Social Media Marketing and E - Commerce Tea Sales
(Based on The SICAS Model):
A Case Study of SL Company, China

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of social media marketing on consumer engagement and e-commerce sales for SL Tea Company in China, utilizing the SICAS model as its foundational framework. The primary objectives were to evaluate the effectiveness of social media marketing on consumer purchasing decisions, to analyze the influence of influencer collaborations on consumer engagement, and to identify challenges faced by brands in implementing social media strategies. A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Quantitative data were collected through an online survey from a purposive sample of 200 SL Tea Company customers who actively engaged with the brand's social media platforms and had prior experience with online purchases. Qualitative data were gathered via in-depth interviews with 10 marketing professionals from SL Tea Company and digital marketing experts. The reliability of the survey instruments was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > .70$), and data validity was ensured through triangulation, cross-verifying survey results with qualitative insights and content analysis. Statistical analysis employed descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

The research findings empirically supported the hypothesis that each stage of the SICAS model positively influences consumer engagement with the brand. Specifically, all five stages were identified as significant positive predictors of consumer engagement: Share ($\beta = .315$, $p < .001$), Sense ($\beta = .302$, $p < .001$), Communications ($\beta = .274$, $p < .001$), Action ($\beta = .211$, $p < .001$), and Interest & Interactive View ($\beta = .132$, $p = .007$). This study highlights that SL Tea Company can significantly enhance brand visibility and reach a wider audience by creating engaging content, fostering collaborations with influencers, and executing targeted advertising campaigns on social media platforms. These findings offer valuable empirical insights into the effective use of social media marketing to enhance consumer engagement and drive e-commerce sales within the tea industry, thereby affirming the SICAS model as a robust framework for understanding consumer engagement in this dynamic context.

Introduction

The digitalization of commerce dramatically reshaped traditional business models, making social media marketing a crucial strategy for brands aiming to expand their consumer base and enhance market presence. Social media platforms such as TikTok, WeChat, and Xiaohongshu became essential for brand promotion and direct consumer engagement. The Chinese tea industry, which historically relied on physical retail distribution, experienced a significant shift toward e-commerce. SL Tea Company, a leading tea brand in China, embraced this transformation by leveraging social media marketing strategies to enhance brand visibility and drive online sales. The primary objectives of this study were to evaluate the effectiveness of social media marketing on consumer purchasing decisions, analyze the impact of influencer collaborations on consumer engagement, and identify challenges faced by brands in implementing social media strategies. This research aimed to provide actionable insights into optimizing digital marketing approaches for improved e-commerce performance. Social media platforms served as a critical medium for businesses to engage with their consumers in real-time. They offered brands an avenue to reach a broader audience at a lower cost than traditional marketing methods. Through innovative content, interactive campaigns, and targeted advertisements, businesses could build a loyal consumer base. SL Tea Company strategically utilized social media marketing by incorporating influencer partnerships, live-streaming promotions, and data-driven content optimization to strengthen its market presence. A significant challenge for businesses leveraging social media marketing was the rapidly changing digital landscape. Algorithms on platforms such as TikTok and WeChat continuously evolved, affecting the visibility of promotional content. Brands had to continuously adapt their marketing strategies to maintain engagement and conversion rates. Furthermore, the saturation of content in the digital space made it difficult for companies to differentiate their products. This study explored how SL Tea Company navigated these challenges and provided insights into best practices for digital marketing in e-commerce.

Consumer behavior in the digital era also evolved, with purchasing decisions being highly influenced by peer recommendations, online reviews, and social media endorsements. Studies indicated that digital consumers tended to trust recommendations from influencers and customer testimonials more than traditional advertising methods. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in content personalization further enhanced the effectiveness of digital marketing. SL Tea Company employed AI-driven strategies to analyze consumer preferences and tailor content accordingly, improving its engagement rates and overall sales performance.

The significance of this research lies in its ability to provide an empirical analysis of the relationship between social media marketing and e-commerce growth. By focusing on SL Tea Company as a case study, this research provided a framework for other businesses to refine their digital marketing approaches. The insights gained from this study contributed to the growing literature on digital marketing and offered practical strategies for businesses looking to optimize their social media presence for higher sales conversions. This study is structured as follows: The Literature Review section explores existing research on social media marketing and e-commerce strategies. The Research Methodology section outlines the mixed-methods approach, including data collection techniques and analysis methods. The Findings and Discussion section presents key insights from the research, and the Conclusion provides a summary of findings along with strategic recommendations for businesses. By investigating how SL Tea Company employed social media marketing to boost e-commerce sales, this study aimed to bridge the knowledge gap in understanding digital marketing effectiveness in China's rapidly growing tea industry.

Literature Review

Social Media Marketing and Consumer Engagement

Social media marketing emerged as a powerful tool for driving brand engagement and customer loyalty. Research suggested that social media platforms enabled businesses to reach targeted audiences more effectively than traditional advertising methods (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2021). Consumer engagement on platforms like TikTok and WeChat proved to increase brand interaction and enhance loyalty, as businesses leverage these channels to create personalized and immersive content, fostering strong relationships with their audience (Eslami et al., 2022). The rise of online live streaming and social networking has further fueled social media marketing, driving consumer growth through word-of-mouth interactions and leading to new economic models such as the influencer and trust economies (Hollebeek & Chen, 2024). Chinese consumers are increasingly using short video platforms and social media for online shopping, with a significant portion of online shoppers making purchases through these channels rather than exclusively through traditional e-commerce platforms.

