The Synergistic Effects of Multidimensional UGC Quality and Platform Governance: A Structural Equation Modelling Analysis of Consumer Purchasing Behaviour on Chinese Social E-commerce Platforms

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Abstract

With the rapid rise of social e-commerce, user-generated content (UGC) has become one of the most influential external information sources shaping consumer cognition and purchasing decisions. However, existing studies tend to focus on single dimensions, such as information quality or credibility. While offering an incomplete understanding of the multidimensional nature of UGC quality and largely overlooking the critical role of platform governance in content filtering, presentation, and trust transmission. Addressing this gap, the present study examines users of major Chinese social e-commerce platforms and constructs a five-dimensional UGC quality framework encompassing information quality, credibility, interaction quality, presentation quality, and the appropriateness of emotional arousal. Platform governance is incorporated into the analytical model alongside consumer purchasing behaviour to develop an integrated structural equation model. Based on 445 valid responses, the results show that information quality, credibility, interaction quality, and presentation quality significantly enhance consumer purchasing behaviour, whereas the appropriateness of emotional arousal does not exhibit a significant effect. Moreover, platform governance mediates the effects of information quality, credibility, and presentation quality, underscoring its fundamental role in trust transmission and exposure mechanisms within social e-commerce environments. These findings enrich theoretical discussions on the multidimensional structure of UGC quality, reveal the institutional mechanisms through which platform governance operates, and provide practical insights for platforms seeking to improve content governance, algorithmic optimisation, and user trust building.

Keywords

User-generated content, Platform governance, Consumer purchasing behaviour, Social e-commerce, Structural equation modelling

Introduction

In recent years, the widespread penetration of mobile Internet technologies and the continuous expansion of smart-device usage scenarios have fueled the rapid rise of social e-commerce in China's digital economy, making it a key driver of evolving consumption patterns. Unlike traditional e-commerce, which relies primarily on keyword searches and static product displays, social e-commerce operates within an environment shaped jointly by content, interaction, and algorithmic curation. Upon entering a platform, users no longer actively search for products, nstead, they develop interest, assess credibility, and eventually make purchase decisions through exposure to various forms of user-generated content (UGC). Image-text reviews on Xiaohongshu, short videos on Douyin, and livestream demonstrations on Kuaishou all embed UGC deeply into consumers' cognitive processes, reducing decision uncertainty. Because different forms of UGC vary in their modes of

information delivery, emotional intensity, and depth of interaction, they exert differentiated influences on user behaviour. Yet, existing research has not offered a systematic explanation for the mechanisms behind these differences. Moreover, although platform governance plays an essential role in content moderation, recommendation, and visibility control, it is often treated merely as a macro-level contextual factor. Its concrete functions within the pathways through which UGC affects consumer behaviour remain insufficiently theorised. The content consumers encounter has already been shaped by algorithmic ranking, risk filtering, and rule-based interventions. Its visibility, perceived trustworthiness, and diffusion speed all arise from governance structures implemented by the platform. This implies that the influence of UGC cannot be understood independently of the institutional environment in which it is embedded.

Against this backdrop, there is a pressing need to re-examine the overall relationship among UGC quality, platform governance, and consumer behaviour. As short videos and livestreaming become dominant formats, presentation quality, interaction quality, and emotional expression exert increasingly prominent effects, rendering traditional information-quality perspectives insufficient for explaining contemporary decision-making processes. Furthermore, social e-commerce consumers typically do not enter platforms with predefined purchase needs. Instead, they develop interest gradually, build trust through repeated exposure, and eventually form purchase intentions through cumulative reinforcement. This makes the joint influence of UGC quality and platform governance a critical determinant of purchasing behaviour.

Accordingly, this study focuses on three central questions: First, whether the multidimensional qualities of UGC influence consumer purchasing behaviour in distinct ways. Second, whether platform governance performs a substantive mediating role between UGC quality and purchasing behaviour. And third, whether structural,

mutually embedded relationships exist among UGC quality, platform governance, and purchasing behaviour. By addressing these questions, the study aims to fill gaps in the literature concerning the multidimensional architecture of UGC, the micro-level mechanisms of platform governance, and consumer decision pathways shaped by emerging content formats. The findings are expected to provide theoretically grounded insights for enhancing content governance, algorithmic optimisation, and user conversion strategies in social e-commerce platforms.

