

**Fan Culture as Informal Brand Power:
An Exploratory Study of How Chinese Fan
Communities Influence non-fans Gen Z
Consumers' Decision-Making and Brand
perception in the Luxury fashion brand.**

Shu Hua

*A project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the
degree MA Strategic Fashion Marketing
The London College of Fashion University
of the Arts London*

*Submission Date: 16 September 2025
Word count: 18279*

DECLARATION

I, Shu Hua (Student ID: 20003375), hereby declare that this dissertation, entitled “Fan Culture as Informal Brand Power: An Exploratory Study of How Chinese Fan Communities Influence Gen-Z Non-Fans’ Decision-Making and Brand Perception in Luxury Fashion”, is entirely my own work. It has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification at this or any other university.

All sources of information have been acknowledged and referenced appropriately. The study complied with institutional research ethics guidance; all interview participants received information sheets and provided informed consent. No personal data that could identify participants are disclosed in this dissertation.

USE OF GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT

I confirm that a generative AI tool, ChatGPT, was used to provide technical assistance during the preparation of the interview records. Its sole function was to translate Chinese interview transcripts into English without altering the original meaning (used in August 2025). A representative prompt was: "Please translate this Chinese interview transcript without changing its original meaning" (for ChatGPT). All outputs were manually reviewed, verified, and anonymised by the researcher. The researcher remains fully responsible for data collection, interpretation, and the accuracy of the final text.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to study at the University of the Arts London (UAL), an experience I will always cherish. I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr Bruno Cignacco, for his steadfast support, patience, and insightful guidance throughout this research. His advice and encouragement have been vital to my learning and progress. I am also grateful to our Course Leader, Dr Nina Van Volkinburg, for her kind support and inspiring leadership. My thanks extend to the faculty and staff of the MA Strategic Fashion Marketing programme at UAL, whose teaching sharpened my thinking and helped shape this research.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how Chinese fan communities operate as an informal form of brand power by shaping Gen-Z non-fans' perceptions and decision-making in the luxury fashion context. Adopting a multi-method qualitative design, the study combines a four-week netnography of Weibo, Xiaohongshu and Douyin with eight semi-structured interviews with Chinese Gen-Z non-fans. Thematic analysis integrates both datasets through a three-lens model: Lens 1 (Reach & Amplification), Lens 2 (Perception & Framing) and Lens 3 (Behaviour & Boundaries).

The study contributes a parsimonious mechanism—sincerity threshold → instrumental bridge → outcome gates explaining why reach and framing are necessary but insufficient for conversion. Managerially, it offers platform-specific guidance on designing diagnostic toolkits, curating credible multi-voice narratives and monitoring authenticity risks. Limitations include the cross-sectional window, small-N interviews and reliance on public posts; future work should adopt longitudinal traces, experimental tests of backfire effects and cross-tier comparisons.

The thesis contributes a parsimonious framework sincerity threshold → instrumental bridge → outcome gates—that explains why reach and framing are necessary but insufficient for conversion. Managerially, it offers platform-specific guidance on designing diagnostic toolkits, curating credible multi-voice narratives and monitoring authenticity risks. Limitations include the cross-sectional window, small-N interviews and reliance on public posts; future work should extend to longitudinal traces, experiments on backfire effects and cross-category comparisons.

Keywords: Fan culture; user-generated content; social proof; customer journey; authenticity; endorser–brand fit; Gen Z; China; luxury fashion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	2
1.1 Context	2
1.2 Rationale	3
1.3 Aim and Objectives & Research Question	6
1.3.1 Aim	6
1.3.2 Objectives	6
1.3.3 Research Question	6
1.4 Theoretical and Managerial Contributions	6
1.4.1 Theoretical contribution.....	6
1.4.2 Managerial contributions.....	7
1.5 Overview of The Research Design	7
1.6 Overview of the Structure of the Dissertation	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.1 Introduction	10
2.2 Community-Driven user generated content (UGC) and Fan Digital Labour	10
2.3 Informal Brand Communication on social media: How Fans as Secondary Spreaders Shape Non-Fans’ Brand Perceptions	13
2.4 Social Proof and Customer Journey: How Fan Behavior Shapes Non-Fans’ Brand Response	17
2.4.1 Introduction: From Fan Behavior to Brand Influence	17
2.4.2 Cialdini’s Principle of Social Proof in the Fan Context	18
2.4.3 Mapping Fan Influence onto the Customer Journey	19
2.5 Conclusion	21
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	24
3.1 Introduction	24
3.2 Philosophical Context	25
3.2.1 Research Philosophy: Assumptions and Their Operationalisation in This Study..	25
3.2.2 Interpretivist Paradigm	26
3.2.3 Research Approach	27
3.3 Research Approach and Strategy	28

3.3.1 <i>Multi-Method Qualitative Design and Strategy</i>	28
3.3.2 <i>Time Horizon</i>	30
3.4 Instrument Design: Data Collection Methods	30
3.4.1 <i>Phase 1: Netnography</i>	30
3.4.2 <i>Phase 2: Semi-Structured Narrative Interviews</i>	32
3.5 Data Collection and Analysis: Sampling Strategy and Participant Profile	42
3.5.1 <i>Data Analysis Procedures</i>	43
3.6 Reliability and Validity	43
3.7 Limitations of the Research Design	45
3.8 Ethical Considerations	46
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS	49
4.1 <i>introduction</i>	49
4.2 <i>Lens 1: Reach & Amplification (answer sub-RQ: How do fan contents reach non-fans and shape initial attention?)</i>	50
4.2.1 <i>Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces</i>	51
4.2.2 <i>Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction</i>	53
4.3 <i>Lens 2: Perception & Framing (answers sub-RQ: How do social proof and affective atmosphere shape interpretive frames?)</i>	56
4.3.1 <i>Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof</i>	56
4.3.2 <i>Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser–Brand Fit</i>	59
4.4 <i>Lens 3: Behaviour & Boundaries (answer sub-RQ: How do non-fans gatekeep authenticity and make decisions?)</i>	61
4.4.1 <i>Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Scepticism</i>	62
4.4.2 <i>Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey</i>	64
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION	70
5.1 Discussion	70
5.1.1 <i>Objective 2: To analyse how Chinese fan communities co-create and disseminate brand meaning through user-generated content, emotional labour, and collective action on social media</i>	70
5.1.2 <i>Objective 3: To investigate how fan-led communication and behaviours indirectly influence non-fan Gen Z consumers’ brand perceptions, emotional responses, and purchase decisions</i>	71

5.2 Managerial Implications & Recommendations	74
5.2.1 <i>Preliminary Insight: Endorser Selection & Fan-Community Co-governance</i>	74
5.2.2 <i>Lens 1: Reach & Amplification</i>	75
5.2.3 <i>Lens 2: Perception & Framing</i>	75
5.2.3 <i>Lens 3: Behaviour & Boundaries</i>	76
5.3 Final conclusions.....	77
5.3.1 <i>Originality and contribution to scholarship</i>	77
5.3.2 <i>Limitations and areas for further research</i>	78
5.4 Overall Project Summary	82
<i>Reference list</i>	84
APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL FORM.....	91
APPENDIX 2: INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT SIGNED CONSENT FORMS.....	94
Appendix 3: Netnography and interview	118
Appendix 3.1: Netnography	118
Appendix 3.2: interview transcript and initial code	144
Appendix 3.3: Coding Audit Trail (Interviews): Initial Codes → Small Codes → Sub-themes → Themes	185
APPENDIX 4: GENERATIVE AI MAPPING	197

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Schematic of the Two-Step Flow Model of Influence (Watts and Dodds, 2007).....	15
Figure 2: Schematic of Network Model of Influence (Watts and Dodds, 2007)	16
Figure 3: Research Onion: Adapted from Saunders et. al, 2023	25
Figure 4: Analytical framework of Chapter 4-Three lenses and six themes operationalising the RQ.....	50
Figure 5: Lens 1 and themes 1&2	50
Figure 6: Theme 1 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms	51
Figure 7: Theme 2 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms	54
Figure 8: Lens 2 and themes 3&4	56
Figure 9: Theme 3 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms	57
Figure 10: Theme 4 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms	59
Figure 11: Lens 3 and themes 5&6	61
Figure 12:Theme 5 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms	62
Figure 13: Theme 6 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms	65

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Philosophical Assumptions and Their Application to This Study.....	26
Table 2: Integrated Research Approach & Strategy: Phases, Methods, Theoretical Anchors, and Outputs.....	29
Table 3: Netnography Observation Matrix for Fan–Non-Fan Interactions in Luxury Fashion Context	32
Table 4: Semi-structure Narrative interview	41
Table 5: Interview Participant Profile: Gender, Age, City Tier, Occupation	42
Table 6: Trustworthiness Criteria and Application	45
Table 7: Methodological Limitations and Mitigation Strategies by Research Phase	46
Table 8: How the Findings Answer the Research Questions.....	68
Table 9: Study limitations and boundaries	79
Table 10: Areas for further research (actionable designs).....	81

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

The rapid development of social media platforms has driven the evolution of fan behavior from mere emotional expression to more organized and influential marketing practices, gradually giving rise to a new model of relationship marketing based on emotional bonds (Dan, Wang and Chen, 2023). Fans not only establish deep emotional connections with idols or brands but also demonstrate strong self-organizing abilities and mobilization power on social media, becoming a key driving force in brand communication and consumer mobilization (Moreno-Gavara and Jiménez-Zarco, 2016).

Against this backdrop, fandom is regarded as a hybrid and fluid socio-cultural practice that integrates emotional investment, social interaction, and self-expression (Duffett, 2013). This cultural phenomenon typically revolves around specific objects of interest, such as media texts, idol celebrities, musical works, and even commercial brands. Based on these objects, fans collectively construct meaning systems, develop identity recognition, and engage in continuous emotional expression and interactive practices (Jenkins, 1992; Jenkins, 2006; Linden & Linden, 2018).

Fans are groups who demonstrate a high level of emotional investment in a particular cultural object and actively participate in its reproduction. They are not only consumers of content but also engage in the construction of cultural discourse through creation, organization, and dissemination (Duffett, 2013; Hellekson, 2015). With the rise of social media, such participation has become more visible and frequent, turning fans into active participants and shapers of digital culture (Wang, 2020). They voluntarily express emotions, share experiences, and provide evaluations related to idols, products, and brands (Moreno-Gavara and Jiménez-Zarco, 2016). In recent years, fans have also been regarded as “digital labour,” generating online buzz and manipulating algorithmic dissemination mechanisms to create vast amounts of informal yet highly influential cultural and economic value for idols or brands (Linden & Linden, 2018; Wang, 2020). In contrast, non-fans are typically defined as individuals who do not directly engage in fan communities but may be indirectly influenced by the dissemination of fan-generated content often referred to as “passersby audiences” or peripheral consumers (Duffett, 2013).

In China, fan culture is highly organized. Traditional idol fans often initiate collective actions on social media platforms, such as controlling comments, boosting rankings, providing support, or initiating boycotts to influence the public image and career trajectory of their idols (Cui & Wu, 2024; Wang, 2020). Although existing studies acknowledge the positive role of fans in idol endorsement and brand trust (Hung, 2020; Wang, 2020; Cui & Wu, 2024), such research tends to focus on fans' direct supportive behaviors toward brands, while relatively overlooking how the dissemination mechanisms of fan content on social media indirectly influence non-fan groups' brand perception and consumption judgment. Meanwhile, as content creators, fans continuously generate user-generated content (UGC) about brands through social media. While this promotes brand exposure, it also subtly affects the emotions and attitudes of peripheral users. As Duke (2023) pointed out, UGC builds digital communities around shared interests and creates a strong sense of belonging and participatory atmosphere, such that non-fan users, through frequent exposure to such content, may be drawn into collective emotions and thereby develop either identification with or bias against the brand. Therefore, fan-generated content can be seen as a special form of UGC, characterized by strong emotional drive and community-based dissemination power. It constitutes an informal yet highly influential brand communication pathway that can break through original social boundaries and indirectly shape non-fan consumers' initial impressions and consumption tendencies toward the brand.

In the context of social media, fans are no longer passive recipients of brand communication but are increasingly becoming co-constructors of meaning. Their participation, reproduction, and collective actions have gradually expanded the boundaries of brand communication (Li, Larimo and Leonidou, 2021). As Guschwan (2012) noted, fans are not only loyal consumers of brand ambassadors but also disseminators of the brand. Against this backdrop, the process of brand perception formation has become more diverse, dynamic, and community-driven. Consumers' perception of brands is no longer entirely based on the brand's own information output but is shaped by the combined influence of fan culture and user-generated content within a complex social context. It is precisely within this informal communication network that non-fan consumers may unconsciously receive, interpret, and even accept brand imagery constructed by fans. This phenomenon is the core issue that this study aims to address.

1.2 Rationale

This research is significant as it focuses on Chinese Generation Z non-fan consumers, who, despite lacking strong emotional attachments to idols or brands, act as a "spillover audience." Their responses to fan-generated content can more accurately reflect a brand's broader

reputation and potential influence beyond the fan community. Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2009), though accounting for less than 17% of China's population due to the one-child policy, has grown up during a period of rapid economic growth and demonstrates remarkable potential in driving the country's consumer market transformation (Statista, 2023). As typical "digital natives," they spend more time online than the global average, with a strong preference for platforms such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Bilibili that emphasize short videos, visual notes, and interactive commenting (McKinsey & Company, 2024). Their consumption decisions extend beyond product functionality and are strongly shaped by emotional resonance and social recognition. Brand perceptions are influenced by online atmospheres and peer interactions, and positive digital engagement with brands can foster favorable impressions, trust, and loyalty (Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos, 2025).

In 2024, China's luxury market experienced a sharp decline, contracting by around 18–20% (Lannes, Xing and Gu, 2025), with most brands affected. This downturn was primarily driven by cautious spending under economic uncertainty; even the typically resilient VICs (Very Important Customers) shifted towards more conservative wealth diversification strategies (Lannes, Xing and Gu, 2025). At the same time, social media has increasingly become a core channel for luxury brands to engage with consumers (Li, 2024). Against this backdrop, brands have sought to create a sense of scarcity and construct narratives, leveraging fan communities and UGC to generate buzz and visual symbols. However, such reliance also carries risks, fan discourse may spiral out of control during dissemination, provoking backlash and causing perceptual distortions or emotional polarization among non-fan groups. In a fast-moving digital environment, these risks become even more complex and unpredictable. Therefore, in the Chinese Gen Z market, luxury brands face both opportunities to achieve youth-oriented and segmented marketing through social media, and challenges of mitigating the distortions and polarization that may result from fan discourse spillover.

In China, fan culture has evolved into a highly institutionalized social phenomenon, integrating emotional mobilization, collective action, and commercial connectivity. Research indicates that this cultural system plays a key role not only in the idol industry but also demonstrates increasingly close interaction between its structured community practices and brand communication (Dan, Wang & Chen, 2023). Especially within the realm of social media, fans' support campaigns, comment manipulation, and content reproduction frequently enter the public sphere and exert broad influence on external audiences. As Dan, Wang, and Chen (2023) point out, Chinese fan groups are typically highly visible in the public domain of social media, particularly through large-scale support campaigns that often spark discussions or even controversy among outsiders. This suggests that even if Gen Z non-fans do not actively

participate in fan activities, they may still passively encounter fan-generated content on social platforms and consequently experience emotional reactions such as social comparison, identification, or aversion. At the same time, social platforms have provided fans with unprecedented space for participation, enabling them to transform from recipients of brand content into creators, community mobilizers, and co-constructors of brand meaning (Wang, 2020; Moreno-Gavara & Jiménez-Zarco, 2016). Existing research shows that celebrity endorsement and social interaction have significant appeal for young consumers, with fans often acting as “amplifiers” of brands, promoting brand exposure and enhancing consumer loyalty (Cui & Wu, 2024; Hung, 2020). However, such research mainly focuses on fans’ direct contributions to brands, paying less attention to how these behaviors influence non-fan groups’ brand perceptions and consumption judgments through content dissemination. In fact, the everyday posts, edited videos, interactive comments, and product recommendations shared by fans constitute a key UGC pathway in brand communication. Duke (2023) emphasizes that UGC has a strong emotional contagion in constructing digital belonging and community atmosphere. Non-fans, after repeated exposure to such content, may become immersed in the emotionally charged community context and develop emotional identification with or resistance to the brand.

Therefore, this study attempts to approach the issue from the perspective of “fan culture as an informal force of brand communication,” focusing on how the behaviors of Chinese Gen Z fan communities on social media indirectly influence non-fan consumers’ perceptions of and purchase paths toward luxury brands. Differing from previous research that views fans as “target users” or “endorsement boosters,” this paper places the audience response mechanisms of non-fans at its core, exploring how brands can expand their potential influence through “layered dissemination.” This not only responds to the academic gap concerning “out-of-circle dissemination mechanisms” but also offers theoretical insights for luxury brands to develop more precise community management and emotional risk avoidance strategies. Existing research focuses more on the direct relationship between “fans and brands” and endorsement effects, while lacking systematic discussion on how fan-generated content in the luxury fashion context indirectly influences Chinese Generation Z non-fans through social media dissemination. This study takes this as the entry point, addressing the theoretical gap and managerial need regarding the “indirect influence path”.

1.3 Aim and Objectives & Research Question

1.3.1 Aim

This study aims to analyse how Chinese fan communities operate as an informal form of brand power by shaping non-fan Gen Z consumers' brand perception and influencing their purchase decisions through social media in the luxury fashion context.