The SICAS Model in Social Media Marketing

The SICAS model (Sense, Interest & Interactive View, Connect & Communication, Action, and Share) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding consumer engagement in social media marketing within the digital era. Introduced by the Data Center of China Internet (DCCI) in the "2011 China Social Marketing Blue Book," the SICAS model evolves upon earlier consumer behavior models like AIDMA and AISAS by emphasizing the disorderliness of the social media environment, the interactive needs of consumers, and the significance of information generated during consumer behavior (Zhou, 2020; Chen, 2024). Each stage of the model plays a crucial role:

Sense: Focuses on brand-user mutual perception, where companies enhance brand awareness and capture consumer needs through social platforms (Wang, 2023).

Interest & Interactive View: Involves stimulating consumer interest through marketing and promotional content that encourages attention and interaction with the brand.

Connect & Communication: Emphasizes utilizing social media characteristics to foster dialogue and interaction between consumers and the brand, ultimately increasing purchase intent.

Action: Pertains to consumer purchasing behavior, which can occur across various channels including O2O (Online-to-Offline), apps, and social networks, with previous stages influencing purchase rates.

Share: Highlights the open and sharing nature of the internet, where consumers actively share experiences, leading to secondary marketing and viral effects, making it a starting point for new marketing cycles driven by word-of-mouth and relationship marketing.

Studies indicate that effective application of the SICAS model can lead to higher conversion rates and stronger brand-consumer relationships.

The Role of Influencer Marketing in E-commerce

Influencer marketing was shown to significantly impact consumer purchasing decisions. Studies indicated that recommendations from trusted influencers could increase product credibility and encourage online purchases (Li & Wang, 2022). Consumers tend to trust social media influencers and key opinion consumers (KOCs) more than traditional advertisements, due to their professionalism and influence, leading to a higher likelihood of making purchasing decisions based on influencer endorsements (Hussain & Khan, 2022; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The rise of the influencer economy in China reflects this trend, where individuals with strong online presence can drive consumer growth through direct recommendations and authentic interactions.

Personalized Content and Interactive Marketing

Personalized content and interactive marketing strategies contributed to higher engagement levels and brand retention (Chen & Liu, 2021). Consumers were more likely to respond to brands that offered tailored content that aligned with their preferences and purchasing behavior. The development of big data and artificial intelligence technologies has made algorithm-driven personalized recommendations mainstream, significantly enhancing the effectiveness of digital marketing (Chandra et al., 2022). Interactive content such as live-streaming, Q&A sessions, and personalized promotions could significantly enhance user engagement and brand loyalty. Companies leveraging these strategies often achieve greater customer satisfaction and increased purchase intentions by providing targeted training for online sales and customer service personnel, and adopting differentiated marketing methods to improve online interaction (Wang, 2021).

Challenges and Opportunities in Social Media Marketing

Despite its effectiveness, social media marketing presents various challenges, including content saturation, continuous algorithmic changes on platforms like TikTok and WeChat, and the complexities of audience retention (Paliwal, 2015; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Brands must continuously adapt their strategies to ensure their content remains visible and relevant amidst a rapidly evolving digital landscape . The saturation of content can make product differentiation difficult. However, these challenges also present opportunities. Successful companies often utilize data analytics and AI-driven content recommendations to address these issues, maintaining competitive advantages by optimizing content output and user experience. The shift from traditional e-commerce to diverse social media platforms for online shopping also underscores the need for multi-channel marketing approaches and the creation of shareable content. Furthermore, accurately measuring the Return on Investment (ROI) of social media activities remains a complex challenge for many businesses, requiring sophisticated analytics and clear metric definitions (Paliwal, 2015).

Online Tea Market in China and Consumer Behavior

The Chinese tea market, as the world's largest producer and consumer, has seen significant growth in online sales, particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed online shopping to become a primary channel for daily consumption needs (Li & Zhang, 2023). Despite the convenience, online purchasing in the tea industry can exacerbate information asymmetry, making it difficult for consumers to judge product quality through physical contact (Li & Zhang, 2023). Consumer behavior in the online tea market is influenced by various factors such as education level, familiarity with tea, convenience, product diversification, and online reviews (Li & Zhang, 2023). The online attention for China's tea

industry shows trends of rapid growth, high stability, and slow decline, with economic development, residents' income, and tea prices being essential influencing factors (Zhou & Li, 2023). Understanding these specific consumer behaviors and market dynamics is crucial for tea companies like SL Tea to effectively tailor their digital marketing strategies.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to assess the effectiveness of social media marketing on e-commerce growth for SL Tea Company. The research followed a convergent parallel design, wherein both qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently and analyzed to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

Research Design
The quantitative component of this study utilized a descriptive research design to analyze the current state of SL Tea's social media marketing and consumer behavior patterns. It aimed to describe the characteristics of the population or phenomenon being studied, focusing on the five dimensions of the SICAS model (Sense, Interest & Interactive View, Communication, Action, and Share) as they relate to consumer engagement and purchasing decisions.

