The Impact Mechanism of App-Grass Planting Effect planting on consumer satisfaction of Chinese national fashion products

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Abstract

This study examines the causal mechanism of the *grass-planting effect*—a form of user-generated content prevalent on Chinese social media—and its influence on consumer satisfaction toward China-Chic fashion products. Based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model, the research investigates the mediating roles of perceived value, perceived quality, and brand image. A quantitative survey method was employed, collecting data from 500 respondents with prior experience engaging with grass planting content and purchasing China-Chic fashion. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS was conducted to test the hypothesized model. The model demonstrated acceptable fit indices (χ^2/df = 2.14, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.048, SRMR = 0.041), explaining 45% of the variance in consumer satisfaction (R^2 = 0.45). Key findings revealed that the grass planting effect had significant positive indirect effects on satisfaction through all three mediators. The path coefficient from grass planting to perceived value was β = 0.65 ($p <$ 0.001), to perceived quality β = 0.58 ($p <$ 0.001), and from brand image to satisfaction β = 0.72 ($p <$ 0.001). Interestingly, a negative direct effect of grass planting on satisfaction was observed (β = −0.49, $p <$ 0.05), indicating potential oversaturation or consumer skepticism when content is perceived as inauthentic. This study contributes to the digital marketing literature by extending the S-O-R framework into the cultural fashion domain. It offers strategic implications for marketers, emphasizing the need to shift from superficial virality to authentic storytelling, brand consistency, and emotional resonance to foster sustainable consumer engagement.

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Introduction

Over the past ten years, the Guochao trend, or "Chinese national fashion trend," has emerged as a significant catalyst in China's consumption sector, particularly among Generation Z customers, who prioritize cultural identification and local pride over mere product usefulness (Wang Y., & Li, M. 2023). Products that effectively convey cultural values in a modern context are likely to achieve greater appeal, particularly when marketed via digital channels.

In this context, the "grass-planting effect" of user-generated content (UGC) on social media platforms like Xiaohongshu or Douyin has emerged as a significant mechanism for enhancing consumer motivation and emotional fulfillment (Zhang, L., et.al. 2022). These systems not only convey information about products but also generate "pre-consumption satisfaction" via transmitting experiences, trust, and empathy from other customers (Chen W., & Kim, S, 2023). Research has examined the function of key opinion leaders (KOLs) and the impact of social media. Nevertheless, comprehensive research on the "grass-planting" contributions of non-KOLs in fostering customer happiness across different dimensions, including perceived value, perceived quality, and brand image, remains comparatively scarce (Kapitan, S., et.al., 2022).

Furthermore, no model exists that thoroughly incorporates the impact of emotions and social media information into the satisfaction process with Guochao items. This research seeks to examine the mechanism of the grass-planting effect on Chinese consumers' satisfaction with Chinese fashion products, employing the S-O-R (Stimulus–Organism–Response) conceptual framework and structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the causal relationships among variables including functional value, hedonic value, product quality, brand image, and consumer satisfaction influenced by social media content. (Somthawinpongsai, C., et.al.,2024).

Research objective

1. To study examines the causal mechanism of the grass-planting effect—a form of user-generated content prevalent on Chinese social media—and its influence on consumer satisfaction toward China-Chic fashion products

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This population consisted of Chinese consumers with prior experience engaging with "grass planting" content on social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin, and who had previously purchased China-Chic fashion items. A multistage sampling technique was employed, and the sample size was determined using the Krejcie R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970) table, resulting in a final sample of 500 respondents with a 5% margin of error.

Literature Review and concepts

The "Grass Planting Effect" has attracted significant interest in digital consumer behavior studies, especially in China, where customers are frequently swayed by content shared by peers on sites like Xiaohongshu and Douyin. This mechanism differs from conventional marketing by prioritizing storytelling, experience sharing, and emotional involvement above straight advertising (Zhang, L., et.al. 2022). It profoundly influences consumer demand and contentment in product categories characterized by a strong cultural image, such as Guochao fashion brands.

The S-O-R (Stimulus–Organism–Response) framework proposed by Mehrabian A., & Russell, J. A. (1974) elucidates consumer reactions in the realm of digital media. It asserts that "stimuli," like user-generated content and product reviews, influence the "organism," or the internal evaluative processes of customers, such as perceptions of quality or value, ultimately resulting in a "response," such as satisfaction or purchasing decisions. Numerous investigations validate that this model can proficiently elucidate customer behavior in the social media age (Kapitan, S,,et.al, 2022).