1.3.2 Objectives

Objective 1: To critically review the literature on fandom, consumer-based brand perception, Gen Z consumer behaviour, and social media-driven brand communication in the luxury fashion sector.

Objective 2: To analyse how Chinese fan communities co-create and disseminate brand meaning through user-generated content, emotional labour, and collective action on social media.

Objective 3: To investigate how fan-led communication and behaviours indirectly influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' brand perceptions, emotional responses, and purchase decisions.

Objective 4: To identify the opportunities and challenges for luxury brands in leveraging fan communities as informal brand communicators.

Objective 5: To provide strategic recommendations for effectively engage with fan-driven content to manage brand image and influence broader consumer decision-making.

1.3.3 Research Question

How do Chinese fan communities indirectly influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' brand perception and purchase decisions in the luxury fashion sector through social media-driven content and practices?

1.4 Theoretical and Managerial Contributions

1.4.1 Theoretical contribution

This study approaches the topic from the perspective of "how fan behavior functions as an informal force of brand communication," aiming to extend the applicable boundaries of existing brand communication and consumer behavior theories. First, it responds to the recent shift in academic paradigms regarding the "fan-brand relationship," moving from a focus on fans'

loyal support of idols or brands to an exploration of their role as “secondary disseminators” within a broader communication ecology. By integrating Cialdini et al. (1999) theory of social identification and Lemon and Verhoef (2016) customer journey model, this study constructs an indirect influence pathway linking fan behavior, non-fan perception, and brand attitude, thus providing a theoretical framework for understanding how community behavior penetrates peripheral consumers. Second, by adopting the perspective of non-fans, this study emphasizes the agency and complexity of “peripheral groups” in the construction of brand perception.

1.4.2 Managerial contributions

At the managerial level, this study offers insights for luxury brands in formulating communication strategies within the Gen Z social media environment. As fan culture gains increasing influence, brand communication is no longer solely dominated by official content; community generated UGC, reposts, and comments as forms of “secondary dissemination” are creating new consumer touchpoints. Therefore, brands need to recognize the potential value of fan communities as “cognitive intermediaries,” optimize collaboration mechanisms with fans, and stimulate emotionally resonant content with greater communicative power to influence a broader base of potential consumers. Furthermore, the study reveals that Gen Z non-fans often form their initial impressions of a brand from the interactive atmosphere on social media rather than the brand itself. Thus, brands should pay attention to the management and guidance of “fan discourse power” in the social context, and strategically employ mechanisms of “social identification” and “emotional resonance” to enable the extension and adaptation of brand meanings across different communities. Finally, this study also suggests that endorser evaluation should be extended beyond the individual to include the structure of the endorser’s fan community and its co-governance with the brand.

1.5 Overview of The Research Design

This study follows the Research Onion framework proposed by Saunders et al. (2019, 2023), unfolding each layer in line with the research objectives. At the philosophical level, the study adopts interpretivism, which emphasizes understanding the subjective construction of meaning within social phenomena. In terms of research approach, it primarily employs inductive reasoning to explore potential mechanisms and refine theoretical insights based on observed data. Regarding methodological choice, a multi-method qualitative design is adopted, combining netnography and semi-structured narrative interviews. The research strategy is divided into two stages: the first stage applies netnography to observe and code

typical fan-generated content (UGC) on platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu, identifying community logic and content characteristics; the second stage involves conducting semi-structured narrative interviews with 8 Chinese Generation Z non-fans to investigate how they encounter fan content in social media environments, their emotional responses, and subsequent changes in brand attitudes. In terms of time horizon, the study adopts a cross-sectional design with rolling data collection to capture the dynamic nature of social media content. Finally, for techniques and procedures, the data will be analysed using thematic analysis, with coding and comparison across both types of data.

1.6 Overview of the Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the research background, research aims and significance, and defines the research questions and objectives. Chapter Two presents a literature review, systematically reviewing studies in the fields of fan culture, UGC dissemination, brand communication pathways, and Gen Z consumer behavior, to clarify the theoretical foundation and research positioning. Chapter Three explains the research methodology, including sample selection, data collection, and analysis methods. Chapter Four provides data analysis and discussion, summarizing the mechanisms through which fan behavior influences non-fans, based on case studies and interview data, and engages with relevant theories. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the research findings, offers theoretical and managerial implications, reflects on the study's limitations, and outlines directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

With the rapid development of social media and digital culture, fan communities have increasingly become key nodes in brand communication networks. Emerging consumer groups, represented by Generation Z, have gradually moved away from traditional linear communication models in their brand perception paths, relying more on informational cues and emotional atmospheres generated by others on social platforms. In this context, fan culture is no longer merely a self-entertaining activity of loyal consumers but has gradually evolved into an important informal force influencing the brand judgments of peripheral users. This chapter will explore the literature surrounding the question of how fan culture indirectly influences non-fans' brand perception, with a particular focus on community driven UGC, the role of fans as secondary disseminators, and the mechanisms of influence within social identification and the customer journey, thereby providing a theoretical foundation for the subsequent empirical analysis.

This chapter will be developed around four theoretical pillars. First, participatory culture and UGC (user generated content) and digital labour, explaining how fan content becomes a usable communication asset. Second, the two-step flow of communication versus network influence models, comparing the diffusion paths of “top opinion leaders” and “micro-influence groups”. Third, social proof, illustrating how social cues shape the initial judgment of non-fans. Fourth, the customer journey model, mapping fan influence onto the timing and context of informal touchpoints, with a focus on the specific context of Chinese Generation Z and luxury fashion.

2.2 Community-Driven user generated content (UGC) and Fan Digital Labour

With the development of Web 2.0, the internet—characterized by rich interactive content and high sociability—has rapidly become a central medium for contemporary users to communicate, consume, and generate information. Web 2.0 not only facilitated the rise of social platforms but also greatly expanded the channels for the creation and dissemination of user-generated content (UGC: refers to non-paid content such as text, images, short videos, comments, and reposts that is created and publicly distributed by consumers rather than by brands. Its key features lie in spontaneity, visibility, and diffusibility.), offering millions of ordinary users the possibility to produce and distribute content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

In this context, fans are no longer a passive consumer group but active “co-creators” of content. Jenkins (1992), in his seminal work *Textual Poachers*, introduced the concept of “Participatory Culture,” emphasizing that fans actively “poach” mainstream cultural resources by adapting, re-creating, criticizing, and distributing them, thereby generating culturally meaningful secondary texts. He further pointed out in *Convergence Culture* (2006) that with the intensification of media convergence, such fan participation has not only been noticed by brands but also incorporated into mainstream communication mechanisms, forming a “prosumer” identity that merges consumer and producer roles. However, Jenkins’ analysis mainly focused on Western media and entertainment fandom, while little attention was paid to how such participatory practices extend into luxury brand contexts or how they might indirectly affect non-fan consumers.

Building on this, Fiske’s (1992, p.20) concept of “textual productivity” further reveals fans’ agency and creative capacity in cultural dissemination. He argued that fans deeply engage with and rewrite cultural products through editing, publishing, commenting, reposting, and re-creating. The boundaries of this cultural production have become increasingly blurred with the evolution of social platforms and have gradually transformed into a form of “digital labour” that can be strategically utilized by platforms and brands (Hills, 2013). Yet, while scholars such as Fiske and Hills highlight fans’ creative productivity and their exploitation within platform capitalism, there is still limited exploration of how this “digital labour” operates in the high-end luxury fashion industry, where brand value is closely tied to exclusivity and symbolic capital.

In the luxury fashion industry, such fan-generated content has unique market value. First, the tone, scarcity, and symbolic characteristics of luxury brands determine that fan-generated content often presents higher visual aesthetics and emotional intensity (such as exquisite unboxing, styling with limited-edition items, and interpretations of brand historical anecdotes), which can align with and amplify Chinese Generation Z’s pursuit of “sense of social circle” and “identity symbols” (Li, 2023). Second, compared with fast-moving consumer goods or affordable fashion, the purchase frequency of luxury goods is lower, and fan-generated content plays a more important role in emotional guidance and value shaping in the long-term cultivation of brand mindshare.

In other words, within the context of contemporary platform capitalism, fan “participation” carries not only cultural and creative value but also becomes a component of brand marketing and algorithmic traffic mechanisms. As Wang (2020) pointed out, content generated by fans through formats such as bullet comments, subtitle groups, edited videos, ranking campaigns, and comment manipulation—though originating from emotional investment and interest-driven

motives—has invisibly created substantial data value and dissemination benefits for brands and platforms. These interest-based UGC practices have been systematically embedded in capitalist logic, becoming vital tools for driving advertising revenue, enhancing user retention, and expanding markets.

It is worth noting that Wu, Jiang and Wang (2025) also emphasize the remarkable sustainability of this fan labour. Even when fan communities dissolve or idol popularity fades, fans' emotional investment and enthusiasm for digital creation persist. This “unpaid labour” does not cease with the disbandment of fan groups; rather, it becomes an enduring emotional and content resource for brands and platforms, continuing to generate commercial and communicative value. Nevertheless, Wang's work primarily examines idol and entertainment industries; the implications of such practices for luxury fashion remain under-researched, particularly in terms of how fan-driven visibility may spill over to shape non-fans' brand judgments.

On the other hand, Keen (2007) emphasizes the “amateurism supremacy” risk brought by Web 2.0. He points out that the proliferation of UGC not only blurs the authenticity of information but also weakens the professional standards and authoritative mechanisms of traditional media. On the one hand, fan-produced content demonstrates extremely high engagement and emotional depth, which can endow luxury brands with a sense of authenticity and community; on the other hand, such content may also fall into “information noise” and a “trust crisis” due to the lack of professional review and standardized production, especially in the high-end market where it is more likely to trigger controversies over “counterfeit product displays” and “dilution of brand tone” (Zhou, 2024). Yet, current discussions on UGC authenticity risks rarely address the specific dynamics of luxury brands, where consumer expectations of exclusivity and prestige make the tension between amateur production and brand control particularly acute.

In summary, fan UGC demonstrates the cultural vitality of participation under the Web 2.0 environment, while also revealing the risks of creative alienation under the logic of platform capitalism. More importantly, this form of community-mediated content production not only influences the internal interaction structure of fan circles but, to a greater extent, reshapes the brand perception paths and consumer emotions of non-fans. Although fan UGC behaviors are often driven by interest and self-expression, from the perspectives of platforms and brands, these creations have become communication assets that can be utilized (Wang, 2020). Such content often forms “community consensus” and emotional mobilization through social platforms, thereby affecting non-fan users. For example, edited videos, comment manipulation

rhetoric, or popular bullet comments not only serve internal fan circle interaction but also indirectly shape the visibility and trustworthiness of brand images among broader user groups (Hills, 2013). Therefore, although fan labor carries “informal” characteristics, it has become a communicative lever through which brands influence public perception in the context of Web 2.0.

2.3 Informal Brand Communication on social media: How Fans as Secondary Spreaders Shape Non-Fans’ Brand Perceptions

With the widespread popularity of social media and the refinement of platform algorithms, brand communication is undergoing a structural transformation. The traditional linear and one-way communication model dominated by advertisers is being replaced by a networked communication form, in which information is horizontally disseminated through multiple nodes and dominated by ordinary users. Users are no longer passive recipients of information but have become key intermediaries in the negotiation and dissemination of brand meanings through content re-creation, interaction, and sharing. Within the context of fan culture, this trend is particularly prominent fans, through the production of UGC, interactive commenting, and community management, have become important drivers of the informal diffusion of brand perception across broader social circles. Especially for Chinese Generation Z who have grown up in the environment of mobile internet and social media, their mode of information reception is inherently decentralized and relies more on indirect content from peers or communities, thereby further amplifying the communication role of fan groups.

Based on this, the paper further focuses on the dual role of fans as “communication actors” and “digital labourers,” exploring how they indirectly influence non-fan consumers through social media. In the brand communication path, fans are often regarded as “secondary spreaders,” a role that can be theoretically explained through the “Two-Step Flow of Communication” model proposed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1957). However, this model emphasizes top-down authority and influence of opinion leaders, which, under the current decentralized communication mechanisms reinforced by platform algorithms, can no longer fully capture how fan communities influence non-fans’ brand judgment and consumption intentions through structural coordination. Moreover, while Katz and Lazarsfeld’s work was foundational in highlighting intermediaries in communication, it largely overlooked decentralized online communities and did not account for the dynamics of fan cultures or their indirect impact on non-fan consumers in markets such as luxury fashion. Therefore, this study introduces the Network Model of Influence (Watts and Dodds, 2007) to re-examine the informal dissemination paths and mechanisms of brand information within the context of fan culture.

Compared to the linear influence of elite nodes emphasized in the “Two-Step Flow of Communication” model, the network model of diffusion proposed by Watts and Dodds (2007) places greater emphasis on the potential agency of “ordinary individuals” in large-scale dissemination. They point out that in social networks, the spread of information often does not rely on a few key opinion leaders, but instead depends on the coordinated forwarding and structural connections of numerous ordinary nodes, thereby forming a broad and rapid “cascade effect.” In fan communities, this structure is particularly typical many non-central but active fans build stable dissemination chains through daily interaction and emotional bonds, allowing brand information to unintentionally permeate into non-fan groups. This bottom-up flow of information reflects three key characteristics: decentralization, emotional drive, and relational networks—and provides a more explanatory theoretical framework for understanding how fans influence non-fan consumers. However, such a decentralized path may also bring the risk of “overexposure”, especially under the positioning of luxury brands that emphasize scarcity and exclusivity, where the excessive dissemination of information may weaken their uniqueness. Yet, while Watts and Dodds (2007) stress the importance of “ordinary individuals” in diffusion, their model does not specifically consider the symbolic nature of luxury brands or how non-fans, as unintended audiences, interpret and react to fan-driven brand messages.

The “Two-Step Flow of Communication” theory proposed by Katz (1957) emphasizes that the information and influence of mass media do not act directly on the general audience but are first channeled through a group of “opinion leaders.” These opinion leaders are usually individuals with frequent media exposure and strong information interpretation capabilities. After receiving media content, they filter and reprocess it based on their own understanding and transmit the information to surrounding audience groups through everyday interpersonal interactions. In other words, most people do not obtain information directly from the media itself but form their understanding and judgment of information through communication with others. Katz (1957) further emphasizes that the social network structures in which individuals are embedded, such as families, friends, professional or religious organizations often exert a more profound influence on their attitudes and decisions than the media itself. Therefore, this theory posed an important critique of early mass communication models that viewed audiences as “passive receivers” and highlighted the key role of “intermediaries” within social relationships. In the context of Chinese Generation Z consumers, such an “intermediary” role is often undertaken by peers, members of interest communities, or highly interactive users within virtual social circles, rather than traditional opinion leaders in the conventional sense.

In the social media context discussed in this study, the “Two-Step Flow of Communication” theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how fans influence non-fan consumers. When applied to the social media environment, this theory allows fans to be viewed as “secondary spreaders” or “intermediary nodes.” They are not only active recipients of brand content, but also play the role of transmitting brand information to broader non-fan circles through forms such as content re-creation, emotional expression, and interactive dissemination. Especially in brand marketing, fans use UGC methods such as product recommendation posts, edited videos, and promotional content to re-encode brand meanings, enabling brand narratives originally targeted at specific audiences to be encountered and accepted by a wider range of Gen Z consumers. Compared with the “one-way influence” dominated by opinion leaders in the traditional media environment, this communication path is more diverse and interactive, emphasizing the “social intermediary function” of fans in the diffusion of brand perception.

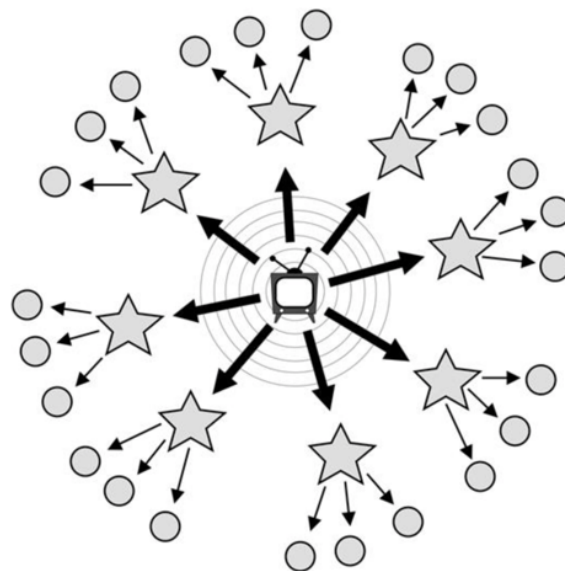


Figure 1: Schematic of the Two-Step Flow Model of Influence (Watts and Dodds, 2007)

However, Watts and Dodds (2007) presented a systematic critique of the “influential hypothesis,” arguing that the theory oversimplifies the pathways and processes of information dissemination within social networks. They emphasized that information diffusion does not rely on a few highly influential “super-spreaders,” but rather originates from the interactions among many “easily influenced ordinary individuals” in the network which a phenomenon referred to as “critical mass” (Watts and Dodds, 2007). Through computer simulations of interpersonal transmission mechanisms, their study found that large-scale information cascade effects are

often the result of coordinated actions among ordinary nodes that are not centrally located in the structure but are interconnected with one another (Watts and Dodds, 2007).