Literature review

With the rapid development of social e-commerce, user-generated content (UGC) has become a critical source of information influencing consumer cognition and purchasing decisions, owing to its authentic experiences, user-centered perspectives, and non-commercial orientation [1]. International studies have predominantly focused on the mechanisms through which UGC operates within traditional social networking sites (SNS) and e-commerce platforms, emphasising its trust advantage as a "de-commercialised" information source. In contrast, domestic studies have increasingly shifted attention to UGC in multimedia-driven environments, a trend closely related to the rise of content-intensive platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Kuaishou [2].

In recent years, both domestic and international scholars have moved beyond single-dimensional analyses and have begun conceptualising UGC quality as a multidimensional construct. The prevailing framework identifies five core dimensions: information quality, credibility, interaction quality, presentation quality, and appropriateness of emotional arousal [3]. Among these, information quality constitutes the fundamental basis for users' risk assessment and value evaluation; credibility is central to the formation of digital trust; interaction quality reflects the participatory logic of social e-commerce and shapes users' sense of social identification; presentation quality enhances information

processability in image and short video-dominated environments; and emotional arousal appropriateness influences early-stage interest and attention formation in new media contexts [4-6].

Despite the emerging clarity of this multidimensional UGC quality framework, existing research still exhibits significant limitations. International studies have continued to prioritise text-based UGC, providing insufficient structural analysis of "high-sensory, multimodal content" such as images, videos, and livestreaming [7]. Domestic studies, while more attentive to novel content formats, often remain descriptive and lack theoretically grounded structural models [8].

Furthermore, literature tends to overlook the differentiated effects across quality dimensions and rarely offers systematic comparisons of their relative influence [9]. Regarding platform governance, international studies commonly highlight its roles in content moderation, anti-misinformation measures, and risk control within public information environments [10]. Domestic studies, meanwhile, emphasise governance effects on content ecosystem quality, traffic allocation, fairness, and platform trust [11]. However, both streams of research primarily approach governance from a macro perspective and seldom investigate the micro-level question of how governance alters the pathways through which UGC affects consumer behaviour.

In essence, UGC in social e-commerce is not presented in its raw form, it undergoes institutional processing through moderation, filtering, ranking, and recommendation. Consequently, UGC and platform governance jointly form a "dual-layer filtering structure": While UGC quality determines the informational foundation, platform governance shapes whether content is seen, how it is seen, and how its credibility is perceived. Current research reveals three notable gaps in this regard.

First, there is a lack of integrated studies that examine UGC multidimensional quality and platform governance within a single analytical model [12]. Second, empirical evidence on the mediating role of governance, specifically, whether governance amplifies or attenuates the effects of different UGC dimensions is limited [13]. Third, most existing studies rely on traditional platforms such as Facebook, Weibo, or Amazon, offering limited applicability to China's highly content-driven and algorithm-intensive social e-commerce model, and there remains a scarcity of large-sample empirical research in this domain [14,15].

Building on these gaps in domestic and international literature, the present study adopts a dual-mechanism perspective that integrates content quality and institutional governance. It further proposes a comprehensive theoretical model, which links multidimensional UGC quality, platform governance, and consumer purchasing behaviour.

Theoretical framework and hypothesis development

In the context of social e-commerce examined in this study, the influence of user-generated content (UGC) on consumer cognition and behaviour can be clearly explained through information processing theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. Together, these theories constitute the analytical foundation of the study. Information processing theory focuses on how individuals interpret external stimuli. ELM distinguishes between central and peripheral routes in persuasion, and the S-O-R framework links external stimuli to internal psychological responses and behavioural outcomes. Building on these theoretical perspectives, the quality of UGC functions as a critical starting point shaping consumer judgments and reactions.