The qualitative component employed a case study approach through in-depth interviews. This design allowed for a deeper exploration of the issues faced by SL Tea in social media marketing, gathering rich insights from key personnel and experts that quantitative data alone might not capture. By combining both approaches, the study aimed to triangulate findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the conclusions.

Population and Sample Size
The study population for the quantitative component consisted of SL Tea Company customers who actively engaged with the brand's social media platforms. A total of 200 respondents were selected using purposive sampling. This non-probability sampling method was chosen to ensure that participants had prior experience with social media engagement and online purchases of tea products, aligning directly with the study's objectives. This sample size was deemed sufficient for the planned statistical analyses, including regression and correlation, to identify significant relationships within the SICAS model.

For the qualitative component, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 marketing professionals from SL Tea Company and digital marketing experts. These participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in or expert knowledge of social media marketing strategies within the tea industry, providing valuable insights into operational challenges and strategic decision-making.

Research Tools
1. Online Survey Questionnaire
An online survey questionnaire was distributed to the selected customer respondents. The questionnaire was structured into two main parts: Part 1: Demographic Information: Collected basic information about the respondents, including gender, age, education level, and income. This information facilitated the creation of user profiles and aided in understanding the characteristics of the consumer base. Part 2: SICAS Model Dimensions: Included questions related to consumer perceptions, interest attraction, interaction and communication, purchasing

behavior, and sharing experiences, all aligned with the five dimensions of the SICAS model. Questions were designed using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to quantify respondents' attitudes and views. To ensure data validity, responses indicating "Not heard of" for SL Tea were considered invalid and excluded from the analysis, ensuring a more comprehensive and scientific dataset.

2. In-depth Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide was developed for the qualitative interviews. The questions were primarily based on the five dimensions of the SICAS model, tailored to elicit detailed insights into SL Tea's social media marketing strategies, challenges, and opportunities from the perspective of marketing professionals. The interview guide allowed for flexibility, enabling interviewers to probe deeper into emerging themes and gather rich, genuine feedback.

Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

1. Reliability Analysis

The reliability and internal consistency of the online survey questionnaire were assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient. A pilot test was conducted with 30 qualified participants who were not included in the main sample to verify the questionnaire's reliability. The study required an α value of ≥ 0.70 to ensure the credibility of the questionnaire, a commonly accepted threshold in social science research.

2. Validity Analysis

The validity of the survey instrument was established through multiple approaches. The questionnaire was reviewed by expert, the independent study, to ensure that the questions adequately covered the content domain of social media marketing and the SICAS model relevant to SL Tea Company. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Factor loadings were examined to confirm that individual items loaded appropriately onto their intended constructs (convergent validity), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) values were calculated to further support convergent validity. Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with the correlation coefficients between that construct and all other constructs. The square root of AVE for a construct should be greater than its correlations with other constructs, indicating that each construct measures a unique concept.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in two phases:

1. Quantitative Data Collection: The online survey questionnaire was distributed to the 200 selected customer respondents via a dedicated online platform (e.g., Questionnaire Star) from September to October 2024. Participants accessed the questionnaire through a shared link, ensuring convenience and cost-effectiveness. The platform also facilitated the creation of a bilingual version (Chinese and English) to minimize language barriers.

2. Qualitative Data Collection: One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 10 marketing professionals. These interviews were held in an informal manner, typically within the company's premises, to encourage open and genuine feedback. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, and detailed notes were taken. After the interviews, recordings were transcribed and prepared for thematic analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis involved processing both quantitative and qualitative data:

1. Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the online survey were analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSSl). The following statistical methods were employed: 1) Data Cleaning: Invalid questionnaires (e.g., those indicating "Not heard of" SL Tea) were removed to ensure the reliability of the analysis results, 2) Descriptive Statistics: Frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their attitudes towards various aspects of SL Tea's social media marketing based on the Likert scale responses, 3) Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the strength and direction of relationships between the five dimensions of the SICAS model (Sense, Interest & Interactive View, Communication, Action, Share) and overall consumer engagement, and 4) Multiple Regression Analysis: Multiple regression analysis was performed to test the research hypotheses and determine the predictive power of each SICAS dimension on consumer engagement with SL Tea. Collinearity diagnostics (Tolerance and VIF) were conducted to ensure that multicollinearity among independent variables was not a significant issue.

2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involved: 1) Transcription: Interview recordings were accurately transcribed, 2) Coding: Transcribed data were systematically reviewed and coded to identify key points, concepts, and recurring themes related to SL Tea's social media marketing strategies, challenges, and opportunities, 3) Categorization: Codes were grouped into broader categories and themes, allowing for the identification of patterns and differing perspectives among interviewees, and 4) Interpretation: The identified themes were interpreted in relation to the quantitative findings and existing literature, providing a richer, more nuanced understanding of the research problem.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, strict ethical guidelines were adhered to. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, ensuring they fully understood the purpose of the research, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. All collected data were anonymized to protect the privacy and identity of the respondents. Data were stored securely and accessed only by the research team for academic purposes, in compliance with relevant data protection regulations.