This finding challenges the traditional communication theories' overreliance on the role of opinion leaders and underscores the crucial roles of decentralization, horizontal interaction, and cross-community diffusion in the environment of social platforms. Compared to the one-way influence model that focuses on top-tier KOLs, this model is more suitable for explaining how "micro-influencer groups" on platforms drive the widespread dissemination of brand information through structural collaboration and emotional resonance. For this study, the theory provides important insights into how fan groups influence non-fan consumers, indicating that active yet non-prominent fan collectives may, through UGC and community interaction, play a structurally advantageous role in brand perception and the formation of purchase intentions.

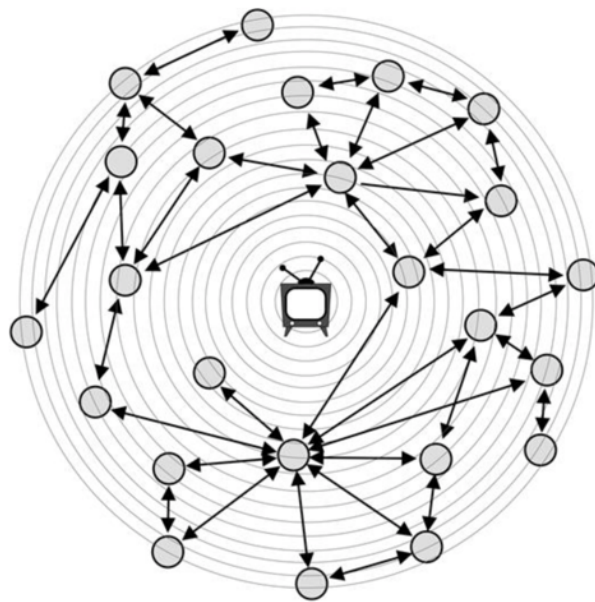


Figure 2: Schematic of Network Model of Influence (Watts and Dodds, 2007)

Further validation of the network diffusion model proposed by Watts and Dodds (2007) can be seen in the empirical study of the German Twittersphere by Münch et al. (2021). By improving the "rank degree" algorithm to sample the Twitter follow network without relying on full API data access they identified the users with the most "structural influence" on the platform. The study found that this "influencer backbone" was not composed entirely of top-tier accounts or opinion leaders, but rather consisted of multiple clusters of mid-level influential nodes, such as political commentators, cultural communities, and gamers. These users possessed high connectivity within their local communities and maintained topic-based networks through

stable and frequent interactions, enabling brands or issues to diffuse horizontally across multiple social circles. This finding not only confirms the hypotheses of “critical mass” and “coordinated diffusion” proposed by Watts and Dodds (2007) but also reveals the unique value of “micro-influencer groups” on social platforms in terms of connection, reach, and penetration. Nevertheless, Münch et al. (2021) focus on political and cultural discourses in the German Twittersphere, leaving open the question of how similar diffusion mechanisms may operate within Chinese social media ecosystems, particularly in fan cultures tied to luxury consumption.

For this study, fan groups embody precisely this type of diffusion characteristic, though not opinion leaders, they serve as key diffusion nodes within the network structure. Through UGC, recommendation posts, and social interactions, they become crucial bridges for the flow of brand discourse among non-fans. Therefore, this research not only expands the methodological possibilities of social network sampling but also theoretically reinforces the decentralized, community-driven diffusion mechanism, providing an empirical foundation for the “fan influence on non-fans” phenomenon addressed in this study.

2.4 Social Proof and Customer Journey: How Fan Behavior Shapes Non-Fans’ Brand Response

2.4.1 Introduction: From Fan Behavior to Brand Influence

As Duke (2023) pointed out, fan-generated content often breaks through original community boundaries and enters a broader social network environment, subtly influencing peripheral users’ initial perceptions of a brand. This suggests that non-fans’ impressions of a brand may not originate from the brand’s own communication but are instead constructed by content driven by fan communities. This section will draw on the principle of social proof by Cialdini et al. (1999) and the customer journey model by Lemon & Verhoef (2016) to explore how fan behavior, as a form of “social cue,” infiltrates non-fans’ brand contact processes and judgment paths, constructing a brand experience in both emotional and cognitive terms. This analysis not only focuses on the communication mechanism itself but also considers the characteristic of Chinese Generation Z consumers being more susceptible to group cues under the background of collectivist culture (Peredy et al., 2024). However, existing research rarely centers on Chinese Gen Z non-fans within the luxury fashion context; the spillover of fan-driven cues across the non-fan customer journey remains under-examined, particularly regarding how informal touchpoints prime brand evaluations before any brand-controlled exposure.

2.4.2 Cialdini's Principle of Social Proof in the Fan Context

In their classic theory of social influence, Cialdini et al. (1999) proposed the Principle of Social Proof, pointing out that when individuals are in situations of uncertainty, information asymmetry, or lack of experience, they tend to use others' behaviors as a basis for judging "what ought to be done." Social proof is not only a heuristic for judgment but also a psychological mechanism in which "others serve as reference" in specific contexts. Cialdini emphasized that individuals are more inclined to believe that "what most people choose is reasonable," especially in unfamiliar consumption domains or when faced with an abundance of choices. In luxury consumption decision-making, this psychology is particularly prominent because brand value is often reflected through social meaning and symbolic consumption rather than purely functional needs (Wang, 2022). Yet, most applications of social proof focus on mass-market categories or Western settings, how social proof operates among Chinese Gen Z non-fans evaluating luxury brands where scarcity and status symbolism are central remains insufficiently theorized.

In the context of social media, this mechanism is further amplified—especially when users have not yet formed a clear brand attitude. The interactive behaviors of others, such as the number of likes, shares, and the popularity of comments, are often regarded as valuable social reference cues (Muchnik, Aral and Taylor, 2013). In fan culture, this phenomenon is particularly evident: fans express their loyalty and identification with a brand by posting recommendation notes, edited videos, and comment manipulation rhetoric, creating a strong emotional atmosphere. When non-fan users are frequently exposed to such UGC content, they may develop the social-psychological response of "everyone seems to like it" or "this must be good." As Cialdini et al. (1999) pointed out in their cross-cultural study, the effect of social proof is more pronounced in collectivist cultures, where group behavior is more frequently used as a reference for judgment. For China's Gen Z, who exhibit a strong tendency toward social comparison, such social cues of "most people are using it" may be more persuasive than official brand promotions. However, luxury fashion brands also face risks when leveraging the social proof effect: when fans' recommendation content is overly concentrated on a single popular item, it may lead to a "monolithic" brand image and even trigger aesthetic fatigue or a counter-reaction among non-fans. This "homogenized exposure" driven by social proof, although boosting brand popularity in the short term, may weaken the brand's long-term scarcity and cultural depth. Notably, platform-metric cues (likes, reposts, comment ranking) have been primarily studied on Western platforms; evidence on Weibo/Xiaohongshu/Douyin ecosystems and how their algorithmic surfacing alters non-fans' luxury judgments are still limited.

On the other hand, some scholars have questioned the applicability and neutral value of “social proof.” Sunstein (2009) pointed out that phenomena such as “group polarization” and “conformity bias” are widespread on digital platforms. Users are more likely to adopt a viewpoint by imitation rather than judgment after seeing others like or share it, leading to cognitive bias and the formation of an “information echo chamber.” Boyd (2014) further emphasized that Gen Z users in particular are not passive recipients of content on social platforms; they possess a certain level of media literacy and critical thinking skills, and may filter, critique, or reject UGC depending on the context. In luxury fashion consumption, such criticality is manifested in the rapid response to brand over-marketing or “PR crises”, such as questioning the quality issues of celebrity-endorsed items or boycotting brands involved in culturally insensitive behavior. Yet, boundary conditions that attenuate or reverse social proof among Chinese Gen Z non-fans—e.g., perceived inauthenticity of fan rhetoric, overexposure effects under scarcity positioning, or algorithmic amplification that triggers reactance—have not been systematically tested in luxury contexts.

In summary, the Principle of Social Proof offers a powerful theoretical tool for understanding how non-fans develop brand perceptions through fan behavior, especially within the context of Chinese social media. However, social proof is not a universally effective psychological mechanism, its function in actual communication processes is shaped by multiple factors, including the algorithmic environment, users’ cognitive capacities, and the cultural context. A critical understanding of this theory helps to grasp the indirect pathways more comprehensively through which fan behavior influences non-fans’ brand perception. For luxury fashion brands, how to stimulate the social proof effect while maintaining brand differentiation and a sense of scarcity will be a key balancing point in marketing strategy design. Addressing these gaps, the present study traces how fan cues operate as social proof across informal touchpoints and identifies when such cues enhance versus erode luxury brand value among Chinese Gen Z non-fans.

2.4.3 Mapping Fan Influence onto the Customer Journey

To gain a deeper understanding of how fan behavior indirectly influences non-fan consumers in brand communication, it is necessary to refer to the “Customer Journey” model proposed by Lemon and Verhoef (2016). This model suggests that in the process of forming a purchase decision, consumers typically go through three key stages: the pre-purchase stage, the purchase stage, and the post-purchase stage. Each stage includes multiple brand touchpoints and is accompanied by different emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses. Traditional

research has mostly focused on brand-controlled touchpoints, such as advertising, e-commerce interfaces, or customer service experiences. However, in the context of social media, fan-generated content has gradually become an “informal touchpoint,” influencing users at the early stages of the journey. Especially in the long decision-making cycle of luxury goods, these informal touchpoints subtly fulfill the function of emotional seeding. Nonetheless, few studies systematically map fan-mediated informal touchpoints shaping non-fans’ luxury evaluations across pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages, nor do they integrate these with culturally specific platform practices in China.

In the pre-purchase stage, non-fan users often encounter brand information for the first time through fan generated UGC. This content includes promotional posts on Weibo, product recommendation notes on Xiaohongshu, edited videos on Bilibili, or topic interactions—usually characterized by strong emotional tone and visual expressiveness, which can easily evoke emotional resonance or curiosity, thereby initiating preliminary attention to the brand. For example, Duke (2023) pointed out that UGC has a significant advantage in stimulating users’ sense of digital belonging and emotional engagement. Especially after frequent exposure to content related to a particular brand, non-fan users may become caught up in the “collective emotion,” thereby forming a brand connection through emotional identification. The key mechanism at this stage is not rational judgment but the “perceived social atmosphere”—that is, the psychological cue of “worth paying attention to” formed by the visible participation of many others in discussions or use of the brand. In luxury fashion, such an atmosphere is often reinforced through forms such as “celebrity-endorsed items” and “limited-edition countdowns”, thereby creating a sense of scarcity and urgency. Yet we still lack empirical mapping of which specific fan cues (e.g. comment herding) are most effective for non-fans at this early stage in luxury categories.

Entering the purchase stage, non-fans may develop action tendencies due to repeated earlier exposure, such as actively searching for the product, clicking on links, or adding it to their shopping cart. Although fan behavior does not directly lead to a purchase, the “positive emotion and trust tone” shaped within the cognitive process can be considered a triggering factor that drives users toward concrete actions. Kapitan and Silvera (2016) pointed out that when forming brand preferences, individuals often rely on “emotional bonds” rather than “functional rationality,” and fan UGC precisely plays the role of emotional shaping in this process. In luxury brands, such emotional shaping not only influences product selection but may also affect the purchase scenario (such as choosing an offline flagship store to obtain a more complete experience). However, the conversion pathways by which fan cues translate

into concrete behaviors among non-fans (search, store visit, trial) in luxury remain undertheorized, particularly under omnichannel settings.

In the post-purchase stage, even if non-fans do not become loyal users, fan communities may continue to influence their attitude updates through “usage display” or “secondary interaction.” Examples include sharing unboxing posts in Moments, trial experience videos, or reposting and commenting, which form a nonlinear “re-contact” path. This multi-stage, cross-node communication pathway indicates that fan behavior can function as an indirect driving factor in multiple stages of the customer journey in shaping brand perception. For luxury fashion, such post-purchase re-engagement also helps create a “sense of continued scarcity” and “sense of community belonging”. Even if users no longer make purchases, they may continue to act as passive disseminators of the brand’s word-of-mouth. Yet research seldom examines non-fans’ post-purchase identity work (e.g., occasional luxury buyers) and how fan communities sustain or erode their long-term brand meaning through ongoing exposure.

In summary, mapping fan influence onto the customer journey model helps reveal how non-fans’ brand perception is gradually constructed through “informal pathways.” Fan behavior not only triggers emotional interest in the early stages but also continuously intervenes in the brand journey of non-fans through emotional memory and social representation. This perspective expands the traditional journey framework centered on “brand-dominated touchpoints” and provides an emotional and community-based cognitive dimension for future research. In the luxury fashion market, this perspective is particularly useful for understanding the interaction between long decision-making cycles, scarcity marketing, and emotional social content, thereby extending the traditional journey understanding framework centered on “brand-led touchpoints”. Accordingly, this study addresses the above gaps by integrating social proof with a journey-based mapping of fan-mediated informal touchpoints among Chinese Gen Z non-fans in luxury, clarifying when and how fan cues help or harm brand judgment.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter synthesized scholarship on fan culture as digital labour, community-driven UGC and informal brand communication, the social proof mechanism, and the customer journey, showing that in social media environments fan behavior not only structures brand–fan interaction but also subtly shapes non-fans’ brand perceptions and intentions via decentralized networks and emotionally charged cues. However, existing research remains fragmented—often isolating communication paths or psychological mechanisms and rarely tracing the full

chain from information trigger to emotional appraisal to behavioral conversion; it is also predominantly Western-centric, with limited adaptation to China's platform architectures and collectivist culture that may amplify social proof and emotional contagion among Gen Z luxury consumers; moreover, empirical evidence on how ordinary fan collectives influence non-fans through UGC, interaction, and affective atmospheres is scarce. Addressing these gaps, the present study integrates communication-path models (Two-Step Flow; Network Model), socio-psychological mechanisms (social proof), emotional/relational processes (parasocial interaction; emotional contagion), and the customer-journey lens to construct a comprehensive "fan–non-fan brand influence chain" tailored to Chinese Gen Z in luxury. Practically, it guides how luxury brands can mobilize fan communities for indirect reach and attitude shaping while safeguarding scarcity, differentiation, and brand meaning within China's social media ecosystem, informing community-driven, cross-circle strategies and risk controls.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlined the study's methodological design, from philosophical assumptions to data collection and analysis, to demonstrate the rationale and applicability of the chosen methods. The research question asked how Chinese Gen Z fan communities, through social media participation and content production, indirectly shaped non-fans' engagement, purchase decisions, and brand judgement in the luxury sector, a phenomenon at the intersection of fan culture, luxury marketing and digital networks that involved multi-level meaning construction, emotional resonance, and symbolic consumption (Jenkins, 2006; Kapferer and Bastien, 2012; Duffett, 2013).

Contemporary social media was multi-nodal and decentralised; ordinary users, including fan groups, drove brand-meaning negotiation (Watts & Dodds, 2007; Münch et al., 2021). In China, Gen Z were both core participants in digital culture and a rising force in luxury consumption (McKinsey, 2021). Methodologically, capturing fan culture's indirect effects on non-fans therefore required attention to cultural complexity and subjective experience (Bryman, 2016; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011).

Guided by the Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2023), the design proceeded from philosophical stance to specific strategies. The study adopted interpretivism to understand individual meaning-making within socio-cultural contexts and acknowledged the researcher's axiology (Geertz, 1973). Reasoning was inductive, aiming to generate concepts from empirical data, which was well suited to theory gaps, complex phenomena and context dependence (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A multi-method qualitative design combined netnography and narrative inquiry. Netnography (Kozinets, 2015) examined naturally occurring fan UGC and interaction patterns on platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu to capture community-driven brand communication at a macro level. Narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) employed semi-structured interviews to explore Chinese Gen Z non-fans' emotional responses, brand impressions and consumption tendencies after exposure to such UGC, revealing micro-level meaning-making. The study adopted a cross-sectional time horizon and collected and analysed data within a defined window. This reflected the rapid evolution of social media discourse and brand communication and enabled comparison of community dynamics across different time points (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2023).

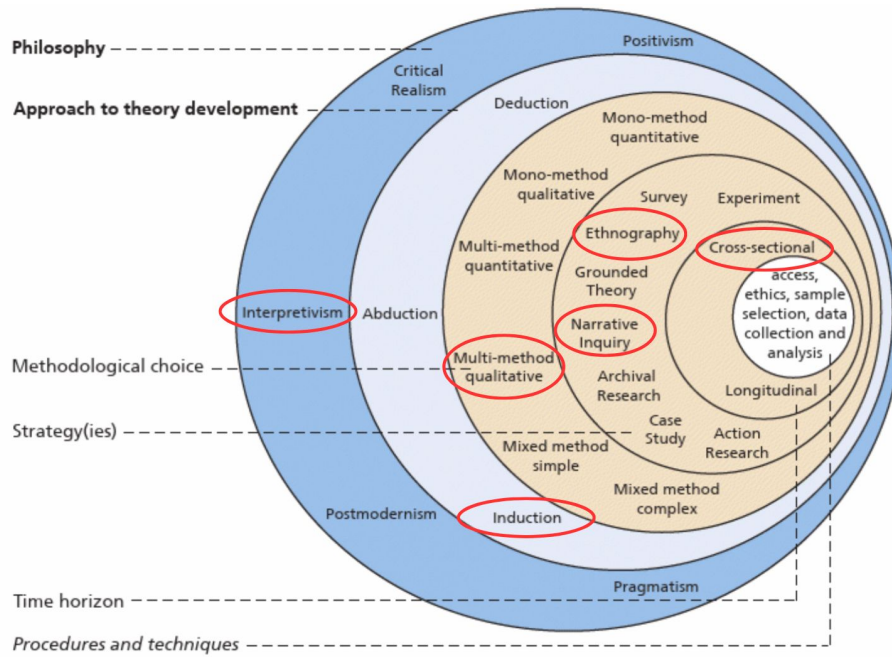


Figure 3: Research Onion: Adapted from Saunders et. al, 2023

3.2 Philosophical Context

3.2.1 Research Philosophy: Assumptions and Their Operationalisation in This Study

This section aimed to outline the key philosophical assumptions on which this study was based, including ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, and to explain their specific application in the research design. These assumptions together formed the philosophical foundation of the research and directly influenced the way data were collected, analysed, and interpreted (Saunders et al., 2023).