High levels of information quality and credibility encourage consumers to engage in deeper cognitive elaboration, reduce uncertainty during comparison and evaluation, and form more stable attitudes. Interaction quality and presentation quality provide social cues, expressive formats, and visual structures that enhance information absorption. These elements enable consumers to quickly

develop trust in the content and its creators. Although emotional arousal does not determine final judgments, it plays a crucial role in capturing attention and triggering initial interest. Importantly, the content consumers encounter is not identical to the raw information uploaded by creators. Instead, it is the outcome of platform moderation, filtering, ranking, and recommendation processes. Platform governance intervenes substantively in this transformation, determining whether content becomes visible, the form in which it appears, and the competitive dynamics it faces, thereby altering the actual pathways through which UGC affects consumer behaviour.

Platforms with stricter governance mechanisms tend to amplify the influence of high-quality content, making it more likely to gain exposure and persuasive power. Conversely, platforms with weaker governance may allow low-quality content to proliferate, diluting the true effectiveness of UGC. Overall, consumer purchase intention typically develops along a sequential pathway: from UGC quality, through platform governance processing, to behavioural outcomes. Based on this logic, the study proposes hypotheses concerning both the direct effects of the five UGC quality dimensions and the mediating role of platform governance.

Hypotheses:

H_1: Information quality has a significant positive effect on consumer purchasing behaviour.

H_2: Credibility has a significant positive effect on consumer purchasing behaviour.

H_3: Interaction quality has a significant positive effect on consumer purchasing behaviour.

H_4: Presentation quality has a significant positive effect on consumer purchasing behaviour.

H_5: Appropriateness of emotional arousal has a positive effect on consumer purchasing behaviour.

H_{6a}: Platform governance mediates the effect of information quality on consumer purchasing behaviour.

H_{6b}: Platform governance mediates the effect of credibility on consumer purchasing behaviour.

H6c: Platform governance mediates the effect of interaction quality on consumer purchasing behaviour.

H_{6d}: Platform governance mediates the effect of presentation quality on consumer purchasing behaviour.

H_{6e}: Platform governance mediates the effect of emotional arousal appropriateness on consumer purchasing behaviour.

Empirical analysis and hypothesis testing

Grounded in a positive paradigm, this study adopts a standardised questionnaire and structural equation modelling (SEM) to systematically examine the joint effects of multidimensional UGC quality and platform governance on consumer purchasing behaviour. Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM) is employed as the primary analytical technique, given the model's structural complexity, the inclusion of multidimensional latent constructs, the moderate sample size, and the potential non-normality of the data. This method enables simultaneous assessment of both measurement and structural models and is well suited for exploratory as well as theory-driven research.

The questionnaire items were adapted from established international scales and revised to fit the context of Chinese social e-commerce. The measurement framework covers five dimensions of UGC quality: information quality, credibility, interaction quality, presentation quality, and appropriateness of emotional arousal. While platform governance and purchasing behaviour were assessed using mature scales from the content governance and digital trust literature. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with content validity examined through expert interviews and a pilot test. A total of 521 questionnaires were collected, of which 445 were valid. The sample's composition in terms of gender, age, education level, and usage frequency aligns with known characteristics of Chinese social e-commerce users (see Table 1), ensuring representativeness and external validity. The measurement model was evaluated using SPSS and SmartPLS. Results show that reliability

(Cronbach's α and composite reliability) for all latent variables exceeded recommended thresholds, convergent validity was adequate (AVE ＞0.60), and discriminant validity was confirmed through both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT values (see Tables 2, 3, and 4), indicating a structurally robust measurement model.

In the structural model assessment, this study applied bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples) to examine path coefficients and indirect effects. The results demonstrate that information quality, credibility, interaction quality, and presentation quality exert significant positive effects on consumer purchasing behaviour, whereas appropriateness of emotional arousal does not (see Table 5). The mediation analysis further reveals that platform governance significantly mediates the effects of information quality, credibility, and presentation quality, but not those of interaction quality or emotional arousal (see Table 6). The model exhibits strong predictive power, with an R^2 of 0.62 for purchasing behaviour and 0.58 for platform governance. The SRMR value of 0.058 and Q^2 values greater than zero (see Table 7) confirm that the overall model meets established standards for good fit. Overall, the findings indicate that multidimensional UGC quality and platform governance jointly shape consumer decision-making processes in social e-commerce. Among the UGC dimensions, information quality and credibility exert the strongest effects, while emotional arousal plays a comparatively limited role (see Table 5). Platform governance serves as a critical institutional filter and amplifier, particularly for UGC dimensions with strong rational attributes (see Table 6).