Conceptual Framework

This study explored the impact of social media marketing on consumer engagement with SL Tea, utilizing the SICAS model as a conceptual framework. The research hypothesized that each stage of the SICAS model (Sense, Interest & Interactive View, Communication, Action, and Share) positively influenced consumer engagement with the brand. Specifically, it was posited that brand familiarity, impressions, consistency, and information channels influenced brand awareness (H1). Furthermore, the study hypothesized that content appeal, exposure, and content nature influenced consumer interest and interaction (H2). The research also examined the influence of participatory activities, interactive features, and information provided by SL Tea on consumer engagement and communication (H3). It was further hypothesized that purchase intent, reasons for purchase, purchase behavior, and repurchase

behavior were influenced by consumer engagement with social media marketing (H4). Finally, the study investigated whether positive recommendations and sharing reasons were influenced by consumer engagement and brand satisfaction (H5).
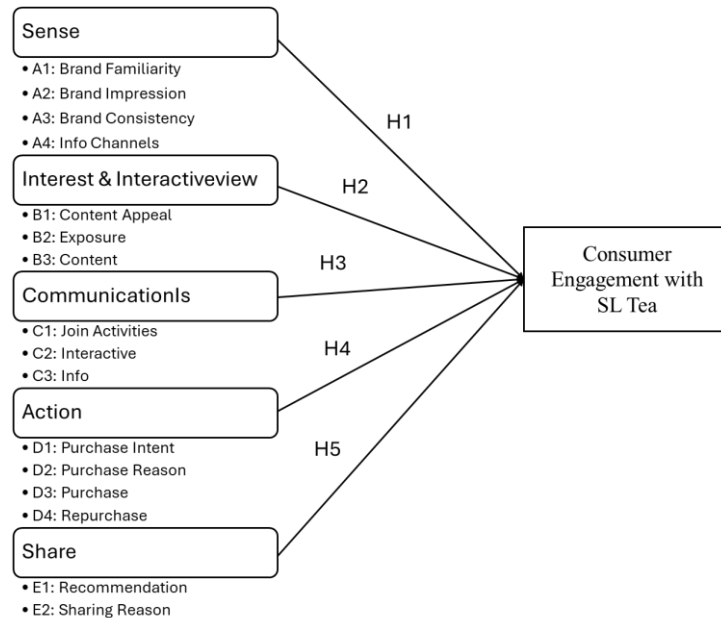

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Hypotheses

H1: Sense - Brand familiarity, impression, consistency, and information channels positively influenced consumer brand awareness of SL Tea.

H2: Interest & Interactive View - Content appeal, exposure, and the nature of the content itself positively influenced consumer interest and interaction with SL Tea's social media presence.

H3: Communicationls - Active participation in activities, interactive features, and information provided by SL Tea positively influenced consumer engagement and communication with the brand.

H4: Action - Purchase intent, reasons for purchase, actual purchase behavior, and repurchase behavior were positively influenced by consumer engagement with SL Tea's social media marketing efforts.

H5: Share - Positive recommendations and reasons for sharing content were positively influenced by consumer engagement with SL Tea and their satisfaction with the brand.

Research Finding

This paper studied and analyzed the current state, challenges, and underlying reasons related to social media marketing within SL tea enterprises. It proposed optimization strategies and safeguards for SL tea enterprise e-commerce marketing. The results are presented below.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the population and sample are presented in Table 1.

Table1: General information description

Item	Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	102	51.0
	Female	98	49.0
Age	Under 18	10	5.0
	18-25	56	28.0
	26-30	48	24.0
	31-40	35	17.5
	41-50	26	13.0
	51-60	19	9.5
	Over 60	6	3.0
Education Level	College or below	60	30.0
	Bachelor's degree	114	57.0
	Master's degree	21	10.5
	Doctorate or above	5	2.5
Income	Below 3000 RMB	30	15.0
	3001-6000 RMB	45	22.5
	6001-9000 RMB	46	23.0
	9001-12000 RMB	64	32.0
	Above 12001 RMB	15	7.5
Information Channels (multiple-choice question）	Social Media Advertisements	129	64.5
	Influencer Recommendations	115	57.5
	Word-of-Mouth	123	61.5
	Search Engines	111	55.5
	Other (please specify)	104	52.2
Have you ever recommended SL Tea Company to others or shared information about SL Tea Company?	Yes	105	52.5
	No	95	47.5

Table 1 presented the demographic characteristics of the study's population and sample. The sample consisted of 200 participants, with a near-equal gender distribution (51% male, 49% female). The age distribution was diverse, with the largest group falling between 18 and 25 years of age (28%), followed by the 26–30 age group (24%). Participants aged 31–40 constituted 17.5% of the sample, while those in the 41–50, 51–60, and over 60 age brackets represented 13%, 9.5%, and 3%, respectively. Only 5% of participants were under 18 years old. Regarding education level, the majority of participants (57%) held a bachelor's degree, followed by college or below (30%). Master's degree holders made up 10.5% of the sample, and those with a doctorate or above represented 2.5%. Income levels varied, with the largest segment of participants (32%) reporting an income between 9001 and 12000 RMB. Incomes below 3000 RMB, between 3001 and 6000 RMB, and between 6001 and 9000 RMB were reported by 15%, 22.5%, and 23% of participants, respectively. Only 7.5% of participants

reported an income above 12001 RMB. Participants were asked about the channels through which they obtained information about SL Tea Company (multiple choices were allowed). Social media advertisements were the most frequently cited source (64.5%), followed closely by word-of-mouth referrals (61.5%). Influencer recommendations were also a significant source (57.5%), as were search engines (55.5%). Other unspecified sources were mentioned by 52.2% of participants. Finally, participants were asked whether they had ever recommended SL Tea Company to others or shared information about the company. A slight majority (52.5%) reported having done so, while 47.5% indicated they had not."