Perspective	Application For This Study
Ontology	This study held that the perceptions of Chinese Gen Z non-fans towards luxury brands were diverse and dependent on specific socio-cultural contexts, and that there was no single “objective” truth, but rather a social reality that was continuously constructed through social interactions.
Epistemology	The study emphasised understanding the process of meaning construction behind brand judgement, emotional reactions, and contexts through interaction between the researcher and the interviewees. Therefore, qualitative methods (netnography +

	narrative inquiry) were used to capture subjective experiences and cultural symbols.
Axiology	It was acknowledged that the researcher's values and past experiences in fan culture and brand communication research might have influenced interpretation; therefore, reflexivity and transparency were maintained throughout the research process.
Methodology	A multi-method design was adopted: first, netnography was used to observe fan-generated content (UGC) and interaction patterns on social media; second, narrative inquiry was employed to explore in depth the perceptions and reactions of non-fans through interviews.

Table 1: Philosophical Assumptions and Their Application to This Study

These assumptions were interrelated and jointly provided the study's methodological foundation. Ontologically, brand perception was treated as socially constructed rather than objective and fixed, which underpinned an interpretivist epistemology (Geertz, 1973). Epistemologically, the study sought to understand meaning construction through interaction and contextual analysis, thus privileging qualitative approaches able to capture cultural contexts and individual experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Axiologically, the researcher's position, experience, and values were recognised as shaping interpretation; reflexive practice was therefore used to enhance credibility (Finlay, 2002). Methodologically, these stances were operationalised through a multi-method qualitative design that combined netnography and narrative interviews: netnography examined community UGC and interaction patterns, and narrative interviews probed non-fans' perceptions and reactions, thereby capturing macro- and micro-level dynamics (Kozinets, 2015; Riessman, 2008). This sequence, from reality (ontology) to knowing (epistemology), to values (axiology), and to method (methodology), ensured internal consistency and a progressive, logically coherent design (Saunders et al., 2023).

3.2.2 Interpretivist Paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm to gain an in-depth understanding of how Chinese Gen Z non-fans perceived and interpreted brand influence from fan communities. In luxury brand communication, fan behaviour involved more than visible content production and dissemination; it also contained cultural narratives, social dynamics, and emotional resonance. The reception and interpretation by non-fans were shaped by personal background, social context, and affective stance, so deeper meanings could not be captured through indicators

alone. Interpretivism emphasised how people assigned meaning in specific contexts through interaction between the researcher and participants (Bryman, 2016; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015) and relied on thick description of cultural and social settings (Geertz, 1973), which aligned with this study.

In comparison, positivism, although it emphasised objective measurement and causal relations between variables, showed clear limits for studying the indirect influence of fan culture. First, positivism suited hypothesis testing in relatively stable environments, whereas interactions between fans and non-fans were highly dynamic and their meanings shifted with public opinion, community relations, and event contexts. Second, positivism tended to quantify influence strength with numerical indicators but struggled to reveal deeper responses such as emotional resonance, cultural identification, or implicit aversion that non-fans experienced during brand exposure. By using open ended and contextualised methods, including narrative interviews and netnography, interpretivism captured these subtle and subjective meaning structures and therefore offered more nuanced insights for research on luxury brand communication.

3.2.3 Research Approach

This study adopted inductive reasoning. It started from empirical materials and, through systematic analysis, generalised new frameworks of understanding and theoretical propositions. This choice was driven by the lack of mature theories that could directly explain how fan culture indirectly influenced non-fans' brand judgement on social media. Prior fan studies mostly focused on fans' own consumption behaviours or endorsement effects, with limited discussion of non-fans' passive exposure pathways and emotional responses. The research therefore began with first hand data to capture the phenomenon's complexity and diversity, and then abstracted explanatory patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gioia et al., 2013).

In addition, the inductive approach was not entirely detached from existing theories; rather, it generated new insights by extending and revising established models. For example, Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE; Keller, 2001) could explain how consumers formed brand judgements based on perceptions and associations, but it did not fully consider the variables of fan culture in a social media context. The Two-Step Flow Model (Katz, 1957) revealed the mediating role of opinion leaders, but it did not sufficiently cover the decentralised and collective communication structure of fan communities. The network diffusion model (Watts & Dodds, 2007) emphasised multi-nodal influence diffusion, but it lacked analysis of emotional symbols and cultural narratives. Through inductive reasoning, this study integrated

these theoretical elements with field data to construct a brand influence mechanism framework better adapted to the digital social era, thereby making targeted contributions and extensions to the existing literature.

3.3 Research Approach and Strategy

3.3.1 Multi-Method Qualitative Design and Strategy

This study adopted a multi-method qualitative design under an interpretivist paradigm, combining netnography and semi-structured narrative interviews to capture both macro community dynamics and micro meaning-making among Chinese Gen Z non-fans in the luxury context. Netnography provided ecologically valid observations of fan community interaction patterns, UGC characteristics and affective atmospheres in naturally occurring digital settings, helped identify brand-related cues that non-fans might passively encounter on platforms such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu and Douyin (Kozinets, 2015). In parallel, semi-structured narrative interviews elicited nuanced accounts of non-fans' emotional responses, brand judgements and emergent purchase tendencies after exposure to fan content, enriching the psychological and motivational layers that could not be directly observed online (Riessman, 2008). The complementarity of the two strategies enabled triangulation: netnography mapped the symbolic system and diffusion logics of fan culture, while interviews reconstructed individual evaluative pathways; together they enhanced credibility and built an integrated model of the indirect influence of fan culture on non-fans' brand perceptions (Denzin, 1978). For clarity of implementation, the design proceeded in three phases: (1) netnographic observation and coding, (2) semi-structured narrative interviewing that targeted 8 Chinese Gen Z non-fans, and (3) integrative analysis to articulate the fan-to-non-fan influence pathway; a summary table of phases, objectives, theoretical anchors, and applications was provided in Table 2.

Research Phases of Multi-Method Qualitative Design

Research phase	Method type	Research objective	Theoretical Support	Application
Phase 1	Netnography	To capture macro-level patterns of fan community interactions, UGC characteristics, and emotional atmospheres; to identify brand-related content and situational cues potentially encountered by non-fans	Two-Step Flow Model (Katz, 1957); Networked Publics Theory (boyd, 2011)	Observing fan support campaigns, comment control, creative re-production, and emotional expression on Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin
Phase 2	Semi-structured Narrative Interviews	To explore micro-level emotional responses, brand judgements, and purchase inclinations of non-fans after exposure to fan-generated content	Narrative Inquiry Framework (Riessman, 2008); Social Proof Theory (Cialdini, 2001)	Interviewing 8 Chinese Gen Z non-fans to discuss brand perceptions and emotional resonance
Phase 3	Method Integration	To integrate online observation and interview data to construct a model of the influence pathway of fan culture	Interpretivism (Schwandt, 1994); Triangulation (Denzin, 1978)	Developing an indirect influence mechanism model of fan culture on non-fans' brand perceptions

Table 2: Integrated Research Approach & Strategy: Phases, Methods, Theoretical Anchors, and Outputs

3.3.2 Time Horizon

This study adopted a cross-sectional design and implemented netnographic observation and semi-structured narrative interviews within a single time frame to ensure consistency of socio-cultural context and chronology (Saunders et al., 2019; Bryman, 2016). Specifically, the netnography lasted four weeks (1 July 2025 to 28 July 2025). Typical interactions and user-generated content from fan communities were recorded five times per week (approximately 30 minutes each) on Weibo, Xiaohongshu and Douyin. During the same period, the researcher conducted online semi-structured narrative interviews with 8 Chinese Gen Z non-fans (30 to 45 minutes each) to capture their immediate reactions and brand perceptions in response to the observed fan behaviours. This time span facilitated the integration of macro-level community dynamics and micro-level individual narratives within the same socio-cultural context, thereby producing findings with contextual consistency. However, a cross-sectional design could not reflect the long-term evolution of fan behaviours and brand perceptions. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to examine changes over a longer time scale.

3.4 Instrument Design: Data Collection Methods

3.4.1 Phase 1: Netnography

To examine the indirect influence of fan culture in luxury brand communication, the study conducted a four-week netnographic observation from 1 July 2025 to 28 July 2025 on Weibo, Xiaohongshu (RED) and Douyin. These platforms had high penetration and strong interaction among Chinese Gen Z (CNNIC, 2024) and each formed a distinct content ecosystem: Weibo was suited to real-time public opinion and trending topics; Xiaohongshu centred on recommendation sharing and consumption experiences; Douyin spread emotional content rapidly through short videos. This multi-platform arrangement enabled comprehensive capture of fan-generated content and its diffusion paths across different media forms.

The observation focused on fan behaviours related to luxury brands and endorsers, including initiating and spreading support posts and hashtag challenges, comment control, emotional transmission, creative reproductions (such as posters, video mashups and memes), secondary dissemination of official brand content, and boycott or counteraction activities. A data-collection matrix recorded content type (image or text, video or mixed), interaction volume (shares, comments and likes), emotional valence (positive, neutral or negative), time of publication and hashtag labels.

Data were collected five times per week per platform, with each session lasting about 30 minutes, to cover different time slots and activity cycles. All data came from publicly visible content, and no interactive intervention was undertaken to maintain the authenticity of the natural context (Kozinets, 2015). Recording methods included screenshots of observed content, saved URL links and emotional tags to facilitate subsequent coding and thematic analysis.

Behaviour to be Observed	Was the behaviour observed?	Notes and comments
1. Posting branded fan support content (e.g., hashtag campaigns, collective “support” posts for celebrity-endorsed luxury products)		Recorded examples of hashtags, frequency, and brand mention context
2. Reposting / sharing official luxury brand promotional content linked to the celebrity		Noted tone (supportive, critical, neutral), engagement metrics
3. Engaging in “comment control” (coordinated efforts to flood positive or remove negative comments about brand collaborations)		Documented methods used, size of group participation
4. Producing creative derivative works (e.g., fan art, edited videos, memes) featuring both celebrity and luxury brand		Captured visual style, emotional tone, and fan discourse
5. Initiating or participating in fan-led brand discussions (e.g., product reviews, styling tips, comparisons with other brands)		Noted language style, insider terms, product knowledge
6. Expressing emotional reactions (positive, negative,		Classified emotional valence and recurring themes

mixed) towards brand campaigns involving celebrity endorsements		
7. Interaction between fans and non-fans in comment sections or forums (e.g., debates, persuasion attempts, conflict)		Identified triggers, tone, and persuasion strategies
8. Non-fans' unsolicited comments on fan-generated brand content		Highlighted instances of indirect exposure, attitudes expressed
9. Viral spread of fan-generated brand content to wider social media audience		Noted platform algorithms (trending lists, recommendation feeds)
10. Coordinated fan actions that affect brand visibility (e.g., trending hashtags, mass purchasing events)		Quantified scale, timeline, and resulting brand visibility

Table 3: Netnography Observation Matrix for Fan–Non-Fan Interactions in Luxury Fashion Context

To ensure systematic and replicable collection, the observation matrix was developed at the design stage to specify platform selection, objectives, behaviour types, collection methods and frequency, analytical focus, and ethical considerations. Table 3 presented the matrix used in this study.

3.4.2 Phase 2: Semi-Structured Narrative Interviews

To examine more deeply how Chinese fan communities indirectly influenced Gen Z non-fans' brand perception and purchase decisions through social media activities, the second phase employed semi-structured narrative interviews to obtain individualised, context-rich data. This method maintained a common interview framework while allowing participants to narrate personal experiences freely, thereby capturing subjective feelings, emotional responses and processes of meaning-making (Riessman, 2008).

The interview guide was derived from the study's research questions and objectives and was informed by key literature on fan culture, brand perception and consumer behaviour (Keller, 1993; Katz, 1957; Kozinets, 2015). The questions covered five themes: (1) social media exposure context, namely how non-fans encountered fan-created luxury brand content across platforms; (2) immediate emotional responses, exploring emotions and cognitive feedback on first viewing; (3) interpretation of brand meaning, examining how non-fans understood or reconstructed brand image and value through fan content; (4) purchase intention and consumer behaviour, analysing whether and how such content influenced decisions; and (5) overall attitudes toward the relationship between brands and fan culture, exploring views on brands' use of fan communities and perceived risks and opportunities.

The target group comprised Chinese Gen Z consumers (born 1995 onwards) who were interested in fashion or lifestyle content but did not belong to the fan base of any specific brand endorser. This phase targeted 8 participants. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted online via Zoom or Tencent Meeting to ensure flexibility and accessibility.


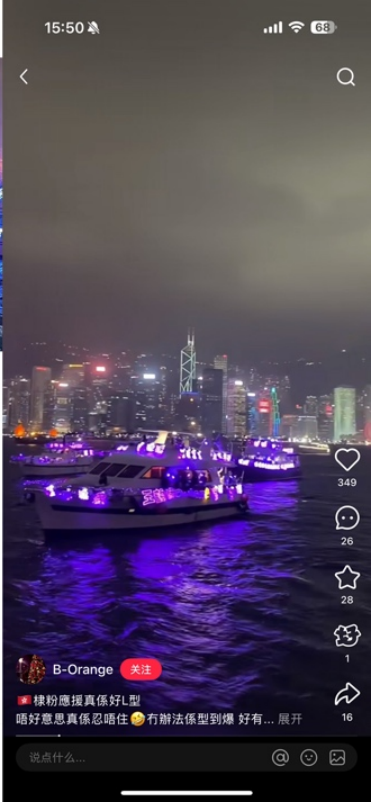

Semi-structured Narrative interview

Introduction (Opening Script)

Thank you for agreeing to Participants in this interview. My name is Shu Hua, and I am conducting this research project as part of my postgraduate study at the University of the Arts London.

This study examines whether and how fan community behaviour on social media influences Generation Z consumers who are not fans in their perceptions and evaluations of luxury fashion brands. Before we begin, I would like to clarify what is meant by “fan behaviour”. It refers to publicly visible activities by fans on online platforms. Examples include sharing content related to celebrity endorsements on Xiaohongshu, Weibo or Douyin, posting about having the same items as a celebrity, recommending, or discouraging products, and expressing support for or opposition to a brand in comment sections. To aid our discussion, I will first show you a few example screenshots from public platforms that have been anonymised. These are provided solely to help illustrate the topic and do not represent any stance. I will then ask about your experiences and feelings. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested only in your genuine views. You may skip any question or end the interview at any time.

Your identity will be anonymised, and the information you share will only be used for academic purposes. You may decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time. Do I have your permission to record this interview for transcription and analysis purposes?

Thematic Category	Research Question Focus	Corresponding Research Objective	Main Questions	Follow-up Questions
 <p>今晚的维港是紫色的! 跟兄棧伙一起包7条船是什么样的体验~</p> <p>真的就是超开心!! 今晚的维港是紫色的!! 上周澳门的遗憾今晚香港补了! 感谢遇见组织~~ 之前都是solo追 澳门之后遇见很多兄棧伙 不枉我下班一小时火速冲到尖沙咀! 太开心了! 下次去还要继续 #王鹤棧 #lv大秀</p> <p>地点 香港-Avenue of Stars</p> <p>编辑于 2023-11-30</p> <p>说点什么... 335 4 70</p>	 <p>虞书欣私服_Estherstyle</p> <p>24-12-18 Edited</p> <p>虞书欣超话 Esther Style @虞书欣 Esther 私服穿搭 #来自星星的穿搭# #专辑造型全解析# #虞书欣 spicyhoneymv# #虞书欣生日专辑上线# #虞书欣主打歌换了9套造型#</p> <p>241218/微博 更新... Full Text Translate content</p> <p>233 205 4.1K</p> <p>说点什么...</p>			 <p>虞书欣</p> <p>虞书欣成为 @MAMAACTIVE 品牌代言人，一起渡博有劲点!</p> <p>“很期待，期待她继续，从这些内容中感受她的魅力。Dear MAMA Girl，感谢了不起! 很高兴能与你们相遇!”</p> <p>虞书欣MAMA ACTIVE品牌代言人MAMA真漂亮! #MAMA品牌宣传# #MAMAACTIVE品牌宣传#</p> <p>虞书欣</p> <p>虞书欣成为 @MAMAACTIVE 品牌代言人，一起渡博有劲点!</p> <p>“很期待，期待她继续，从这些内容中感受她的魅力。Dear MAMA Girl，感谢了不起! 很高兴能与你们相遇!”</p> <p>虞书欣MAMA ACTIVE品牌代言人MAMA真漂亮! #MAMA品牌宣传# #MAMAACTIVE品牌宣传#</p> <p>488 194</p>
1. Social media exposure context	The situations and platforms where non-fans encounter fan-generated	To explore how Chinese fan communities reach non-fans through social	Could you describe a time on Douyin, Xiaohongshu or Weibo when you saw fans creating content and	1.1 What did you see and how was it presented? 1.2 How did this content enter your feed? For

	content related to luxury brands	media behaviours (Objective 2, Objective 3)	supporting or promoting a luxury brand or its celebrity endorser?	example, via recommendations, trending topics, shares, search results or interactions from accounts you follow. 1.3 Earlier I showed examples of fan support or promotion on social media. Have you encountered similar content on the platforms you use?
2. Immediate emotional and cognitive reactions	The emotional and cognitive responses of non-fans when first encountering fan content	To investigate how fan behaviours trigger emotional resonance or aversion among non-fans, and how this affects their brand impressions (Objective 3)	When you come across this fan content on social media, what is your immediate reaction? Please describe in your own words. It could be curiosity, interest, feeling annoyed, feeling inspired, indifference, or anything else.	2.1 Did this content change your view of the brand or its products? If so, please explain how, for example changes in perception, favourability, trust or purchase intention. 2.2 How long do these feelings typically last?

