	42.47%	16.44%
Weibo/Friend Circle advertisements	10.96%	30.14%	45.21%	12.79%	0.91%
Friends sharing	6.85%	17.81%	51.6%	21%	2.74%
Ordinary people sharing on Weibo	10.96%	21%	53.42%	12.79%	1.83%
Ordinary people sharing on Little Red Book	13.24%	20.55%	51.14%	13.7%	1.37%

Table 2: Source reliability on different channels

Table 2 shows how much that respondents trust in different channels. Based on the comparison of source reliability on different channels, Chinese millennials have distinct attitude to these channels. Most of respondents, which occupies 58.91% of total, trust in official Weibo/WeChat

accounts, which is the owned media. 30.13% respondents trust in key opinion leaders, a paid media. Earned media is not the one that Chinese millennials put much trust in. More than a half of the respondents feel normal about earned media (friends sharing, ordinary people's sharing on Weibo/Little Red Book).

	N	Mean	SD
Key Opinion Leaders (KOL)	216	3.23	0.78
Official Weibo/WeChat Accounts	216	3.65	0.92
Weibo/Friend Circle advertisements	216	2.64	0.87
Friends sharing	216	2.97	0.87
Ordinary people sharing on Weibo	216	2.75	0.88
Ordinary people sharing on Little Red Book	216	2.71	0.91

Table 3: Source reliability on different channels

Table 3 shows Chinese millennials' trust to different channels. It is correlated with table 2. From the average data, official Weibo/WeChat accounts are that Chinese millennials most trusted in. Earned media, which refers to friends sharing and ordinary people's sharing on social media, are less trustful.

	% Purchase Intention	P-Value	R
Key Opinion Leaders (KOL)	26.03%	0.004**	0.19
Official Weibo/WeChat Accounts	57.99%	<0.001***	0.26
Weibo/Friend Circle advertisements	30.14%	0.031*	0.14
Friends sharing	49.32%	<0.001***	0.38
Ordinary people sharing on Weibo	25.11%	<0.001***	0.32
Ordinary people sharing on Little Red Book	31.51%	<0.001***	0.28

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 4: Source reliability and purchase intention in luxury cosmetics

Table 4 shows the relationships between source reliability and purchase intention in luxury cosmetics through different channels. The relationships vary from channels. All the P-Value is under 0.05, thus the relationship between source reliability and purchase intention is significant. R>0 shows that the relationship is positive. Thus, source reliability has a positive relationship with purchase intention in all these channels. Thus, if Chinese millennials trust more in one channel, then, they would like to buy more luxury cosmetics. Among all these channels, owned and earned media have the strongest relationship. For owned media, the more Chinese millennials believe the official accounts on the social platforms, the more they would buy the cosmetics under this brand. For earned

media, if Chinese millennials trust others' sharing more, they are more likely to buy the luxury cosmetics shared in the message. Compare owned media and earned media, the relationship in earned media is stronger (0.26<0.28<0.32<0.38).

	% Purchase Intention	P-Value	R
Key Opinion Leaders (KOL)	27.40%	0.001**	0.22
Official Weibo/WeChat Accounts	64.84%	<0.015*	0.17
Weibo/Friend Circle advertisements	30.59%	0.437	0.05
Friends sharing	38.36%	<0.001***	0.27
Ordinary people sharing on Weibo	24.20%	<0.001***	0.29
Ordinary people sharing on Little Red Book	28.31%	<0.001***	0.26

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 5: Source reliability and purchase intention in other luxury categories

Table 5 shows the relationships between source reliability and purchase intention in other luxury categories in different channels. For Weibo/Friend Circle advertisements, there is no significant relationship between source reliability and purchase intention (p-value=0.437). Thus, even if Chinese millennials believe in advertisements they see on Weibo or Friend Circle, they would not want to buy the luxury goods. For other channels, there is significant relationship between source reliability and purchase intention. For other luxury categories, like shoes, handbags, accessories and jewelries, the more Chinese millennials trust in the channel, the more they would like to buy the products. 64.84% of the respondents are attracted by official accounts on social media. However, the strongest relationship is still in the earned media. For other luxury categories, earned media and KOL have the strongest relationships.

FINDINGS

The results show that for luxury cosmetics, in all channels, there is a positive relationship between source reliability and purchase intention. For other luxury cosmetics, except of Weibo/WeChat advertisements, in all other channels, there is a positive relationship between source reliability and purchase intention. Source reliability is a variable that measures social media marketing. Thus, social media marketing has a positive relationship with Chinese millennials purchase intention.

Chinese millennials prefer owned media, which is official Weibo/WeChat account in this case, but their purchase intention is more related to earned media. For luxury cosmetics, firms should promote products through all channels. For other luxury categories, firms should choose owned media, earned media and Key Opinion Leaders to promote their products.

CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Social media marketing has strong impact on Chinese millennials' consuming behaviors regarding luxury brands. For paid, owned and earned media, they prefer owned media, but their purchase intention is much more related to earned media. Regarding luxury cosmetics, firms should market through all channels, especially for owned and earned media. For other categories, firms do not care much about advertisements on social media but care for KOL and earned media, which helps to establish a good word-of-mouth.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research is mainly about Chinese millennials, especially college students due to the limitation of online survey's spreading. The online survey was posted through WeChat friend circle and students reposted to their friends. For online channels choices, this paper only chooses KOLs and Weibo/WeChat advertisement for paid media, official Weibo/WeChat accounts for owned media and friends/ordinary people's sharing on Weibo, WeChat and Little Red Book for earned media. Channels choices are limited.