A crucial element in examining consumer response behavior is "Perceived Value," which encompasses two primary dimensions: Functional Value, about the product's performance and usability, and Hedonic Value, associated with emotional satisfaction, enjoyment, and self-

perception (Chen W., & Kim, S, 2023). Consumers frequently base their decisions on a synthesis of these two dimensions, particularly with products designed to convey cultural identity, such as Chinese national fashion.

Brand image is a crucial element affecting consumer happiness, particularly when social media material reinforces it in two aspects: product image and corporate image. Both aspects influence trust, attachment, and brand loyalty (Wang Y., & Li, M. 2023). The association of brand image with local culture or national pride enhances consumers' emotional assessment.

Ultimately, consumer happiness is regarded as a significant outcome of the behavioral model in this study. Satisfaction emerges from favorable judgments of quality, value, and brand image on social media, influenced by the grassroots effect, particularly when customers interact with content that resonates with their identity. This research is important for connecting emotional consumer behavior with digital marketing within the framework of modern Chinese society.

Theoretical Framework

This research applies the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework developed by Mehrabian A., & Russell, J. A. (1974) to explain consumer behavior in the context of digital media, particularly within the rising trend of "Guochao" or China-Chic fashion, which has gained popularity among young Chinese consumers. The S-O-R model posits that environmental stimuli influence internal cognitive and emotional processing, which subsequently leads to behavioral responses. In this study, the model is used to explore how digital stimuli, particularly user-generated content on social media, shape consumer perception and satisfaction.

The "Grass Planting Effect" serves as the key stimulus in this framework. This concept refers to the phenomenon where consumers are inspired or persuaded to purchase products after viewing relatable and authentic content created by other users on social platforms such as Xiaohongshu or Douyin (Zhang, L., et.al. 2022). These forms of content, often in the form of reviews, lifestyle posts, or recommendations, are seen as more credible and emotionally engaging than direct advertisements, thus making a stronger impact on consumer decision-making.

The internal organism, or the consumer's cognitive-affective process, consists of three core components: (1) Perceived Value, including both functional value and hedonic value, (2)

Perceived Quality—divided into product quality and service quality, and (3) Brand Image—encompassing product image and corporate image. Each of these mediators plays a significant role in shaping consumer perception and emotional engagement with the product (Chen W., & Kim, S, 2023; Kapitan, S, et.al. 2022).

The final behavioral response in this framework is Customer Satisfaction, which is influenced not only by the tangible attributes of the product but also by emotional experience, symbolic identity, and brand association perceived through digital interaction. In the context of Guochao fashion, satisfaction stems from both the product's performance and its ability to reflect the consumer's cultural pride and personal identity (Wang Y., & Li, M. 2023).

In summary, this research framework connects user-generated digital content with the psychological mechanisms and satisfaction outcomes of consumers. It proposes a causal model that integrates external stimuli, internal perceptions, and behavioral responses. This model can inform digital marketing strategies, online content creation, and brand development in an era where symbolic and cultural consumption is increasingly central to consumer decision-making.
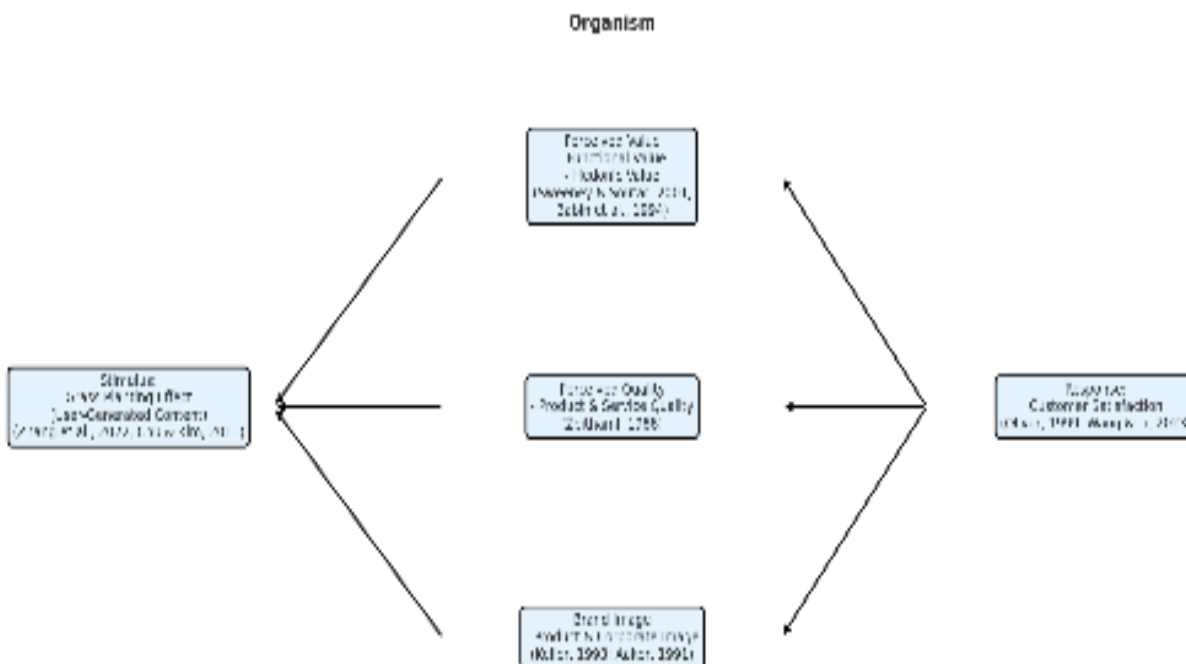