Correlation analysis

The Pearson correlation coefficients (Table 2) among the five SICAS dimensions (Sense, Interest & Interactive View, Communications, Action, Share) and overall Consumer Engagement with SL Tea. All correlations were positive and statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, indicating strong interrelationships among these constructs.

Sense showed a strong positive correlation with Consumer Engagement ($r = 0.604$). It also had moderate to strong positive correlations with Interest & Interactive View ($r = 0.513$), Communications ($r = 0.519$), Action ($r = 0.604$), and Share ($r = 0.510$). This suggests that a positive initial perception of the brand is fundamentally linked to all subsequent stages of consumer engagement.

Interest & Interactive View correlated moderately with Consumer Engagement ($r = 0.503$) and showed similar positive correlations with other SICAS dimensions. This highlights the importance of engaging content in fostering overall consumer involvement.

Communications had a moderate positive correlation with Consumer Engagement ($r = 0.521$) and other dimensions. Effective two-way communication on social media is thus crucial for deepening consumer relationships.

Action demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with Consumer Engagement ($r = 0.510$) and strong correlations with Sense ($r = 0.604$) and Share ($r = 0.612$). This indicates that actual purchasing behavior is closely tied to initial brand perception and the willingness to share experiences.

Share exhibited a moderate positive correlation with Consumer Engagement ($r = 0.509$) and the strongest correlation with Action ($r = 0.612$). This reinforces the idea that positive consumption experiences drive sharing behavior, which in turn fuels further engagement.

Overall, the high and significant positive correlations among all SICAS dimensions and consumer engagement underscore the interconnected nature of these stages in the social media marketing funnel. This aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of the SICAS model, which posits a dynamic and interactive process of consumer behavior in the digital environment (Zhou, 2020).

Table 2: Correlation Analysis Results

	Sense	Interest & Interactiveview	Communications	Action	Share	Consumer Engagement with SL Tea
Sense	1(0.000**)					
Interest & Interactiveview	0.513(0.000**)	1(0.000**)				
Communications	0.519(0.000**)	0.503(0.000**)	1(0.000**)			
Action	0.604(0.000**)	0.536(0.000**)	0.595(0.000**)	1(0.000**)		
Share	0.51(0.000**)	0.513(0.000**)	0.521(0.000**)	0.612(0.000**)	1(0.000**)	
Consumer Engagement with SL Tea	0.604(0.000**)	0.503(0.000**)	0.521(0.000**)	0.51(0.000**)	0.509(0.000**)	1(0.000**)

Note: $p < .001$ for all correlations.

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive power of the SICAS model stages (Sense, Interest & Interactive View, Communications, Action, Share) on overall Consumer Engagement with SL Tea. The regression coefficient statistics (Table 3). All five SICAS dimensions were found to be statistically significant positive predictors of Consumer Engagement with SL Tea, with p-values less than 0.01 (or 0.007 for Interest & Interactive View).

Share emerged as the strongest predictor (Standardized Beta = 0.315, $p < 0.001$), indicating that consumers' willingness to share information significantly drives their overall engagement. This highlights the critical role of word-of-mouth and user-generated content in the digital tea market (Gao, 2023).

Sense was the second strongest predictor (Standardized Beta = 0.302, $p < 0.001$). This emphasizes that initial brand familiarity and positive impressions are fundamental in building consumer engagement, consistent with the foundational stage of the SICAS model (Wang, 2023).

$p < 0.001$). Effective two-way communication and active participation fostered by the brand significantly contribute to consumer engagement.

Action had a notable positive impact (Standardized Beta = 0.211, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that actual purchasing and repurchase behaviors reinforce consumer engagement with the brand.

Interest & Interactive View was also a significant predictor (Standardized Beta = 0.132, $p = 0.007$). While having a smaller beta coefficient compared to other stages, it still plays a vital role in initiating and sustaining consumer engagement through appealing content and interactive features (Chen & Liu, 2021).

The collinearity statistics (Tolerance values > 0.57 and VIF values < 1.76) indicate that multicollinearity among the independent variables is not a serious concern, ensuring the reliability of the regression coefficients. The constant term was also statistically significant (B = 0.754, $p = 0.001$), suggesting a baseline level of consumer engagement.