The results also confirm that the sample reflects typical characteristics of social e-commerce users: 67% are female, 78% are aged between 18 and 34, 72% hold a bachelor's degree or above, and more than 90% use social e-commerce platforms at least three times per week. Moreover, 61% report having made purchases through these platforms, closely aligning with industry statistics and supporting the representativeness of the sample (see Table 1).

The measurement model further demonstrates robust data quality. Cronbach's α values for all constructs exceed 0.85, composite reliability values exceed 0.88, and all AVE values surpass 0.60, indicating strong internal consistency and convergent validity. Discriminant validity is further supported by the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT results (see Tables 2, 3, and 4), providing a reliable foundation for structural model interpretation.

In the structural model, information quality, credibility, interaction quality, and presentation quality all show significant positive associations with purchasing behaviour, whereas emotional arousal appropriateness, though positive, does not reach significance. Information quality ($\beta \approx 0.32$, $p < 0.001$) and credibility ($\beta \approx 0.28$, $p < 0.001$) emerge as the strongest predictors (see Table 5), suggesting that consumers rely more heavily on content that is well-organised, substantively informative, and demonstrably authentic.

Mediation tests indicate that platform governance significantly mediates the effects of information quality, credibility, and presentation quality (indirect effects of 0.14, 0.11, and 0.09, respectively) but not those of interaction quality or emotional arousal (see Table 6). Model fit indices further support the robustness of the structural model, with an R^2 of 0.62 for purchasing behaviour, 0.58 for platform governance, and an SRMR of 0.058 (see Table 7).

Taken together, the results demonstrate that UGC multidimensional quality and platform governance constitute a joint mechanism influencing consumer decision-making in social e-commerce environments. Information quality, credibility, and presentation quality exhibit the strongest behavioural conversion effects, particularly when reinforced by platform governance mechanisms.

Table 1. Sample descriptive statistics (N=445).

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	298	67.00
	Male	147	33.00
Age	18-24 years old	182	40.90
	25-34 years old	165	37.10
	35-44 years old	68	15.30
	45 years and above	30	6.70
Education level	Junior college or below	125	28.10
	Bachelor's degree	226	50.80
	Postgraduate or above	94	21.10
Usage frequency	≥3 times per week	403	90.60

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity (All values satisfy the criteria of α>0.80, CR>0.70, and AVE>0.50).

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Information quality (IQ)	0.89	0.92	0.71
Credibility (CRD)	0.91	0.94	0.76
Interaction quality (INT)	0.87	0.90	0.65
Presentation quality (PRS)	0.88	0.91	0.68
Emotional arousal (EMA)	0.84	0.88	0.62
Platform governance (PG)	0.90	0.93	0.70
Purchasing behaviour (PB)	0.92	0.94	0.78

Table 3. Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion) diagonal values represent the square root of AVE.

Construct	IQ	CRD	INT	PRS	EMA	PG	PB
Information quality (IQ)	0.84	/	/	/	/	/	/
Credibility (CRD)	0.58	0.87	/	/	/	/	/
Interaction quality (INT)	0.44	0.49	0.81	/	/	/	/
Presentation quality (PRS)	0.55	0.52	0.48	0.82	/	/	/
Emotional arousal (EMA)	0.33	0.36	0.40	0.39	0.79	/	/
Platform governance (PG)	0.61	0.59	0.46	0.51	0.37	0.84	/
Purchasing behaviour (PB)	0.63	0.57	0.44	0.49	0.31	0.58	0.88

Table 4. HTMT ratio (all below 0.85 threshold).