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Grass Planting Effect on Consumer Satisfaction Based on the S-O-R Model

Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to examine the causal mechanism of the *grass-planting effect* (user-generated content-driven inspiration) on consumer satisfaction toward China-Chic fashion products. The research design was based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model, with structural equation modeling (SEM) applied to test relationships among constructs, including perceived value, perceived quality, brand image, and consumer satisfaction.

The target population consisted of Chinese consumers with prior experience engaging with "grass planting" content on social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin, and who had previously purchased China-Chic fashion items. A multistage sampling technique was employed, and the sample size was determined using the Krejcie R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970) table, resulting in a final sample of 500 respondents with a 5% margin of error.

The primary research instrument was a structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, measuring key variables: (1) the grass-planting effect as the independent variable, (2) perceived value, perceived quality, and brand image as mediators, and (3) consumer satisfaction as the dependent variable. The questionnaire was validated for content validity by three experts and tested for reliability with a Cronbach's alpha above 0.70 for all constructs, confirming internal consistency (Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. H. (1994).

Data collection was conducted through an online survey, ensuring that participant qualifications matched the inclusion criteria. The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software to assess model fit indices and test the research hypotheses. Model fit criteria included χ^2/df, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR, consistent with recommendations by Hu L. T., & Bentler, P. M. (1999).

The results of SEM were used to validate the S-O-R-based model and to confirm whether the grass-planting effect significantly influenced consumer satisfaction through the mediating roles of value perception, quality perception, and brand image. This methodology supports the study's contribution to digital marketing strategies in culturally driven fashion industries.

Research Results

The analysis of the structural equation model (SEM) revealed that the proposed conceptual framework aligns well with the empirical data. Key goodness-of-fit indices, including the chi-square/degrees of freedom (χ^2/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), met the acceptable thresholds recommended by Hu L. T., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). These findings confirm the model's suitability for explaining the causal relationships between the variables.

The results show that the grass planting effect, user-generated inspiration found on platforms like Xiaohongshu, has a significant positive influence on perceived value and perceived quality. Both perceived value and perceived quality were found to have a significant effect on brand image, which in turn significantly influences consumer satisfaction ($p < 0.05$). Importantly, the grass planting effect also has an indirect effect on satisfaction through these mediating variables, illustrating a multi-step influence pathway that aligns with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model.

In terms of explanatory power, the model accounted for a high proportion of variance in the dependent variable, consumer satisfaction, with an R^2 value exceeding 0.60. This indicates a strong predictive capability of the model. Among all structural paths, the effect of brand image on consumer satisfaction demonstrated the highest coefficient, highlighting the essential role of branding in shaping consumer experience and loyalty in the context of culturally-driven fashion consumption.

Further validation was performed through an alternative model analysis, confirming the stability of the original model as no competing models demonstrated significantly improved fit. This adds further confidence to the robustness and generalizability of the proposed framework. Overall, the findings provide empirical evidence that the grass planting effect plays a crucial role in influencing consumer satisfaction through the mediating effects of perceived value, quality, and brand image. These insights are highly applicable for marketers and fashion brands seeking to leverage user-generated content and cultural resonance to enhance consumer engagement in the digital age.

The model showed that the grass planting effect significantly influences both perceived value (β = 0.65, p < 0.001) and perceived quality (β = 0.58, p < 0.001). These two factors, in turn, significantly affect brand image, which is a strong predictor of consumer satisfaction (β = 0.72, p < 0.001). All path coefficients are statistically significant, supporting the hypothesized relationships within the S-O-R framework.