For future research, except of source reliability, there are other motivations that have relationships with purchase intention for social media marketing. This paper has found that for other luxury categories, in the paid media, the relationship between source reliability and purchase intention varies a lot. Thus, future research can explore other paid media to find out if there is any common relationship.

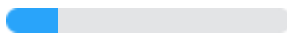
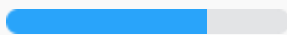
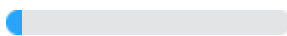
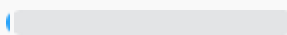
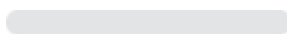
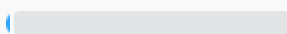
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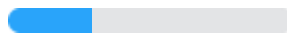
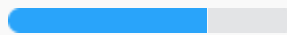
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APPENDIX


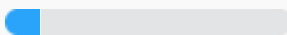
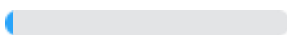
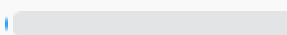
1. 请问您的年龄是多少? What's your age?

选项	小计	比例
a. <20	40	 18.52%
b. 20-24	155	 71.76%
c. 25-30	13	 6.02%
d. 31-35	4	 1.85%
e. 36-40	0	 0%
f. >40	4	 1.85%
	216	

2. 请问您的性别是?What's your gender?

选项	小计	比例
a. 男 Male	65	 30.09%
b. 女 Female	151	 69.91%
	216	

3. 请问您的月收入/生活费是?What's your monthly income/expense?

选项	小计	比例
a. <5000	180	 83.33%
b. 5000-10000	26	 12.04%
c. 10001-30000	7	 3.24%
d. >30000	3	 1.39%
	216	

4. 您曾经有过购买奢牌化妆品（迪奥、香奈儿、CT等）的经历吗? Have you ever purchase luxury cosmetics? (e.g. Dior, Chanel, Christian Louboutin, etc)

选项	小计	比例
a. 是 Yes	143	66.2%
b. 否 No	73	33.8%
	216	

5. 您曾经有过购买奢牌其他产品（成衣、鞋、包等）的经历吗? Have you ever purchase other goods (clothes, shoes, handbags, etc.) of luxury brands?

选项	小计	比例
a. 是 Yes	104	48.15%
b. 否 No	112	51.85%
	216	

6. 你信任以下信息来源吗? How do you trust these sources?

题目\选项	很不信任 Strongly Distrust	不信任 Distrust	一般 Normal	信任 Trust	很信任 Strongly Trust
Key Opinion Leaders (KOL)	8(3.7%)	12(5.56%)	130(60.19%)	55(25.46%)	11(5.09%)
官博、官方公众号 Official Weibo/WeChat Accounts	7(3.24%)	9(4.17%)	72(33.33%)	92(42.59%)	36(16.67%)
微博广告、朋友圈广告 Weibo/Friend Circle advertisements	22(10.19%)	65(30.09%)	99(45.83%)	28(12.96%)	2(0.93%)
朋友圈分享 Friends sharing	13(6.02%)	39(18.06%)	112(51.85%)	46(21.3%)	6(2.78%)
微博素人分享 Ordinary people sharing on Weibo	23(10.65%)	44(20.37%)	117(54.17%)	28(12.96%)	4(1.85%)
小红书素人分享 Ordinary people sharing on Little Red Book	27(12.5%)	44(20.37%)	112(51.85%)	30(13.89%)	3(1.39%)

7. 对于奢牌的化妆品（包括但不限于迪奥、香奈儿、CL等），你容易被以下哪些途径种草 For luxury cosmetics (e.g. Dior, Chanel, Christian Louboutin, etc.), through with channel, you are more interested in?

选项	小计	比例
a. Key Opinion Leaders (KOL)	56	25.93%

b. 官博、官方公众号 Official Weibo/WeChat Accounts	125	57.87%
c. 微博广告、朋友圈广告 Weibo/Friend Circle advertisements	66	30.56%
d. 朋友圈分享 Friends sharing	107	49.54%
e. 微博素人分享 Ordinary people sharing on Weibo	55	25.46%
f. 小红书素人分享 Ordinary people sharing on Little Red Book	69	31.94%
	216	

8. 对于奢牌的其他产品（包、成衣等），你容易被以下哪一种途径种草? For other goods (clothes, shoes, handbags, etc.) of luxury brands, through with channel, you are more interested in?

选项	小计	比例
a. Key Opinion Leaders (KOL)	59	27.31%
b. 官博、官方公众号 Official Weibo/WeChat Accounts	140	64.81%
c. 微博广告、朋友圈广告 Weibo/Friend Circle advertisements	66	30.56%
d. 朋友圈分享 Friends sharing	84	38.89%
e. 微博素人分享 Ordinary people sharing on Weibo	52	24.07%
f. 小红书素人分享 Ordinary people sharing on Little Red Book	62	28.7%
	216	