Table 3: Regression coefficient statistics

	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardization coefficient	t	P	Collinear statistics	
	B	**Standard error**	**Beta**			**TOL**	**VIF**
Constant	0.754	0.213		3.535	0.001**		
Sense	0.276	0.055	0.302	5.018	0.000**	0.652	1.534
Interest & Interactiveview	0.129	0.047	0.132	2.718	0.007**	0.57	1.753
Communications	0.223	0.049	0.274	4.519	0.000**	0.642	1.558
Action	0.212	0.047	0.211	4.509	0.000**	0.611	1.636
Share	0.307	0.059	0.315	5.229	0.000**	0.650	1.539
Dependent variable : Consumer Engagement with SL Tea							

Note: ** indicates significance at the 1% level.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Based on the correlation and regression analyses above, the hypothesis testing results can be summarized in the following Table 4. H1: Sense: The correlation analysis shows a strong positive correlation between "Sense" and overall consumer engagement (r =.604, p <.001). The regression analysis also confirms that "Sense" is a significant positive predictor of consumer engagement (β =.302, p <.001). H2: Interest & Interactive View: The correlation analysis shows a moderate positive correlation between "Interest & Interactive View" and overall consumer engagement (r =.503, p <.001). The regression analysis also confirms that "Interest & Interactive View" is a significant positive predictor of consumer engagement (β =.132, p =.007). H3: Communications: The correlation analysis shows a moderate positive correlation between "Communications" and overall consumer engagement (r =.521, p <.001). The regression analysis confirms that "Communications" is a significant positive predictor of consumer engagement (β =.274, p <.001). H4: Action: The correlation analysis shows a moderate positive correlation between "Action" and overall consumer engagement (r =.510, p <.001). The regression analysis confirms that "Action" is a significant positive predictor of consumer engagement (β =.211, p <.001). H5: Share: The correlation analysis shows a moderate positive correlation between "Share" and overall consumer engagement (r =.509, p <.001). The regression analysis confirms that "Share" is a significant positive predictor of consumer engagement (β =.315, p <.001). This supports H5.

Table 4: Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Correlation with Consumer Engagement (r)	Regression Coefficient (β)	p-value (Regression)	Hypothesis Supported?
H1: Sense	.604 (p <.001)	0.302	<.001	Yes
H2: Interest & Interactive View	.503 (p <.001)	0.132	0.007	Yes
H3: Communications	.521 (p <.001)	0.274	<.001	Yes
H4: Action	.510 (p <.001)	0.211	<.001	Yes
H5: Share	.509 (p <.001)	0.315	<.001	Yes

Summary and Analysis of Qualitative Interview Findings

The qualitative interviews with SL Tea's marketing channel employees provided rich, contextual insights that complement the quantitative findings, offering a deeper understanding of the company's social media marketing strategies and challenges. Key insights from the interviews include:

Definition of SL Tea Company: Interviewees defined SL Tea as an economic organization primarily engaged in tea planting, processing, sales, and related services, aiming to meet consumer needs and generate profit by providing high-quality tea products.

Reasons for Choosing Social Media Platforms: SL Tea opted for social media due to its extensive user base, cost-effective and efficient marketing methods, strong interactivity, user stickiness, and precise target market positioning. This strategic choice was particularly driven by the need to adapt to severe cash flow pressures faced by offline stores during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Emphasis on Brand Promotion and Image Building: Interviewees confirmed that social media marketing is crucial for brand promotion and image building. By publishing high-quality content, interacting with consumers, and showcasing brand stories, the company aims to cultivate a positive brand image and enhance brand awareness and reputation.

Methods and Content to Attract Consumers: SL Tea attracts consumers by publishing engaging content, organizing online activities, and conducting interactive marketing. Content includes tea knowledge, tea culture stories, product introductions, and promotional offers, designed to capture attention and stimulate interest.

Establishing Strong Consumer Connections: The ability to establish strong consumer connections through social media depends on continuous release of valuable content, active interaction, and provision of high-quality products and services. This highlights the long-term investment and persistence required for successful social media relationship building.

Ways to Interact with Consumers: Interaction methods include replying to comments, private messaging, online Q&A sessions, and live stream interactions. These approaches aim to enhance consumer participation and satisfaction by fostering two-way communication.

Desired Consumer Information: SL Tea hopes consumers will gain insights into the brand image, brand story, product information, and promotional activities when viewing their social media content.

Measures to Improve Sales Conversion Rates: Strategies include optimizing product descriptions and visuals, providing high-quality customer service, organizing promotional activities, and utilizing social media advertising.

Special Management for Fans/Community Customers: Interviewees indicated that SL Tea implements special management strategies for frequent live stream viewers and

community customers, such as establishing fan groups and offering exclusive promotions. This reflects an understanding of building loyal communities and leveraging trust.

Encouraging Information Sharing: Consumers are encouraged to share SL Tea information through sharing rewards, creating easily shareable content, and organizing sharing activities. This leverages the power of word-of-mouth marketing in the digital space.

Investment in Social Media Marketing: The human and financial investment varies based on the company's scale and marketing strategy, requiring dedicated content creators, customer service personnel, and budget for advertising and content production.

In summary, the qualitative findings reinforce the importance of the SICAS model's principles in practice, providing practical context to the statistical relationships observed. They highlight SL Tea's proactive adaptation to the digital landscape, their focus on content and interaction, and their recognition of community building and word-of-mouth as key drivers for online tea sales.