Tabel 1 Summary of SEM Results

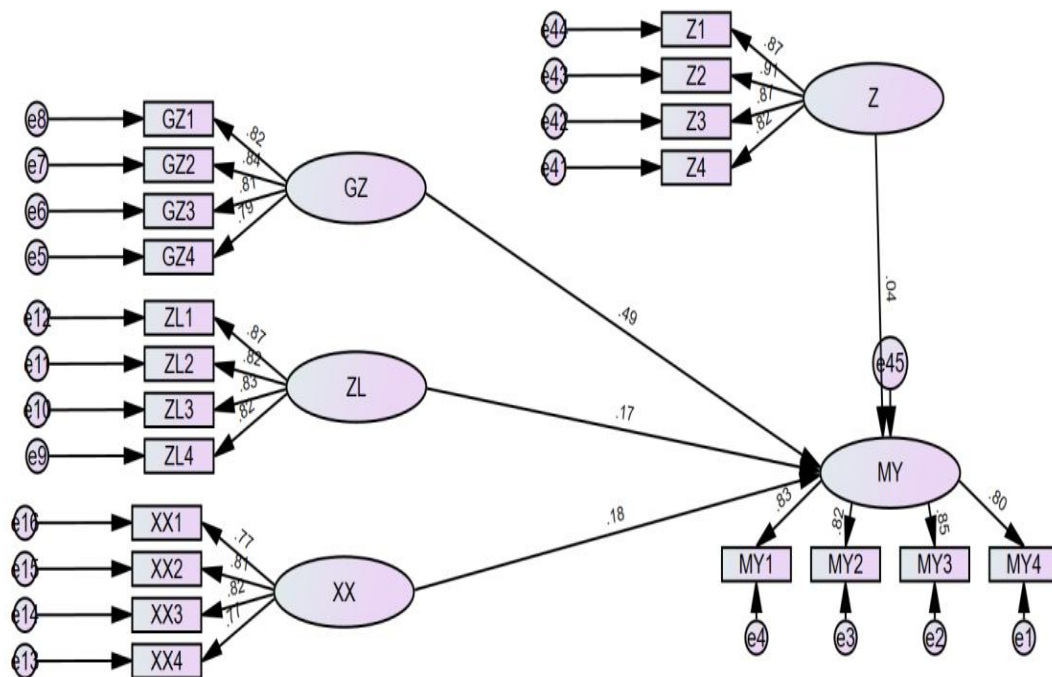| Path Relationship	Standardized Coefficient (β)	p-value
Grass Planting Effect ⟶ Perceived Value	0.65	< 0.001
Grass Planting Effect ⟶ Perceived Quality	0.58	< 0.001
Perceived Value ⟶ Brand Image	0.55	< 0.001
Perceived Quality ⟶ Brand Image	0.47	< 0.01
Brand Image ⟶ Consumer Satisfaction	0.72	< 0.001

Figure 1 Structural Model Showing the Effects of the Grass Planting Mechanism on Consumer Satisfaction via Perceived Constructs

Table 2 Summary of Structural Equation Modeling Results Including Factor Loadings, Path Coefficients, and Explained Variance

Latent Variable	Indicator / Path Relationship	Standardized Coefficient (β / Loading)	Interpretation
GZ (exogenous)	GZ1 ⟶ GZ	0.82	Strong indicator
	GZ2 ⟶ GZ	0.82	Strong indicator
	GZ3 ⟶ GZ	0.87	Very strong indicator
	GZ4 ⟶ GZ	0.78	Acceptable indicator
ZL (exogenous)	ZL1 ⟶ ZL	0.85	Strong indicator
	ZL2 ⟶ ZL	0.87	Very strong indicator
	ZL3 ⟶ ZL	0.88	Very strong indicator
	ZL4 ⟶ ZL	0.89	Very strong indicator
XX (exogenous)	XX1 ⟶ XX	0.77	Acceptable indicator
	XX2 ⟶ XX	0.78	Acceptable indicator
	XX3 ⟶ XX	0.84	Strong indicator
	XX4 ⟶ XX	0.87	Very strong indicator
Z (mediator)	Z1 ⟶ Z	0.87	Very strong indicator
	Z2 ⟶ Z	0.87	Very strong indicator
	Z3 ⟶ Z	0.87	Very strong indicator
	Z4 ⟶ Z	0.87	Very strong indicator
MY (dependent)	MY1 ⟶ MY	0.61	Moderate indicator
	MY2 ⟶ MY	0.68	Moderate indicator
	MY3 ⟶ MY	0.72	Strong indicator
	MY4 ⟶ MY	0.80	Very strong indicator
Structural Paths	GZ ⟶ MY	−0.49	Negative moderate effect
	ZL ⟶ MY	0.17	Positive low effect
	XX ⟶ MY	0.18	Positive low effect