				During or after that time, do you talk about them with others, for example with friends, family or on social media?
3. Interpretation of brand meaning	How non-fans interpret brand image and value from fan content	To analyse the role of fan-generated content in brand co-creation and its impact on non-fan brand perception (Objective 2, Objective 3)	In your view, what impact, if any, do these fan posts have on the brand's overall image? Please summarise in your own words.	<p>3.1 Did it make the brand appear more trustworthy, more fashionable or more authentic, or conversely less authentic or overhyped? Which words would you use to describe the effect?</p> <p>3.2 Have these fan posts ever changed how you feel about a brand, for example liking it more, becoming indifferent or feeling averse? Please give an example.</p>

4. Purchase intention and consumer behaviour	Whether and how fan content influences non-fans' purchase decisions	To assess the potential impact of fan culture on non-fans' purchase intentions (Objective 3, Objective 4)	I'll now show you several screenshots of common fan behaviors on social media (the image above). These are merely examples to help you visualize the issue more clearly. Please discuss whether these images would influence your purchasing decisions.	4.1 Did you search for that product or brand as a result? 4.2 Did you discuss it with friends or check other reviews? 4.3 Did it make you decide to avoid the brand or like it more?
5. Overall perception of brand and fan culture	Non-fans' overall attitude towards fan culture as a communication force in luxury branding	To identify opportunities and challenges for luxury brands in leveraging fan communities as informal brand communicators (Objective 4, Objective 5)	what effects do you think these fan activities have on the brand? Please share your views on both positive and negative aspects. Is there anything else you would like to add, such as thoughts, experiences, or examples?	
6. Personal brand relationship & lifestyle fit	How non-fans make choices among luxury	To examine how Gen Z non-fans evaluate and	When choosing luxury fashion products, what	6.1 Do you feel your preferences for certain

	<p>fashion brands, and how lifestyle/identity factors shape their brand judgement alongside fan-culture influence</p>	<p>select luxury fashion brands, considering both personal lifestyle fit and indirect fan influence (extension of Objective 3 & 4)</p>	<p>factors do you usually consider? You may speak about design, craftsmanship and materials, price, brand reputation, availability and channels, after sales service, others' reviews and assessments, and sustainability, and briefly indicate their order of importance and why.</p>	<p>brands come mainly from your own lifestyle and values, or are they influenced by others' commentary including fan communities? Which carries more weight for you and why? Please give an example if you can. 6.2 If your favourite luxury brand released a new product and the endorser's fan community showed a polarised response with some strongly recommending it and others clearly opposing it, would this affect how you view the brand and what you choose to do? If you have not experienced this, please answer using a</p>
--	---	--	--	---

				similar imagined situation and say what actions you might take, such as continuing to follow, searching for more information, waiting, or changing your purchase decision.
--	--	--	--	--

Table 4: Semi-structure Narrative interview

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis: Sampling Strategy and Participant Profile

This study used a two-phase design that combined netnography with semi-structured narrative interviews to integrate community-level observations and individual accounts (Kozinets, 2015). In both phases the sampling strategy was non-probability purposive sampling, selected to recruit information-rich cases aligned with the research aim and with the interpretivist orientation of the study (Saunders et al., 2019; Bryman, 2016). For the netnography, platforms were selected purposively based on activity and accessibility within the Chinese luxury discourse. Weibo, Xiaohongshu and Douyin were chosen because they hosted active fan communities and visible luxury conversations. Posts were included if they fell within the study window of the previous six months, related directly to luxury brands and their endorsers, showed interaction records such as likes, comments, or shares, and contained emotional expressions or brand value judgements in text or video. These criteria ensured relevance and analytic comparability. For the interviews, the participant group comprised eight Chinese Gen Z consumers, born in 1995 or later, who followed fashion or luxury content on social media yet did not belong to any specific endorser's fan base. Purposive selection with maximum variation guided recruitment to capture diversity by gender, city tier, monthly disposable income, and social media habits, thereby enhancing the transferability of findings (Saunders et al., 2019). Interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes and were conducted online, generating context-rich narratives on emotional responses, brand judgements and emerging purchase tendencies (Riessman, 2008). This purposive, non-probability approach aligned with the study's interpretivist design and maximised the likelihood of obtaining rich, contextually grounded data relevant to the research questions.

Participates	Gender	Age	City Tier	Occupation
P1	Female	25	Tier 1	Graduate student
P2	Female	27	Tier 1	Marketing analyst
P3	Female	24	Tier 1	Fashion e-commerce intern
P4	Female	28	New Tier 1	Product designer
P5	Male	26	Tier 1	Master's student (design)
P6	Female	24	Tier 2	Master's student (Media)
P7	Female	29	Tier 1	PR executive
P8	Female	26	New Tier 1	Operations coordinator

Table 5: Interview Participant Profile: Gender, Age, City Tier, Occupation

3.5.1 Data Analysis Procedures

This study used thematic analysis to handle both the netnographic corpus and the semi-structured narrative interviews, following Braun and Clarke's six phases (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Data were first prepared and de-identified. Netnographic materials (screenshots, links and timestamps) were collated and anonymised; interview audio was transcribed verbatim, checked, and de-identified. All materials were managed in NVivo and supported by Excel summaries and memo files. The analysis proceeded through the following phases for each dataset: (1) familiarisation, by reading and re-reading the materials and writing analytic memos; (2) generating initial codes, by tagging meaningful units with operational definitions; (3) searching for themes, by grouping related codes into candidate themes and subthemes; (4) reviewing themes, by iterating between data and themes to refine boundaries; (5) defining and naming themes, by producing clear construct descriptions with exemplar evidence; and (6) producing the report, by assembling a thematic map and evidentiary extracts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To enhance coding consistency, a pilot round on approximately ten per cent of the corpus informed a draft codebook; definitions and inclusion rules were refined after peer discussion, followed by full coding with ongoing memo-writing (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

To integrate findings across methods, a joint display was constructed that aligned behaviour and cue themes from the netnography with interview themes on emotional responses, brand judgements and purchase intentions. Convergence, complementarity and divergence were noted, and each linkage was traced back to source evidence (for example, post IDs and verbatim quotations). This integration supported triangulation and strengthened interpretive credibility (Denzin, 1978). Sample thematic maps, the codebook and an excerpt of the joint display were placed in the appendix for external review. All coding relied on the original Chinese texts. Quoted excerpts were presented with English translations and the Chinese originals to preserve nuance and context.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

This study assessed trustworthiness using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria guided procedures across data collection and analysis. To strengthen credibility, participants received detailed information sheets before the semi-structured interviews, including purpose, process, confidentiality and anonymisation (Saunders et al., 2019, p.456). During interviews the researcher used member checking by restating key points for confirmation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In the netnography,

all observations were preserved in original form, including screenshots, links and timestamps, to retain social context and limit interpretive bias.

For transferability, the study produced thick description of platform operations (Weibo, Xiaohongshu, Douyin), brand contexts and patterns of fan–non-fan interaction (Geertz, 1973; Saunders et al., 2019). Purposive sampling secured diversity among the eight Chinese Gen Z non-fans in gender, city tier, disposable income and social media habits, which increased the relevance of the findings to comparable settings. For dependability, an audit trail documented data collection records, observation notes, coding schemes and theme development (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Peer debriefing was conducted with colleagues experienced in digital culture and brand communication to review preliminary coding and interpretations, which supported analytical consistency (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For confirmability, the researcher maintained reflexive notes throughout, recording decisions and potential biases (Saunders et al., 2019). All raw materials, including anonymised interview transcripts and social media records, were stored securely to permit external review, which reduced the influence of researcher values and improved transparency.

Criteria	Definition	Application in This Study	Key References
Credibility / Internal Validity	Believability of the findings	Provided participants with prior detailed study information; used member checking in interviews; retained original social media content and context in netnography	Saunders et al. (2019); Creswell & Miller (2000)
Transferability / External Validity	Applicability to other contexts	Used thick description of platforms, brand contexts, and fan–non-fan interactions; ensured sample diversity (gender,	Geertz (1973); Saunders et al. (2019)

		city tier, consumption level)	
Dependability / Reliability	Consistency of findings over time	Maintained an audit trail; used peer debriefing to validate coding and thematic analysis	Bryman & Bell (2011); Creswell & Miller (2000)
Confirmability / Objectivity	Minimising researcher bias	Employed researcher reflexivity; kept raw data and coding notes for external review	Bryman & Bell (2011); Saunders et al. (2019)

Table 6: Trustworthiness Criteria and Application

3.7 Limitations of the Research Design

Following Creswell and Creswell (2017), this study acknowledged methodological and contextual limitations that may have affected validity, reliability and transferability. In the netnography, only publicly visible user-generated content was accessible, while closed or private fan groups were excluded, which may have obscured deeper interaction patterns; platform algorithms may also have shaped content visibility and introduced selection bias (Kozinets, 2020; Metzler & García, 2023). The interview phase involved eight Chinese Gen Z non-fans, privileging depth over breadth, so the findings were not statistically generalisable and the narratives may have been influenced by recall and subjectivity (Berl et al., 2021). Finally, the cross-sectional design captured attitudes at a single period and did not observe temporal change, which limited insight into longer term dynamics (Caruana et al., 2015).

Research Phase	Limitation	Limitation Details	Mitigation Strategies
Netnography	Access constraints (Kozinets, 2020)	Only publicly available content was analysed; closed fan groups excluded.	Focused on diverse public platforms (Weibo, Xiaohongshu) to capture varied interaction styles.

	Algorithmic bias (Metzler and García, 2023)	Platform recommendation algorithms may influence visible content.	Triangulated across multiple search keywords, hashtags, and manual browsing to reduce skew.
Interviews	Small sample size (Berl et al., 2021)	Only 8 participants, prioritising in-depth insights over statistical representativeness.	Applied maximum variation sampling to ensure diversity in gender, city tier, and income.
	Recall and narrative bias (Saunders et al., 2019)	Participants' recollections of social media exposure may be selective or subjective.	Used follow-up prompts and cross-referenced with real-time examples where possible.
Cross-sectional Design	Temporal limitation (Caruana et al., 2015)	Captures attitudes at one time point; cannot track changes over time.	Positioned findings as a snapshot, recommending future longitudinal research.

Table 7: Methodological Limitations and Mitigation Strategies by Research Phase

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This study followed the University of the Arts London Code of Practice on Research Ethics (UAL, 2020) and relevant UK data protection requirements to ensure ethical and lawful conduct throughout.

During the netnography, only publicly accessible user-generated content was collected; no closed groups or private conversations were accessed. To protect privacy, all quoted text, images and usernames were anonymised, and any potentially identifying details were removed (Kozinets, 2020).

For the semi-structured interviews, participants received a Participant Information Sheet and a Consent Form in advance that explained the study purpose, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, intended data use and confidentiality arrangements. Only participants who provided informed consent took part, and interviews were conducted to minimise risk and avoid harm (Saunders et al., 2019).

Audio recordings, transcripts and observation records were stored on password-protected devices and encrypted cloud storage with access restricted to the researcher. Data were retained only for the period specified in UAL policy and were then deleted or fully anonymised (UAL, 2020).

The Ethics Approval Form, Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form are provided in the appendix 1 and 2 for reference.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

4.1 introduction

This chapter combines semi structured interviews with a focused netnography of Xiaohongshu, Weibo and Douyin to address the core question posed in Chapter 1: How do Chinese fan communities indirectly influence nonfan Gen Z consumers' brand perception and purchase decisions in the luxury fashion sector through social media driven content and practices? The dataset comprises eight interviews and twenty-six public posts collected within the study window saved as screenshots, see Appendix 3.1. All materials have been anonymised. Full transcripts, evidence cards and supporting files are provided in Appendix 3.

Following Braun and Clarke (2006) and their six-phase process, the researcher iteratively moved from one hundred and seventy-three initial codes to forty-nine focused codes, which were further grouped into six themes see Figure 4. To ensure auditability and credibility, this chapter retains excerpts of the coding trajectory and the codebook and integrates cross evidence from interviews and netnography through joint displays.

This chapter uses three analytical lenses that break the overarching question into three testable sub research questions aligned one to one with the six themes. Lens 1 Reach and Amplification corresponds to Themes 1 and 2, discussing how fan generated content enters nonfans' feeds through arrival paths such as trending searches, home page recommendations, friends' shares and topic pages, and how instrumental cues reduce search costs and uncertainty. Terms first introduced here include trending lists, recommendation surfaces, same item toolkits, the continuously updated 'same item list'. Lens 2 Perception and Framing corresponds to Themes 3 and 4, examining how the emotional atmosphere and social proof influence judgements of brand fashionability, authenticity and endorser brand fit. Lens 3 Behaviour and Boundaries corresponds to Themes 5 and 6, mapping the pathway from attention to action saving, searching, purchasing or avoidance and identifying key decision gates such as budget, independent reviews, and value alignment. Each theme is triangulated with interview excerpts and platform evidence, presenting convergence, divergence and complementarity, see Appendix 3.

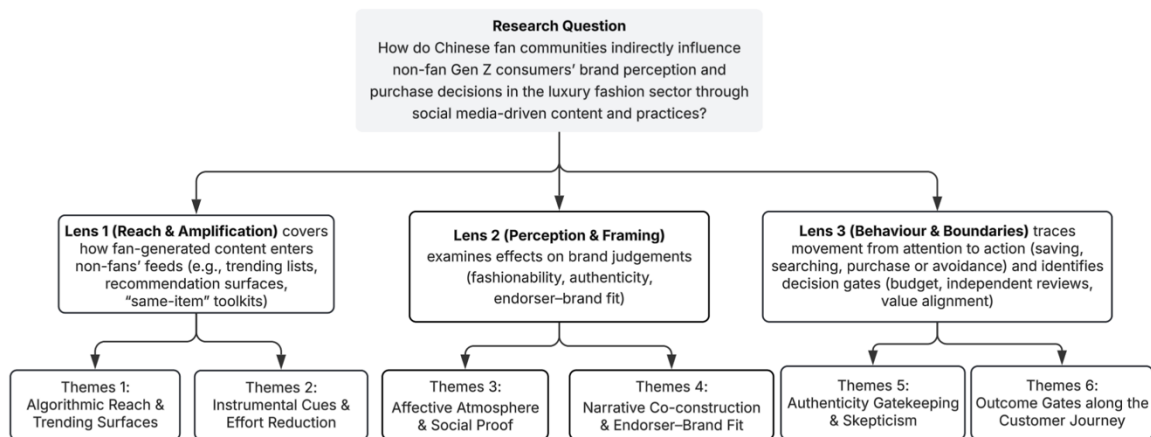


Figure 4: Analytical framework of Chapter 4-Three lenses and six themes operationalising the RQ

Note: The supporting platform traces (netnography) and interview quotes for each cell are referenced in the joint displays and appendices (IDs: X = Xiaohongshu; W = Weibo; D = Douyin; P01–P08 = interview participants).

4.2 Lens 1: Reach & Amplification (answer sub-RQ: How do fan contents reach non-fans and shape initial attention?)

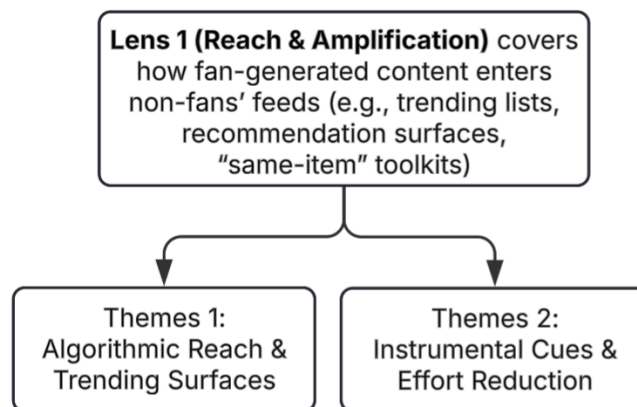


Figure 5: Lens 1 and themes 1&2

This section delineates two platform pathways through which FGC reaches non-fans and shapes initial attention: the first is algorithmic surface placements (discovery, trending and recommendation), which push in-group content to public entry points, rapidly achieving "being seen"; the second is serial seeding and comment-thread amplification (serial seeding: posting with similar templates across multiple days or via multiple accounts; comment-thread amplification: high-frequency interactions repeatedly push the post back to the top), sustaining a "continuous presence" across multiple surfaces. Working together, the two typically produce

a 3–14-day lift in salience and mild favourability, but the impact mostly remains at the awareness–interest stages of the customer journey and is difficult to convert directly (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). At this stage, the platform’s visible interaction metrics (trending lists, pinned top comments, reposts, comments and likes) and “same-item toolkits” (continuously updated lists of styles, prices and SKUs) act as social-proof triggers, on the one hand reducing uncertainty in search and preliminary judgement, and on the other constructing a contextual frame for subsequent evaluation (Cialdini et al., 1999).