Conclusions

This study empirically confirmed the significant positive influence of all five stages of the SICAS model (Sense, Interest & Interactive View, Communications, Action, and Share) on consumer engagement with SL Tea Company's brand. The findings highlight the interconnected and dynamic nature of consumer behavior in the digital marketing landscape, emphasizing that engagement is a multi-faceted process driven by various touchpoints within the social media ecosystem. Specifically, the regression analysis revealed that the Share stage ($\beta = .315$, $p < .001$) was the strongest predictor of consumer engagement, underscoring the critical role of word-of-mouth and user-generated content in amplifying brand reach and influence. The Sense stage ($\beta = .302$, $p < .001$) emerged as the second most influential factor, indicating that initial brand familiarity, positive impressions, and consistent brand image are foundational for cultivating consumer engagement. The Communications stage ($\beta = .274$, $p < .001$) also significantly predicted engagement, affirming the importance of two-way interaction and active brand-consumer dialogue on social media platforms. The Action stage ($\beta = .211$, $p < .001$) demonstrated that actual purchasing and repurchase behaviors reinforce overall consumer engagement, highlighting the cyclical nature of the consumer journey. Lastly, the Interest & Interactive View stage ($\beta = .132$, $p = .007$), while having a smaller coefficient, was still a significant predictor, emphasizing that appealing content and interactive features are crucial for capturing and sustaining consumer interest. The demographic analysis of the 200 surveyed participants revealed a balanced gender distribution and a consumer base predominantly comprising young to middle-aged adults (18-40 years old), a demographic highly active on social media. Information channels most frequently cited included social media advertisements, word-of-mouth, and influencer recommendations, reinforcing the dominance of digital and social channels in consumer information acquisition. Notably, over half of the respondents (52.5%) had recommended or shared information about SL Tea, indicating a moderate level of brand advocacy. The research instruments demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.87$ for all dimensions) and strong validity (KMO $= 0.925$, all factor loadings > 0.6, AVE > 0.5, CR > 0.7, and satisfactory discriminant validity), ensuring the robustness of the quantitative findings. While most demographic factors (age, education, income) did not show significant differences in SICAS dimensions, a notable gender difference was found in the Communications dimension, with males exhibiting higher engagement. In essence, the study concludes that a holistic social media marketing strategy, meticulously addressing each stage of the SICAS model, is vital for driving consumer engagement and ultimately enhancing e-commerce sales for tea companies in the dynamic Chinese market.

Discussions

The findings of this study provide robust empirical support for the applicability and effectiveness of the SICAS model in understanding consumer engagement within the context of social media marketing for the Chinese tea industry. This aligns with and extends existing literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior, particularly given the unique characteristics of the Chinese market and the tea sector. The strong predictive power of the Share stage on consumer engagement ($\beta = .315$) is particularly noteworthy. This finding resonates with previous research emphasizing the power of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and user-generated content (UGC) in influencing consumer decisions and brand advocacy (Gao, 2023; Wang, 2023). In the tea industry, where product quality can be intangible online, consumer testimonials and shared experiences become crucial trust signals, as highlighted by Li and Zhang (2023) regarding information asymmetry in online agricultural product sales. SL Tea's success in encouraging sharing (52.5% of respondents) demonstrates a practical application of this principle. This also implicitly aligns with principles of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), which emphasizes "morality" and "knowledge" as foundational conditions for sustainable development (Wongkumchai et al., 2020). By sharing authentic experiences, consumers contribute to a knowledge-based trust economy, fostering sustainable consumption patterns. The significant impact of the Sense stage ($\beta = .302$) on engagement underscores the foundational importance of brand awareness and initial positive impressions. This is consistent with Kaplan and Haenlein's (2021) assertion that effective brand building and communication strategies are critical in social media marketing. For SL Tea, achieving high brand familiarity through diverse channels (social media ads, influencers, word-of-mouth) lays the groundwork for deeper engagement. This finding also supports the idea that in a saturated market, a clear and consistent brand image is paramount for initial consumer perception (Zhao & Zhu, 2015). Furthermore, this emphasis on clear and consistent information aligns with the "knowledge" condition of SEP, where thorough understanding is crucial for informed decision-making (Wongkumchai & Kiattisin, 2021). The positive influence of Communications ($\beta = .274$) on engagement reinforces the shift from one-way marketing to interactive, two-way dialogue. This aligns with Chen and Liu's (2021) research on interactive marketing's role in enhancing brand loyalty. The qualitative insights from SL Tea's marketing professionals further elaborate on this, detailing methods like replying to comments, private messaging, and live Q&A, which foster a sense of connection and participation. The observed gender difference in this dimension, where males showed higher engagement in communications, suggests a potential area for targeted strategy development, perhaps by tailoring communication styles or content themes to resonate more effectively with female consumers. This continuous dialogue and relationship building can be seen as contributing to the "social" dimension of sustainable development, as emphasized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promoting community well-being and collaboration (Wongkumchai et al., 2020). The significant role of Action ($\beta = .211$) in driving engagement indicates that actual purchase and repurchase behaviors are not merely outcomes but also drivers of continued brand interaction. This cyclical relationship is a key tenet of the SICAS model, where action reinforces overall engagement. This finding supports studies that link digital marketing efforts to direct sales performance and repurchase intent (He & Lin, 2022). For the tea industry, promoting responsible consumption patterns through clear product information and ethical sourcing, even subtly communicated through marketing, could align with SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), contributing to a more sustainable "Action" from consumers (Wongkumchai & Kiattisin, 2021). Finally, the significant contribution of Interest & Interactive View ($\beta = .132$) confirms