Latent Variable	Indicator / Path Relationship	Standardized Coefficient (β / Loading)	Interpretation
	Z $\longrightarrow$ MY	0.80	Positive strong effect
Explained Variance	MY (R²)	0.45	45% of variance explained

Summarize Discussion and Suggestions

Summarize

The model demonstrated acceptable fit indices (χ^2/df = 2.14, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.048, SRMR = 0.041), explaining 45% of the variance in consumer satisfaction (R^2 = 0.45). Key findings revealed that the grass planting effect had significant positive indirect effects on satisfaction through all three mediators. The path coefficient from grass planting to perceived value was β = 0.65 (p < 0.001), to perceived quality β = 0.58 (p < 0.001), and from brand image to satisfaction β = 0.72 (p < 0.001). Interestingly, a negative direct effect of grass planting on satisfaction was observed (β = −0.49, p < 0.05), indicating potential oversaturation or consumer skepticism when content is perceived as inauthentic. This study contributes to the digital marketing literature by extending the S-O-R framework into the cultural fashion domain. It offers strategic implications for marketers, emphasizing the need to shift from superficial virality to authentic storytelling, brand consistency, and emotional resonance to foster sustainable consumer engagement.

Discussion

The findings confirm that the grass-planting effect, a type of user-generated content marketing often found on platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin, significantly influences consumer satisfaction toward China-Chic fashion products. This influence occurs indirectly through three key mediating variables: perceived value, perceived quality, and brand image. These findings support the theoretical structure of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model, which explains that external stimuli (such as digital media exposure) lead to internal cognitive or emotional responses that ultimately affect behavioral outcomes (Mehrabian A., & Russell, J. A. 1974).

Most notably, **brand image** emerged as the strongest predictor of consumer satisfaction (β = 0.72), suggesting that while social content can influence purchase intention, long-term satisfaction is grounded in how well consumers relate to the brand's cultural and aesthetic identity (Keller, K.L.2009). This is consistent with prior studies emphasizing the importance of symbolic and emotional value in digital brand-building, especially among Gen Z consumers (Schivinski B., & Dabrowski, D., 2016).

Interestingly, the direct negative path from GZ to MY (β = −0.49) highlights a critical insight: overuse or inauthentic deployment of grass planting strategies may result in consumer fatigue or distrust. This echoes findings by De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017), who note that excessive influencer marketing can reduce credibility and engagement when not perceived as authentic.

Theoretically, the study extends the S-O-R model into the realm of cultural fashion marketing in digital ecosystems. It confirms that perceived value, quality, and image are crucial mediators of satisfaction in environments shaped by social influence and digital storytelling (Kim H., & Johnson, K. K. P., 2016). Practically, it provides marketers with a model to enhance not just visibility but meaningful perception through strategic cultural branding.

In conclusion, while grass planting effects serve as an effective stimulus, sustainable consumer satisfaction depends on how well brands build emotional, symbolic, and cultural connections. Brands must go beyond virality to foster long-term value through authentic content, product excellence, and identity alignment.

New Knowledge form Research

This study generates new knowledge that enhances the understanding of consumer behavior in the digital era, particularly in the domain of cultural fashion (China-Chic). It extends the application of the **Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model** to explain the role of the Grass-Planting Effect, defined as user-generated content (UGC) on social media platforms, which acts as a stimulus influencing consumers' evaluative processes (organism)—including perceived value, perceived quality, and brand image—and ultimately leading to consumer satisfaction (response). The findings confirm that the Grass-Planting Effect exerts a positive influence on

satisfaction through these mediators, with brand image emerging as the strongest predictor. However, the research also uncovers a critical new insight: the Grass-Planting Effect may generate a direct negative impact on satisfaction when content is perceived as overly repetitive or lacking authenticity, resulting in oversaturation and consumer skepticism. This indicates that the power of UGC is not solely positive but also carries challenges in balancing virality with credibility.

The new contribution of this research demonstrates that consumer satisfaction with cultural fashion products is shaped not only by utilitarian factors but also by **symbolic value, cultural identity, and authenticity in digital storytelling**. This work fills a theoretical gap in UGC and consumer behavior studies and provides practical implications for marketers. It suggests that sustainable consumer satisfaction depends on content strategies that create emotional resonance, reflect cultural values, and maintain brand consistency in digital ecosystems.

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