4.2.1 Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces

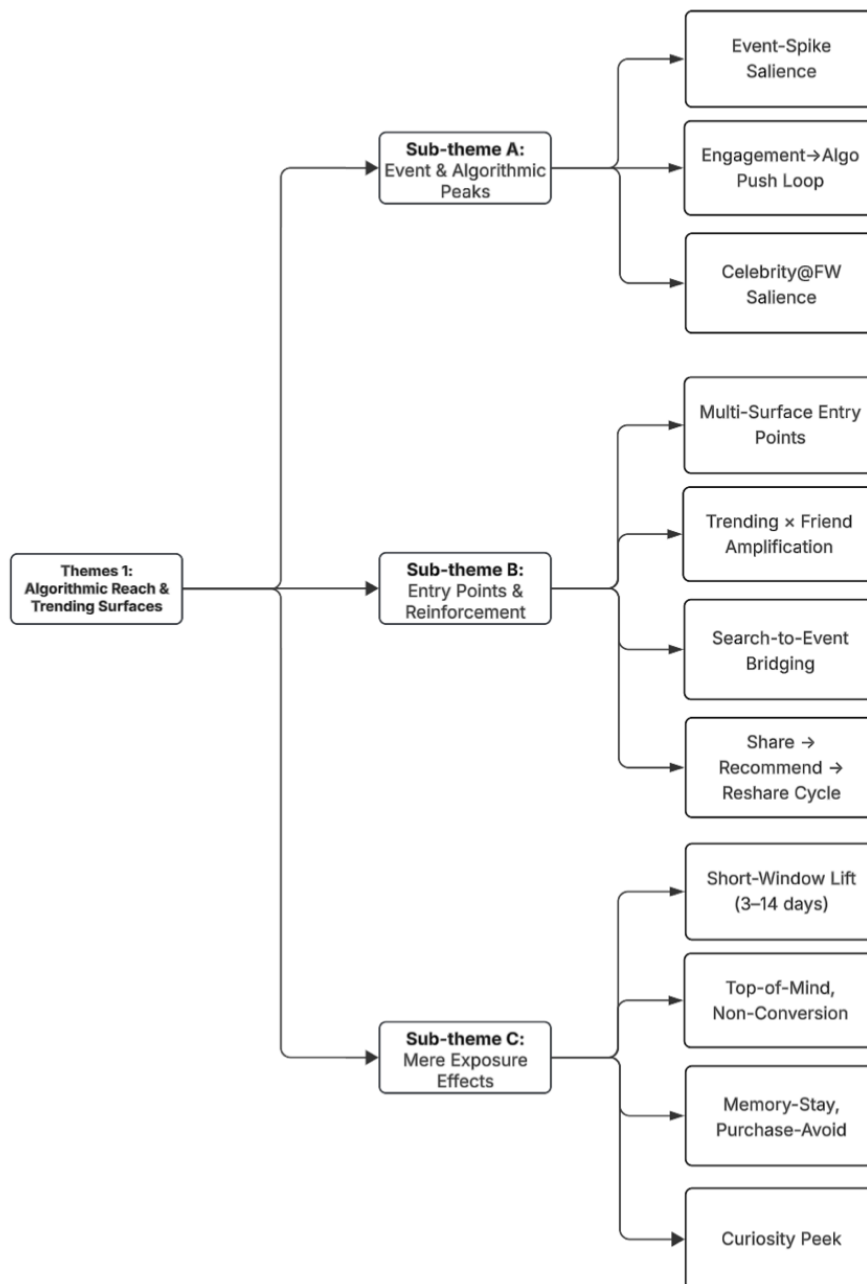


Figure 6: Theme 1 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms

In this theme, the central claim concerns how fan-generated content (FGC) enters non-fans' field of vision and produces short-lived visibility peaks via three interlocking mechanisms: event-driven algorithmic surfacing, cross-surface entry re-amplification, and the mere-exposure effect. Together they raise attention and interest, but typically do not translate directly into purchase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In the data, this process displays a clear time-window profile and platform-surface pathways and is moderated by whether “verifiable evidence” appears concurrently.

First, the event × algorithm overlay generates peak visibility within 3–14 days. Under the combined effect of major moments (e.g., official announcements, fashion week) and ranking rules, related FGC is pushed to public entry points and rapidly amplified: on Xiaohongshu, posts passively enter the Discover cards and are continuously pinned in the profile grid as “toolkit serials” (Appendix 3.1 Netnography: X_03, X_04); on Weibo, topics aggregate on the Hot Search or Topic pages, celebrity on-site photos drive reposts, comments and likes, and templated top comments remain pinned for extended periods (Appendix 3.1 Netnography: W_07, W_08); on Douyin, videos of the same event appear concentrated in the recommendation feed, and once users open several, they continue to receive similar content (Appendix 3.1 Netnography: D_01, D_02). Interviewees' accounts are consistent with this: P03 noted, “It showed up under Trending and on my home recommendations. It seems to be a mix of high engagement and algorithm push”; meanwhile P01 was wary of “managed” comments—“If the comments feel too ‘managed’, it puts me off.” This suggests that interaction metrics are taken as social referents that trigger “secondary surfacing” (Muchnik et al., 2013), but the boundary lies in their strong dependence on the event window and ranking. Once cues of comment management or spammy flooding appear, non-fans tend to enter a “wait–verify” mode, and the peak is difficult to sustain.

Secondly, multi-surface entry and re-amplification mechanisms extend the “sense of presence”. The same asset surfaces in parallel across multiple entry points—Discover cards, topic aggregation pages, and profile grids—so users encounter it repeatedly along different paths; after the first exposure, sharing by acquaintances and continued interaction further trigger algorithmic boosts, forming a “share → recommend → re-share” loop of amplification. On Xiaohongshu, a common pattern is “three parallel placements + pinned top comments” (Appendix 3.1 Netnography: X_06); on Weibo, a parallel path appears as “Hot List entry + @-mentions and private-message forwarding” (Appendix 3.1 Netnography: W_09); on Douyin, share-triggered secondary recommendations occur, and different accounts go live with the

same template consecutively on T+1–T+5 to sustain momentum (Appendix 3.1 Netnography: D_01, D_02). P01 stated, "...a friend sent it to me, and then the app kept pushing it."; P05 added, "After I opened a few related posts, the app kept pushing more... even though I am not a fan." This pathway is consistent with the lateral diffusion logic of the two-step flow and network cascades (Katz, 1957; Watts & Dodds, 2007). Its boundary lies in the fact that re-amplification easily produces homogeneity and a sense of orchestration; in the absence of verifiable evidence, users either shift into a "wait–verify" mode or directly switch off related recommendations (see P07).

Finally, the mere-exposure effect primarily delivers "Top-of-Mind rather than conversion". During event periods, algorithmic amplification increases being noticed and being remembered, but does not automatically translate into action: under Weibo hotspots, sloganized and templated top comments and visible signs of comment management create a context of "seen but not believed" (Appendix 3.1 Netnography: W_07, W_08); on Xiaohongshu and Douyin, saves and full-watch rates rise, but if traffic is not directed to independent reviews and third-party information, purchase-related behaviours are not pronounced (Appendix 3.1 Netnography: X_03, X_06, D_02, D_04). P03 remarked that such content "...gives me a brief lift in favourability, though I do not act straight away"; P04 likewise said, "I usually save it first... Whether I buy still depends on practicality and price." Mechanistically, others' behaviours and platform metrics serve as judgement shortcuts that first elevate salience; advancing to action typically requires verifiable evidence and contextual fit (Cialdini et al., 1999; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The boundary is clear: excessive surfacing and homogeneous rhetoric trigger vigilance and reinforce "wait–verify" (Sunstein, 2009; boyd, 2014); conversely, if real-world comparisons and multi-source consistency are provided alongside exposure, some content can shift from "being remembered" to a pathway of "willing to search and compare".

4.2.2 Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction

In this theme, the central claim is that instrumental cues—such as "same-item lists" and "how-to guides"—provide standardised information and executable steps that significantly reduce non-fans' search and preliminary judgement costs, turning "being seen" into light-touch actions such as saving, adding to a wishlist, and initial price comparison; however, progression to purchase still depends on verifiable evidence and contextual fit (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Cialdini et al., 1999). This mechanism appears across three sub-themes as a stepwise progression from structured, to retrievable, to verifiable.

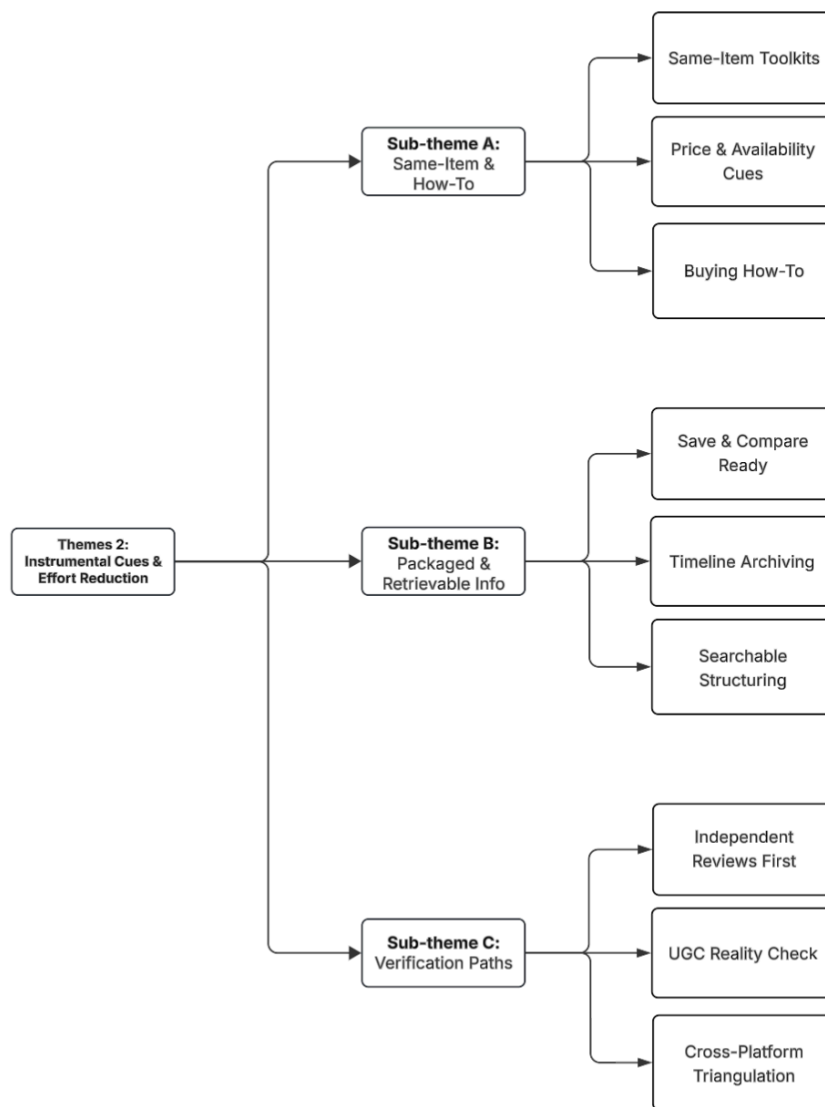


Figure 7: Theme 2 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms

First, “same-item lists” and “how-to guides” structure dispersed cues into directly actionable information units, thereby smoothly channelling attention into the Consideration and Evaluation stage. Concretely, fans break celebrity and endorsement assets down into “same-item toolkits” of brand, model, SKU and links, and present purchase pathways, pitfalls to avoid, and authenticity checks as step-by-step procedures. Netnography shows Weibo fan accounts building a serialised “same-item library”, complete with SKUs and price bands (Appendix 3.1: W_09); Douyin posts embed order screenshots plus the SKU flow, with comments rolling forward “already ordered or arrival feedback”; under in-store and leak videos there are in-hand and try-on shots with order screenshots and concurrent discussion of price and workmanship

(Appendix 3.1: D_02, D_04); on Xiaohongshu, “toolkit serials” enable one-click saving for later review and comparison (Appendix 3.1: X_03). Interviewees corroborate this mechanism: P01: “Fans quickly made ‘same item’ lists... they lower the effort... I looked up the brand and prices and saved a couple for later.”; P02: “The ‘same item’ shots and try-on images lower the effort... I usually just scroll on or save it rather than purchase straight away.” (see also P03). However, where information is single-sourced, templated and lacks verifiable evidence, it is readily seen as “hard sell”, triggering a “wait–verify” stance (see P07; Cialdini et al., 1999).

Secondly, “packaged and retrievable information” reduces cross-post search costs through “save-and-compare” and a “searchable structure”, guiding attention towards organised comparison and subsequent verification. “Save-and-compare” concentrates key information in one place so that, after a one-click save, users can compare laterally; a “searchable structure” employs standardised naming, tags and timeline archiving to facilitate search and back-tracing. Netnography shows that Weibo “Product Selection Top” series enable one-click retrieval via unified naming tags plus timeline archiving (Appendix 3.1: W_09); Douyin embeds SKUs and order pathways in the frame and copy, improving on- and off-platform searchability and save-friendliness (Appendix 3.1: D_04); on Xiaohongshu, the profile grid forms a structured toolkit library that supports long-term retrieval and lateral comparison (Appendix 3.1: X_03). Correspondingly, P01 noted “...looked up the brand and prices and saved a couple for later.”; P04 stated “I usually save it first... Whether I buy still depends on practicality and price.” (see also P02). However, excessive operationalisation and rigid templating of formats and tags can erode trust; they need to be paired with verifiable evidence to avoid “format without substance”.

Finally, “Verification Paths” translate salience and mild favourability into credible judgements, typically following a three-step sequence: Independent Reviews First (prioritising third-party and non-fan reviews and buyer feedback) → UGC Reality Check (relying on genuine try-ons, longer-term use, and balanced pros and cons from users) → Cross-Platform Triangulation (cross-checking across Xiaohongshu, Weibo, Douyin, e-commerce and forums to rule out single-source bias). In the netnography, Douyin’s in-hand photos plus order screenshots constitute verifiable evidence, with ongoing debates in the comments about price/craftsmanship/authenticity (Appendix 3.1: D_02, D_04); these primary traces are often carried over to Weibo topic pages or Xiaohongshu notes for cross-checking (Appendix 3.1: W_09, X_03). Corresponding quotes: P01, “I usually check reviews and think it through before buying... I tend to wait and check independent reviews.”; P03, “If the control looks too strong I tend to wait and see... I look for more objective reviews elsewhere, such as independent

tests, forums, or buyer feedback.” (see also P02, P08). However, platforms may exhibit comment management, ranking bias and echo chambers; if cross-source conclusions fail to converge, users tend to defer or abandon (Cialdini et al., 1999; Muchnik, Aral & Taylor, 2013; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

4.3 Lens 2: Perception & Framing (*answers sub-RQ: How do social proof and affective atmosphere shape interpretive frames?*)

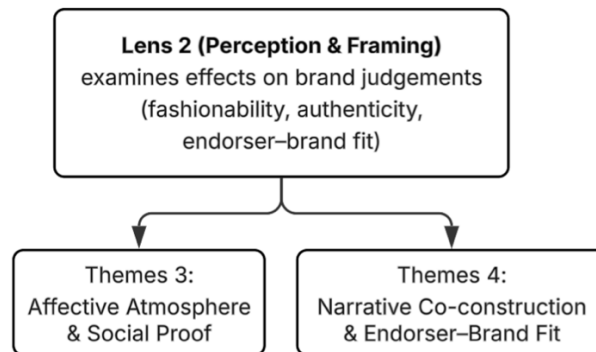


Figure 8: Lens 2 and themes 3&4

This section explains how FGC shapes and frames non-fans’ initial reading of the brand, particularly in perceived fashionability, authenticity, and endorser–brand fit. First, the platform-crafted affective atmosphere and visible social proof (e.g., trending lists, pinned top comments, interaction volumes, and peer co-presence) jointly translate “everyone is watching” into an interpretive frame of “worth a look/more wearable”, reinforced by narrative co-construction (try-on demonstrations, everyday-life vlogs, and fan edit compilations) and endorser–brand fit, which—within a short window—reduces psychological distance and heightens perceptions of “youthful/everyday wearability” (Cialdini et al., 1999). At the same time, this framing is conditional: once signs of excessive retouching, templated flooding, or comment management emerge, it readily triggers affective backlash and pressures of identity/context misfit, shifting attention from favour to caution (the “wait–verify” path). Accordingly, Lens 2 functions to alter interpretive frames rather than to persuade directly. Whether progression occurs still depends on the verifiable evidence and cross-source convergence in Lens 3; its precondition lies in the short-window visibility and retrievability already created by Lens 1.

4.3.1 Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof

The core claim of this theme is that platform affective atmosphere and social proof can, in a short period, lift the subjective sense of ‘worth a look’ or ‘worth paying attention’ and push

attention into light exploration; yet once signals of comment management, flooding, or identity labelling appear, affect flips to scepticism and avoidance, exploration is put on pause, and whether it resumes depends on the presence of verifiable evidence and contextual fit.