Construct	IQ	CRD	INT	PRS	EMA	PG	PB
Information quality (IQ)	/	0.69	0.54	0.63	0.42	0.71	0.72
Credibility (CRD)	0.69	/	0.58	0.61	0.45	0.67	0.70
Interaction quality (INT)	0.54	0.58	/	0.56	0.49	0.59	0.62
Presentation quality (PRS)	0.63	0.61	0.56	/	0.52	0.65	0.68
Emotional arousal (EMA)	0.42	0.45	0.49	0.52	/	0.48	0.50
Platform governance (PG)	0.71	0.67	0.59	0.65	0.48	/	0.74

Construct	IQ	CRD	INT	PRS	EMA	PG	PB
Purchasing behaviour (PB)	0.72	0.70	0.62	0.68	0.50	0.74	/

Table 5. Structural path analysis (direct effects).

Path	Indirect effect (β)	p-value	Significance
Information quality → Purchasing behaviour	0.32	<0.001	Significant
Credibility → Purchasing behaviour	0.28	<0.001	Significant
Interaction quality → Purchasing behaviour	0.17	0.004	Significant
Presentation quality → Purchasing behaviour	0.21	0.003	Significant
Emotional arousal appropriateness → Purchasing behaviour	0.05	0.152	Not significant

Table 6. Mediation effects of platform governance.

Indirect path	Mediation effects (β)	p-value	Result
Information quality → Platform governance → Purchasing behaviour	0.14	0.008	Significant mediation
Credibility →Platform governance → Purchasing behaviour	0.11	0.021	Significant mediation
Interaction quality →Platform governance → Purchasing behaviour	0.04	0.162	Not significant
Presentation quality →Platform governance → Purchasing behaviour	0.09	0.027	Significant mediation
Emotional arousal →Platform governance → Purchasing behaviour	0.03	0.245	Not significant

Table 7. Model fit and explanatory power.

Indicator	Value	Evaluation
R^2 (Platform governance)	0.580	Moderate-high explanatory power
R^2 (Purchasing behaviour)	0.620	High explanatory power
Q^2 (Predictive relevance)	All >0.000	Predictive capability present
SRMR	0.058	Good model fit

The empirical results indicate that the multidimensional qualities of user-generated content exert significantly differentiated effects on consumer purchasing behaviour. Information quality ($\beta=0.32$, $p<0.001$), credibility ($\beta=0.28$, $p<0.001$), interaction quality ($\beta=0.17$, $p=0.004$), and presentation quality ($\beta=0.21$, $p=0.003$) all demonstrate significant positive effects on purchasing behaviour, thereby supporting H1 through H4. In contrast, although the effect of emotional arousal appropriateness is positive, it is not statistically significant ($\beta=0.05$, $p>0.05$), and thus H_5 is not supported. This suggests that consumers rely more on rational and trustworthy informational cues when forming purchase intentions.

Regarding mediation effects, platform governance significantly mediates the relationships between information quality, credibility, and presentation quality on purchasing behaviour, with indirect effects of 0.14, 0.11, and 0.09 respectively, supporting H_{6a}, H_{6b}, and H_{6d}. However, the mediation effects along the paths of interaction quality and emotional arousal appropriateness are not significant, meaning that H_{6c} and H_{6e} are not supported. Overall, the findings validate the central role of rational content dimensions in social e-commerce decision-making and further confirm that platform governance enhances the behavioural conversion effects of high-quality UGC, whereas the influence of emotional and social cue-based content remains relatively limited.

Table 8. Hypothesis testing results.

Hypothesis	Path relationship	Path coefficient (β)	p-value	Conclusion
H_1	Information quality $\to$ Purchasing behaviour	0.32	<0.001	Supported
H_2	Credibility $\to$ Purchasing behaviour	0.28	<0.001	Supported
H_3	Interaction quality $\to$ Purchasing behaviour	0.17	0.004	Supported
H_4	Presentation quality $\to$ Purchasing behaviour	0.21	0.003	Supported
H_5	Emotional arousal appropriateness $\to$ Purchasing behaviour	0.05	0.152	Not supported
H_{6a}	Information quality $\to$ Platform governance $\to$ Purchasing behaviour	0.14	0.008	Supported
H_{6b}	Credibility $\to$ Platform governance $\to$ Purchasing behaviour	0.11	0.021	Supported
H_{6c}	Interaction quality $\to$ Platform governance $\to$ Purchasing behaviour	0.04	0.162	Not supported
H_{6d}	Presentation quality $\to$ Platform governance $\to$ Purchasing behaviour	0.09	0.027	Supported
H_{6e}	Emotional arousal appropriateness $\to$ Platform governance $\to$ Purchasing behaviour	0.03	0.245	Not supported