that engaging content and interactive features are essential for capturing and maintaining consumer attention. This is particularly relevant in the "content + e-commerce" monetization model prevalent in China (Liu, 2020), where appealing short videos and live streams can profoundly impact consumption habits. The qualitative data from SL Tea, detailing their use of tea knowledge videos and live streaming studios, exemplify this strategic approach. By disseminating knowledge about tea culture and production, SL Tea's content marketing can also be viewed through the lens of SEP's "knowledge" condition, empowering consumers with information that extends beyond mere transactional value (Wongkumchai et al., 2020). While the study found no significant differences in SICAS dimensions across age, education, and income levels, this suggests that SL Tea's social media marketing strategies may be broadly effective across these demographic segments, or that these factors are less influential than the SICAS stages themselves in driving engagement within this specific context. This contrasts with some broader consumer behavior studies that often find demographic variations in digital engagement. This broad applicability across demographics might be a strength for a product like tea, which has a wide appeal, and could implicitly contribute to economic stability by reaching diverse consumer groups, a concept also explored within the Information Analysis and Evaluation Model (IAEM) for local economies (Wongkumchai & Kiattisin, 2021). Overall, this research not only validates the SICAS model as a robust framework for analyzing social media marketing effectiveness in the Chinese tea industry but also provides granular insights into which stages are most impactful. It underscores the necessity for brands to move beyond traditional marketing, embracing interactive, content-driven, and community-focused strategies to thrive in the digital era. Furthermore, by implicitly or explicitly aligning social media marketing efforts with principles of sustainability, such as those found in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Sustainable Development Goals, tea companies can potentially enhance brand perception and build deeper, more meaningful connections with a discerning consumer base.

The research findings can be synthesized into a conceptual model framework, as illustrated in Figure 2.
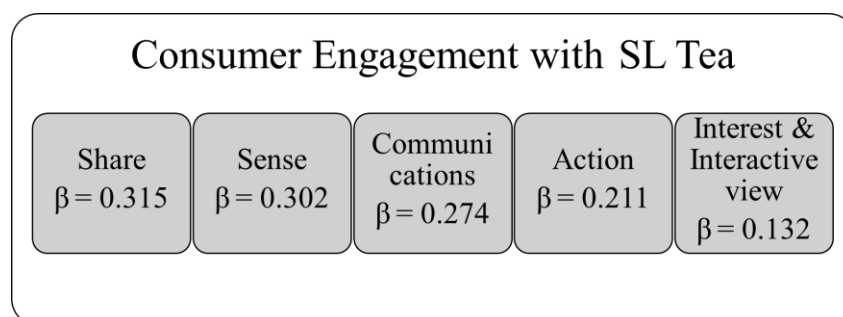

Figure 2: Presented a conceptual model framework that illustrated the relationship between social media marketing and e-commerce tea sales, based on the SICAS model.

Suggestion

Based on the study's findings and discussions, the following suggestion are proposed for SL Tea Company and other online tea businesses in China:

Applications

1. Develop a cohesive social media marketing strategy that meticulously addresses each stage of the SICAS model, from initial brand impression (Sense) and captivating content (Interest & Interactive View) to fostering two-way communication (Communications), driving purchases (Action), and encouraging sharing (Share).

2. Prioritize creating high-quality, engaging, and personalized content (e.g., brand storytelling, tea knowledge, interactive live streams) that not only attracts attention but also seamlessly guides consumers towards purchasing and reinforces their overall engagement. Ensure direct and user-friendly links from social media content to e-commerce platforms to streamline the "Action" stage.

3. Actively encourage and incentivize user-generated content (UGC) and positive sharing of tea experiences on social media, leveraging the "Share" stage as a powerful driver of brand influence and trust.

4. Invest in dedicated community management to foster deeper two-way communication, build exclusive brand communities (e.g., WeChat groups), and provide personalized interactions that enhance customer loyalty and transform satisfied customers into brand advocates.

Future Research

1. Conduct comparative studies across different social media platforms (e.g., TikTok vs. WeChat vs. Xiaohongshu) to understand their unique effectiveness on consumer engagement and sales in the tea industry, informing more nuanced platform-specific strategies.

2. Explore the long-term dynamics of consumer engagement across the SICAS stages through longitudinal research, providing insights into evolving behaviors and the sustained impact of social media marketing.

3. Research the detailed application and impact of advanced technologies, such as AI and big data analytics, in optimizing each SICAS stage, particularly in content personalization, targeted advertising, and predictive consumer behavior analysis within the online tea market.

4. Further investigate the specific roles of trust and authenticity, especially in influencer collaborations and user-generated content, as mediating or moderating factors within the SICAS model in this industry context.

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