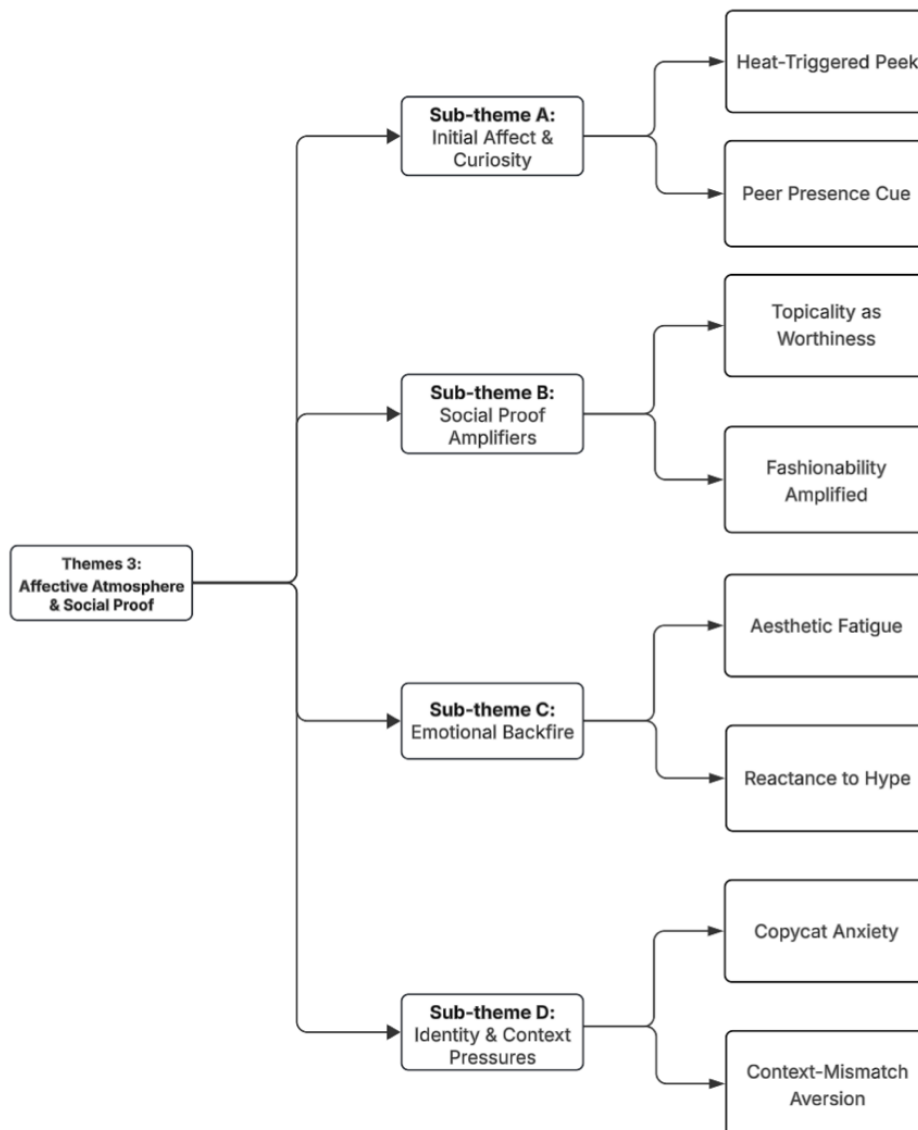


Figure 9: Theme 3 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms

First, within event/official-announcement windows (e.g., brand shows, endorser announcements), high-traffic entry points (topic pages, Hot Search, recommendation feeds, discover cards) and peer co-presence cues (@-mentions, private messages, forwards) trigger an initial affect and curiosity of “passive click → light look → save first”. Netnography shows that related topics on Weibo rapidly aggregate to Topic/Hot Search pages during event periods (Appendix 3.1: W_01, W_02), Douyin videos concentrate in the recommendation feed (Appendix 3.1: D_01), and on Xiaohongshu content repeatedly surfaces via Discover cards/topic aggregation (Appendix 3.1: X_06). Interviewees corroborate this: P03—“It showed

up under Trending and on my home recommendations. It seems to be a mix of high engagement and algorithm push.”; P02 noted “...a clear spike... a short-lived boost of curiosity.” Mechanistically, social proof as a judgement shortcut and event-period cascade diffusion act together to lift salience and initial favourability, with continued boosting to those who have already interacted (Cialdini et al., 1999; Watts & Dodds, 2007; Muchnik et al., 2013). The effect typically lasts around three days (P03) and mostly remains at the save/initial-check stage; further progression still depends on verifiable cues (as per Theme 2).

Secondly, two types of social-proof amplifier translate “everyone is watching” into an interpretive frame of “worth a look/more wearable”: the first is “topicality equals worthiness”, meaning that appearing on Topic/Hot lists or in high-ranked recommendations is itself read as a cue that it ought to be attended to, and pinned top comments layered with receipts/store check-ins and captions such as “bought because of the endorsement” consolidate this reading (Appendix 3.1 Netnography: W_03, W_05, W_06, W_07, W_08). The second is “fashionability amplified”, whereby styling demonstrations, fan-edit compilations and lifestyle vlogs render the brand closer to everyday life and easier to wear (Appendix 3.1 Netnography: X_03, X_06, D_02). P02 felt this would “...make the brand younger and more everyday... concretise the intended brand image.”; P04 noted “...that viral look refreshed my view of the brand, easier to wear in daily life.” Thus, social proof reduces psychological distance and moves attention from Awareness to the threshold of Consideration; but what it changes is the interpretive frame rather than delivering immediate persuasion, and it still requires handover to verifiable evidence and fit gates. Once excessive retouching/homogeneous flooding/comment management appear, distance is increased, and fatigue triggered (P03: “polished image adds some distance”).

Third, Emotional Backfire refers to when homogeneity and signs of orchestration (sloganised or templated top comments occupying positions over time, deletion of dissent indicating comment management) flip initial favourability to scepticism–avoidance. Netnography shows that multiple Weibo topics are dominated by sloganised, templated replies, creating an atmosphere of “seen but not believed” (Appendix 3.1: W_07, W_08). P01: “If the comments feel too ‘managed’, it puts me off.”; P02: “...formulaic and floods my feed... feels inauthentic and hyped.” This phenomenon can be explained by the Persuasion Knowledge Model: once persuasive intent and manipulative cues are detected, audiences activate defensive processing (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Kirmani and Zhu, 2007). In this study, authenticity and desirability in the luxury context are eroded, pulling the journey back from Awareness and Interest to Consideration and Verification. If in-hand or try-on verifiable evidence, balanced

pros and cons, and multi-source information are provided simultaneously, the backlash can be mitigated, and some users will still continue to search and compare.

Fourth, Identity & Context Pressures denote two constraints that inhibit further exploration. The first is bandwagoning/‘twinning’ anxiety and the risk of being read as making a fandom statement; the second is contextual mismatch, namely when the brand narrative, endorser persona or fan ambience does not align with one’s values, lifestyle or use scenarios. At major moments, receipt walls or store check-in mobilisations provide strong social proof but also intensify in-group labelling, prompting bystanders to avoid in order to prevent misreading (Appendix 3.1 netnography: W_05, W_06). P07: “Avoid strongly celebrity-tied items to dodge ‘fandom signalling’; prefer rational guidance.”; P08: “If the drama is about values or a real quality issue, I drop it... I go back to product, price, and fit.” Therefore, identity and context alignment act as a necessary filter for moving from ‘worth a look’ to ‘worth owning or can be set aside’; when the persona narrative fits one’s personal schema and is accompanied by verifiable evidence, bandwagon anxiety eases and exploration can continue.

4.3.2 Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser–Brand Fit

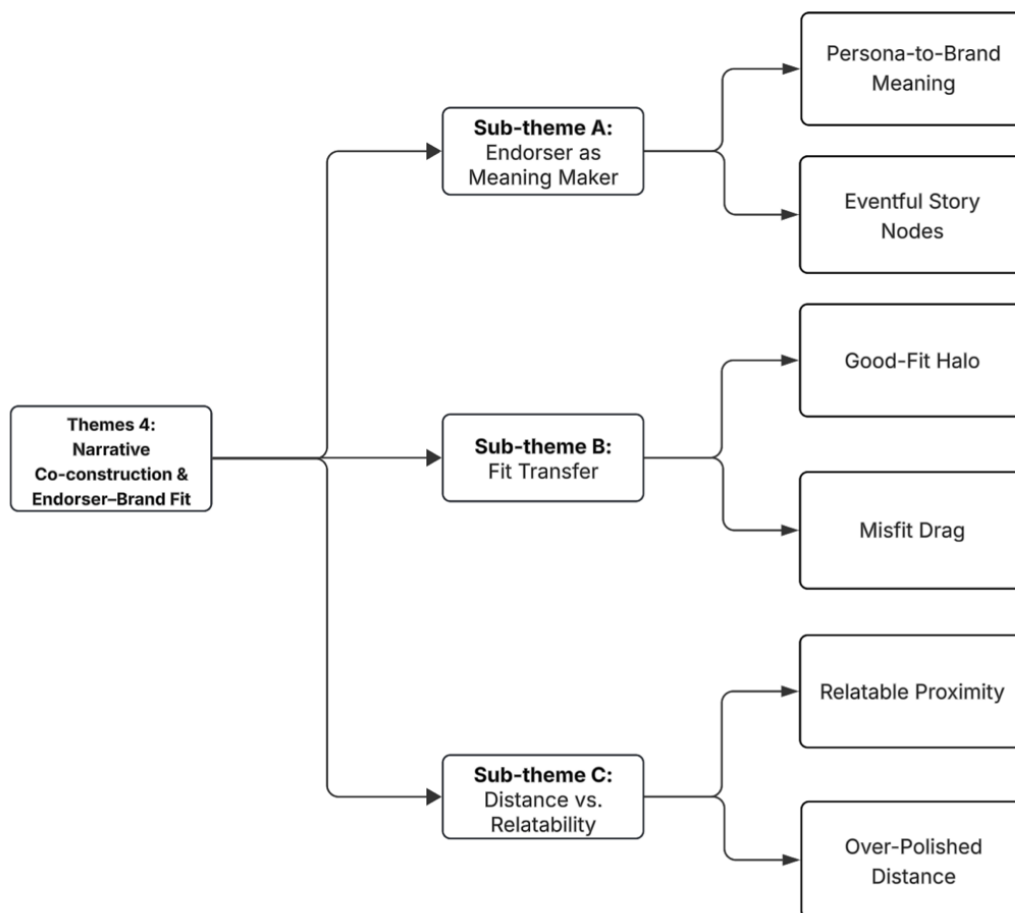


Figure 10: Theme 4 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms

The core claim is that fans' "narrative co-construction" stitches dispersed materials into reusable story nodes, thereby transferring the meanings and ethos carried by the endorser's persona to the brand (fit transfer). When "closeness–approachability" is supported by authentic evidence, this produces a short-window lift in favourability and discussion (a good-fit halo); conversely, under "over-polished/managed" conditions it turns into misfit drag and a sense of distance. Three sub-mechanisms structure this theme: the endorser as a meaning-producer, fit transfer, and perceived distance versus approachability (Jain and Roy, 2016).

First, Endorser as Meaning Maker. In comments and fan edits, fans weave the endorser's persona (value orientations, lifestyle) together with everyday snippets (travel, commuting, study/work, daily choices) into brand discourse, stitching dispersed materials into reusable story nodes that concretise and contextualise brand meaning. Netnography shows that on Weibo, retellings and fan edits around "travel/growth", layered with store check-ins and receipt collages, anchor the narrative in verifiable everyday scenes (Appendix 3.1: W_04, W_05, W_03); on Xiaohongshu, toolkit libraries and, on Douyin, try-on/in-hand evidence provide readily retrievable assets (Appendix 3.1: X_03, D_02). Interviewees also noted this "persona → brand meaning" linkage: P03—"Celebrities add a new reading; the brand feels younger and more everyday." When fit is high, perceived closeness and discussion increase; if the narrative misfits/is over-managed/relies on a single source, it is readily challenged at subsequent authenticity gatekeeping and fit gates (as per Theme 5).

Secondly, Fit Transfer. Audiences transfer the endorser's ethos/persona to the brand: a good-fit halo yields perceptions of "younger, easier to wear, closer to everyday life", whereas misfit drag results in "over-hyped/traffic-driven, diluted image, misaligned with one's own aesthetic". This effect is typically a short window uplift whose durability depends on authenticity and multi-source evidence. Netnography shows that during event windows fans often use unified slogans/templated comments in topic and top-comment areas to rapidly sculpt a "high-fit" atmosphere and boost visibility; once identified as comment management/over-packaging, trust is weakened in reverse (Appendix 3.1: W_07, W_08). The interviews present a duality: P02, "That viral look refreshed my view... made it feel younger and easier to wear."; P03, "It lifted visibility and briefly transferred the vibe to the brand." Most interviewees follow a "favourability first, then wait-and-see" path (P01, P04). Accordingly, fit transfer changes the interpretive frame rather than producing immediate persuasion; where verifiable evidence is lacking or rhetoric is templated, users shift into wait-and-verify and require subsequent

authenticity gatekeeping and cross-source convergence to carry them forward (Jain and Roy, 2016).

Third, Distance vs. Relatability. Relatable proximity arises from genuine try-ons, everyday contexts, and diverse voices, creating an “I could do this too” feeling and reducing psychological distance. By contrast, over-polished distance stems from heavy retouching, single-track narratives, and visible orchestration, making content seem staged, heightening scepticism, and suppressing action. Interviewees consistently emphasised that “authentic/multiple perspectives” raise credibility, whereas “templated highlights” create distance: P02, “What matters is objective information... If it shows real try-ons, comparisons and balanced pros and cons, I use it as a reference.”; P07, “Flooding or comment control lowers credibility, and I won’t click.” (see also P01, P03). In practice, authentic evidence pulls judgement back from ambience to verifiable information, increasing the likelihood of search and comparison. Perceived distance is lowest when content combines everyday life with verifiable materials; when there are only glossy highlights and a lack of evidence, most users defer and turn to independent reviews.

4.4 Lens 3: Behaviour & Boundaries (*answer sub-RQ: How do non-fans gatekeep authenticity and make decisions?*)

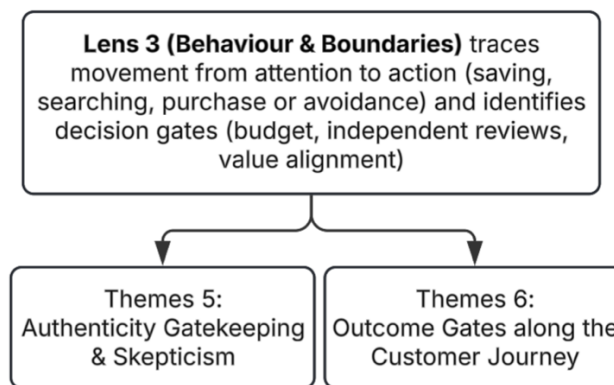


Figure 11: Lens 3 and themes 5&6

This lens defines the “last leap” from attention to action, outlining how non-fans safeguard authenticity and make choices via a chain of gatekeeping → gates → outcomes (see Figure 11). First comes gatekeeping: an initial screen of sincerity and credibility—whether verifiable evidence is present (in-store presence, in-hand/on-body shots, receipts/orders), and whether there are signs of orchestration such as comment management or homogeneous flooding; once risks are detected, the path shifts to wait–verify, with de-fandomised formulations pulling the discussion back to product and evidence.

Next are the gates, comprising three sets of outcome-determining checkpoints: feasibility gates (Budget/Need–Fit: whether it is within budget and matches current use/contexts), credibility gates (Independent reviews + Cross-source convergence: consult independent tests first, then complete a “three-step verification” via UGC reality checks and cross-platform convergence), and value/quality kill-switches (immediate termination when value misalignment or consistent negative evidence on workmanship/durability appears).

Within this framework, non-fan behaviours manifest as save → search/compare → in-store try-on → purchase or avoidance/exit: when evidence is verifiable and consistent across sources, and aligns with budget/needs/contexts, attention progresses from “being seen” to assessable/actionable and moves forward; otherwise, it shifts to wait-and-see or switch to alternatives, and, where necessary, abandon.