Conclusion

The empirical findings indicate that information quality, credibility, interaction quality, and presentation quality all significantly enhance consumer purchasing behaviour, whereas the effect of emotional arousal appropriateness is not significant. This suggests that in real social e-commerce environments, consumers rely more heavily on the logical coherence of information, the authenticity and reliability of content, and the clarity of its presentation when evaluating products. Although emotionally charged content may capture attention, it does not necessarily translate into purchase decisions. Furthermore, platform governance exerts a distinct mediating effect on relationships involving information quality, credibility, and presentation quality, underscoring the institutional role that platforms play within content ecosystems. Beyond content review and ranking, platforms serve as key actors in facilitating user trust. Only under conditions of robust governance and well-designed mechanisms can high-quality UGC be effectively identified, appropriately exposed, and translated into consumer judgments.

Conversely, weak governance environments may impede even high-quality content from exerting its potential influence due to insufficient institutional trust. These findings affirm the applicability of institutional trust theory in social e-commerce contexts and highlight the necessity of accounting for platform-mediated processing when analysing the impact of UGC.

Based on these results, three core conclusions

emerge. First, UGC exhibits clear dimensional heterogeneity. Information quality and credibility operate as prototypical "rational signals" and exert the strongest influence on purchasing behaviour. While presentation quality and interaction quality function as supporting factors, they remain essential for enhancing consumers' comprehension and social identification. Emotional arousal appropriateness, however, contributes minimally to transactional settings due to its limited stability. Second, platform governance plays a pivotal institutional mediating role in the overall influence pathway. Through content moderation, risk control filtering, algorithmic recommendation, and trust-building mechanisms, platforms determine the ultimate form and visibility of content, thereby shaping the effectiveness of UGC. Third, consumer decision-making in social e-commerce does not follow a simple linear pattern. Instead, it unfolds along a sequential logic of "informational foundation → institutional trust filtering → purchase decision". High-quality UGC maximises its commercial value only when embedded within a trustworthy governance environment, indicating that UGC quality and platform governance should be conceptualised as a dual mechanism rather than independent factors.

From an industry perspective, this study provides important practical implications for social e-commerce platforms and content ecosystem managers. Platforms should regard governance capabilities as core competitive assets - strengthening the accuracy and consistency of content review, reinforcing anti-fraud and anti-manipulation systems, and enhancing the transparency and credibility of recommendation algorithms to foster user trust in institutional arrangements. Additionally, platforms should optimise content presentation mechanisms by improving structured displays, visual standardisation, and the readability of information, thereby amplifying the reach and persuasiveness of high-quality UGC. At the same time, platforms should avoid excessive reliance on emotionally

driven content and encourage creators to produce rational, fact-based, experiential, and professionally grounded content that aligns more closely with users' purchasing processes.

From a theoretical perspective, the study also offers several directions for future research. First, the multidimensional structure of UGC quality warrants further examination across diverse platforms and content formats to explore its cross-context stability. Second, platform governance - an institutional environmental variables have profound effects on content influence pathways. Future studies should refine its dimensionality by incorporating aspects such as algorithmic fairness, governance transparency, and content safety strategies to develop more explanatory theoretical models. Third, UGC quality and governance mechanisms may manifest differently across cultural contexts and business models. Cross-cultural comparisons, cross-platform analyses, and longitudinal research could further enrich the theoretical understanding of UGC influence mechanisms. Overall, scholarship should move toward a more systematic theoretical framework based on the triadic logic of "content - institution - behaviour" to advance the study of consumer behaviour in social e-commerce.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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