4.4.1 Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Scepticism

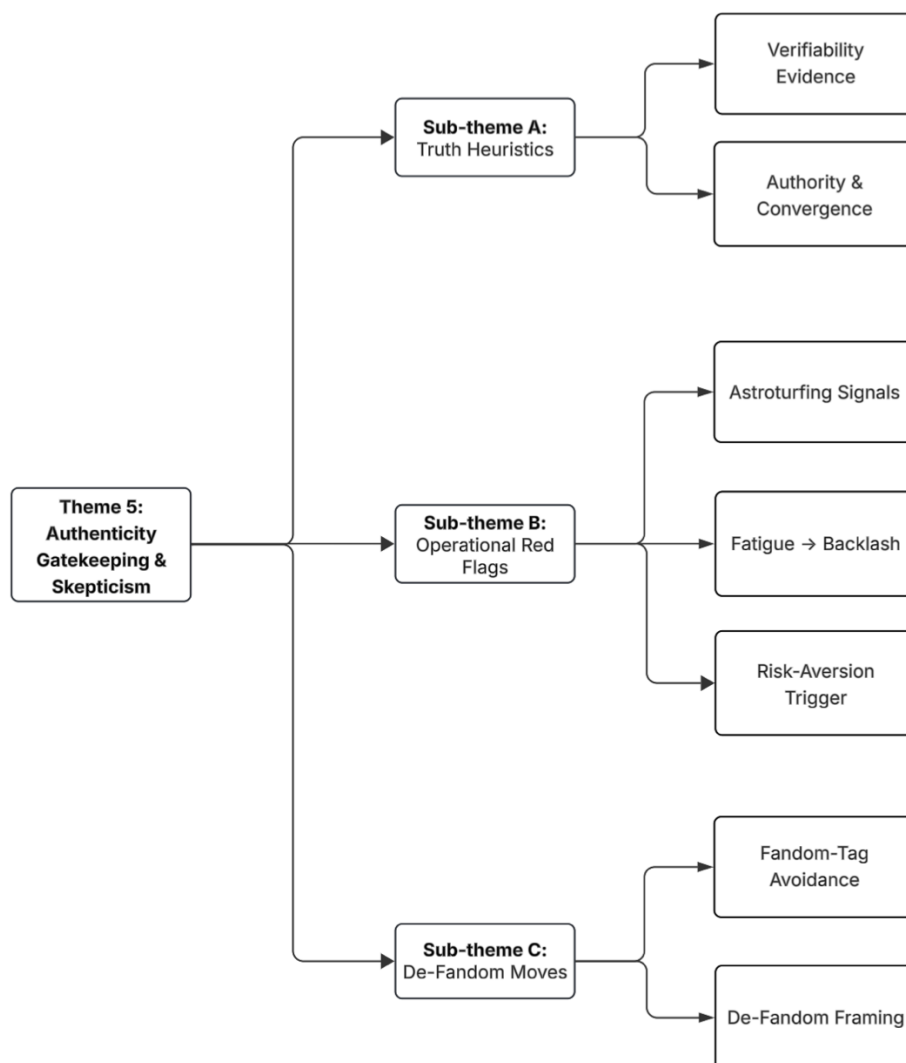


Figure 12: Theme 5 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms

In this theme, the core claim is that before entering evaluation and choice, non-fans first conduct an initial screen of sincerity and credibility; once signals of orchestration or risk are identified, the path shifts from favourability to “wait–verify”, and whether it proceeds depends on the presence of verifiable evidence and cross-source convergence (Cialdini et al., 1999; Muchnik et al., 2013; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

First, Truth Heuristics. The two keys to judging ‘does it seem real?’ are verifiable evidence and authority/convergence. The former includes in-store presence videos, in-hand or on-body shots, and receipt or order screenshots; the latter refers to third-party or non-fan independent reviews and cross-platform consistency. Only when both are present does attention move from curiosity to serious evaluation. Netnography shows that on Weibo and Douyin, receipt or order screenshots, store check-ins, and in-hand or on-body images frequently serve as verifiable proof (Appendix 3.1: W_05, W_06; D_02, D_04), while the same item being corroborated across Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Douyin demonstrates cross-source convergence (Appendix 3.1: X_03; W_05; D_02). Interviewees likewise stressed that only ‘objective information, real try-ons, and balanced pros and cons’ can be used as a reference (P02); once comment management is suspected, they will ‘wait and check independent reviews elsewhere’ (P03). Where evidence is thin or cross-source conclusions diverge, users tend to remain at save or wait-and-see, and the journey struggles to advance.

Second, Operational Red Flags. Three types of signal trigger scepticism and withdrawal: first, Astroturfing signals (templated slogans, synchronised flooding, and top-comment capture indicating “pseudo-spontaneous” activity); second, Fatigue → Backlash (high-frequency homogeneous stimuli induce aesthetic fatigue and backlash); third, Risk-aversion triggers (risks concerning authenticity, workmanship, or public opinion). Netnography shows that Weibo topic pages are, within a short time window, occupied by unified slogans and templated replies, accompanied by long reply chains and repeated images, indicating comment control and flooding (Appendix 3.1: W_07, W_08); by contrast, posts accompanied by in-store presence, in-hand live shots, or receipts are more likely to remain in the ‘assessable’ set. Interviewees corroborate this: P01, “If the comments feel too ‘managed’, it puts me off.”; P07, “Flooding or comment control lowers credibility, and I won’t click.” According to the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994), once persuasive intent or manipulative cues are detected, audiences activate defensive processing, which—particularly in the luxury context—erodes authenticity and desirability. Boundary: if verifiable evidence is provided and discussion remains diverse, aversion can be partially mitigated, yet most users still shift to wait-and-verify rather than immediate action.

Third, De-fandom Moves which means to avoid being labelled as “fans” or as making a stance, non-fans manage identity in two ways: first, Fandom-tag avoidance, meaning not choosing strongly celebrity-tied same-items or limited editions, opting instead for neutral colourways and low-recognisability styles, and reducing public interactions; second, De-fandom framing, meaning using neutral phrasing such as “bystander view/not sponsored/only discussing workmanship and price” to pull the discussion back to product and evidence, thereby down-weighting identity cues and strengthening verifiable information to maintain evaluative autonomy. Netnography shows that at major moments, Weibo frequently features strong identity displays such as receipt walls/store check-ins (Appendix 3.1: W_05, W_06); in contrast, bystander/non-fan content states in the title or opening “non-fan review/only discussing quality and price”, accompanied by in-hand/on-body shots and receipts as support (Appendix 3.1: D_02, D_04). Interviewees corroborate this path: P07, “Avoid strongly celebrity-tied items to dodge ‘fandom signalling’; prefer rational guidance.”; P08, “If the drama is about values or a real quality issue, I drop it... I go back to product, price, and fit.” When the persona narrative aligns closely with one’s personal schema and evidence is sufficient, identity concerns ease and exploration may still move forward.

4.4.2 Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey

The core claim of this theme is that, once attention and mild favourability have been activated by the foregoing mechanisms, whether to “continue – pause – abandon” is determined by four outcome gates: feasibility pre-screening, credibility verification, value/quality kill-switches, and delay and substitution (building on Theme 2 and Theme 5; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

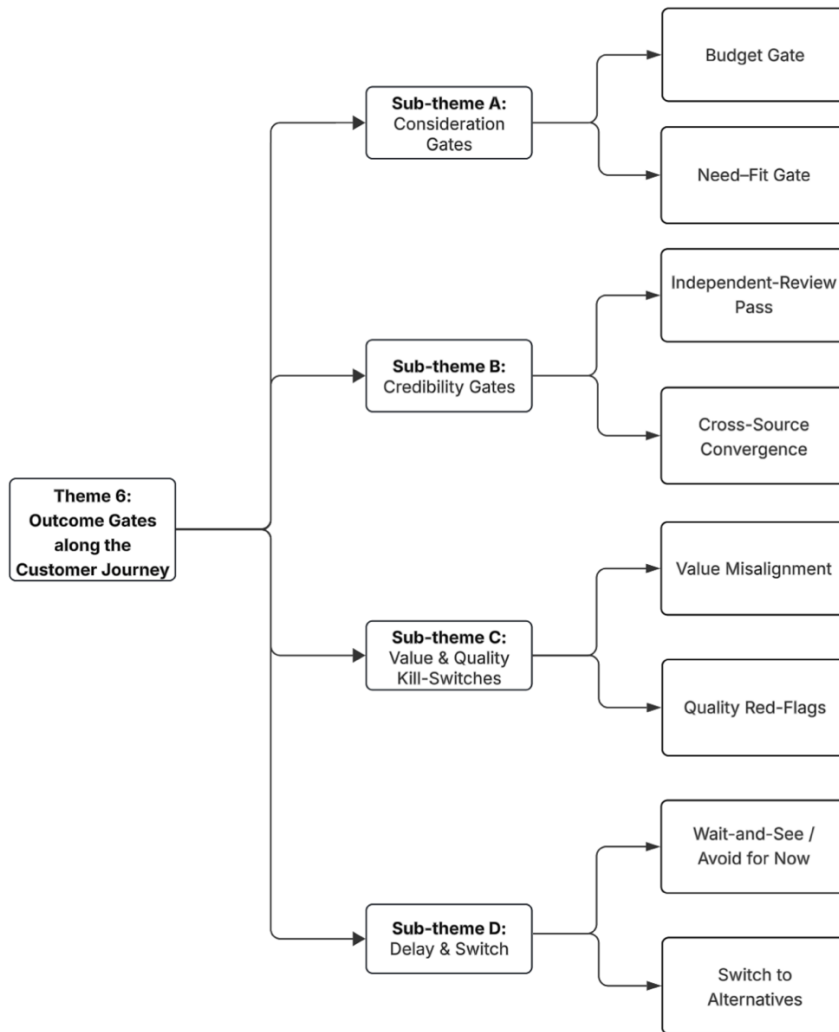


Figure 13: Theme 6 Sub-themes and Micro-mechanisms

First, Consideration Gates (feasibility pre-screening). Two hard thresholds determine whether serious evaluation can begin: the Budget gate (whether the budget is affordable, and whether it is worth adjusting the budget) and the Need-Fit gate (whether current use and context match: size and cut, style, and suitability for commuting or formal occasions). Netnography shows that under Douyin in-store or in-hand posts, comments conduct instant screening around “price × workmanship”, with order or collection screenshots plus SKU queries; when the budget is affordable and the use case is clear, progress advances quickly, otherwise it tends to remain at save or wait-and-see (Appendix 3.1: D_02, D_04). Interviewees corroborate this: P02, “Whether I buy still depends on my current need and budget.”; P01, “If the price is within my range and I like the endorser, I... give it a try.” These two gates translate “want to have a look” into “can it continue”; only when affordability and use-case fit are both satisfied does the individual proceed to subsequent credibility verification and value assessment.

Second, Credibility Gates. The two thresholds are: Independent-review pass (third-party or non-fan; verifiable; presenting balanced pros and cons in reviews and buyer feedback) and Cross-source convergence (multi-platform alignment on quality, sizing, workmanship and on-body effect). Netnography shows that on Douyin, in-store presence and order updates provide traceable evidence (Appendix 3.1: D_02, D_04); when these cues are corroborated by structured materials on Xiaohongshu, they are more readily judged credible (Appendix 3.1: X_03). Corresponding quotes: P01, “I usually wait and look for independent reviews, then decide based on my needs and budget.”; P03, “I look for objective reviews elsewhere... forums or buyer feedback.” If independent reviews are absent or cross-source conclusions diverge, the common outcome is deferral or continued evidence gathering, making it difficult to progress to subsequent value–quality scrutiny.

Third, Value & Quality Kill-Switches. Two triggers terminate the process immediately: Value misalignment (the brand’s or endorser’s value stance conflicts with the individual), and Quality red flags (consistent negative evidence on workmanship, materials, durability or after-sales, or a judgement of poor value for money). Interviewees were consistent: P08, “If the drama is about values or a real quality issue, I drop it... I go back to product, price, and fit.”; P01, “...if several say the stitching or leather is poor, I won’t buy.” (see also P02, P03). Unlike budget constraints, a kill-switch needs no further corroboration to veto; even if earlier gates have been passed, once either trigger appears, the most common outcome is delay or switching to alternatives.

Fourth, Delay & Switch. Wait-and-see (avoid for now) refers to temporarily exiting the current evaluation, awaiting more independent evidence or a cooling of the hype; Switch to alternatives refers to redirecting the same need towards other brands, or choosing safer styles and price points. Two illustrative quotations are: P01, “...I might wait it out. I usually look for independent reviews first.”; P03, “If reviews diverge, I switch to something else that fits my budget and style.” (see also P04, P07). In high-involvement and high-price contexts, pausing and switching are not hesitation but prudent strategies, meaning that when key gates are not cleared they channel the interest sparked by fan content towards more rational decision-making. If strong independent evidence subsequently emerges and price and/or fit improve, some who were waiting will restart evaluation; otherwise, the process typically terminates here.

4.5 summary of finding

This chapter explains, through three lenses, the pathways by which fans indirectly influence non-fans. Lens 1 (Reach & Cost) shows that, during event windows and with algorithmic surfacing, FGC produces short-lived visibility peaks within 3–14 days; instrumental cues such as “same-item lists” and “how-to guides” structure dispersed information, significantly reducing search and preliminary judgement costs and pushing attention from passive exposure to saving/adding to wishlists/initial price comparison (Top-of-Mind, but largely without immediate conversion). Lens 2 (Atmosphere & Framing) indicates that platform affective atmosphere and social-proof amplifiers (Hot Lists/top comments, peer co-presence) act jointly, and—within endorser–brand-fit narratives—reframe the brand as “more wearable, closer to everyday life”; however, when homogeneous flooding/comment management/over-polished imagery appears, they readily trigger affective backlash and identity/context pressures, with interest reverting to cautious watchfulness. Lens 3 (Gatekeeping & Outcomes) reveals that, before making choices, non-fans pass through authenticity gatekeeping and outcome gates: first the Budget/Need–Fit feasibility gates, then “three-step verification” (independent reviews → UGC reality check → cross-platform convergence) as credibility gates; once value misalignment or quality red-flag kill-switches are triggered, deferral or switching to alternatives follows.

Considered collectively, fan influence on non-fans is indirect and conditional: only when verifiable evidence and cross-source consistency appear, and align with personal budget, needs and context, does interest move from “being seen” to “assessable or actionable”; otherwise, it shifts to wait–verify or substitution paths.

Research Question	Sub-Research Question	Key Findings (by Lens/Theme)	Managerial Implication
How do Chinese fan communities indirectly influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' brand perception and purchase decisions in the luxury fashion sector through social media-driven content and practices?	How do fan contents reach non-fans and shape initial attention?	Lens 1 / Themes 1–2: Event×algorithm create short-window peaks; same-item/how-to toolkits structure information and lower search/initial judgment cost, prompting saves & wishlists; mostly non-immediate conversion.	During event windows, use single-screen evidence cards + structured toolkits to minimise off-platform search.
	How do social proof and affective atmosphere shape interpretive frames?	Lens 2 / Themes 3–4: Trending/hot comments + peer presence signal “worth a look”; endorser–brand fit & co-constructed narratives amplify wearability; over-polish/control triggers fatigue/backlash.	Limit templating/control; replace with lived, everyday evidence to reduce distance.
	How do non-fans gatekeep authenticity and make decisions?	Lens 3 / Themes 5–6: Truth heuristics + three-step verification; budget/need gates → independent reviews & convergence → value/quality kill-switch → continue/delay/switch.	Visualise the verification path and use neutral, de-fandom framing to raise credibility pass-rates.

Table 8: How the Findings Answer the Research Questions

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Objective 2: To analyse how Chinese fan communities co-create and disseminate brand meaning through user-generated content, emotional labour, and collective action on social media.

This section revolves around Objective Two and explains how fan communities co create and diffuse brand meaning through UGC emotional mobilisation and collective action guiding the shift from 'passively being seen' to the next step of 'being assessable and actionable' (Katz, 1957; Watts & Dodds, 2007; Duke, 2023). Evidence from Theme One and Theme Two shows that the superposition of events and interaction density triggers algorithmic surfacing and multiple entry point presentation which makes content significantly raise visibility and talking points within a short window of approximately 3 to 14 days mainly enhancing 'saliency' rather than immediate persuasion. At the same time fan compiled same item toolkits price/stock prompts pitfall avoidance and authenticity verification guidance reduce search and judgement costs turning attention into light actions such as 'collections/wish lists/preliminary searches' and providing inputs for subsequent verification (independent reviews cross checking with UGC in real life scenarios cross platform triangulated verification; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This is consistent with existing conclusions that social cues at the upstream stage of the customer journey emphasise the enhancement of saliency (Cialdini et al., 1999; Muchnik, Aral & Taylor, 2013; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This study further supplements that in the Chinese platform context only when information is organised into retrievable and traceable packages will non fans continue to advance evaluation and when structural follow on is lacking short term heat tends to cool rapidly thereby correcting the tendency to equate 'visibility' with 'influence'.

At the mechanism level it can be detailed into three steps. First interaction density and celebrity nodes bring topicality which drives algorithmic amplification and forms short window peaks; second tool based cues translate saliency into actionable information

inputs with a common path of 'save lists first then compare prices and check'; third when manipulative cues such as templated mass posting and comment control are recognised persuasion knowledge is activated and behaviour shifts from following to pausing and prioritising the search for verifiable evidence such as receipts in hand real photos and third party reviews. In the high involvement and identity sensitive luxury context exposure is a necessary rather than sufficient condition and what determines whether to proceed is the information structure that supports verification and cross comparison which is the bridge from 'being seen' to 'being verifiable' (Cialdini et al., 1999; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Overall fan communities rely on platform surfacing and structured toolkits to co create and diffuse an 'actionable' brand meaning which prompts non fans to move from passive seeing to active saving cross comparison and verification and checking yet this influence is indirect and conditional (Katz, 1957; Watts & Dodds, 2007).

5.1.2 Objective 3: To investigate how fan-led communication and behaviours indirectly influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' brand perceptions, emotional responses, and purchase decisions.

This section revolves around Objective three and examines how the emotional atmosphere social proof and the co construction of narrative and endorser fit in fan content indirectly shape nonfans' cognition and evaluation of luxury brands at the stage of visibility to judgement framing (Cialdini et al., 1999; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Synthesising Themes Three and Four emotional rendering and peer presence first translate heat into an initial framing of 'worth a look' increasing clicking saving and preliminary searching, but once manipulative cues appear such as templated mass posting and comment control curiosity quickly turns into fatigue and counter hype and individuals fall back to waiting and verification. If the narrative of fan brand endorser matches in persona and brand temperament it will bring a temporary halo of youthfulness and approachability, mismatch will raise a sense of distance and doubt and weaken the motivation to continue exploring. A parallel evidential path is 'verifiable cues' including store presence in hand or on body real photos receipts and orders and third-party reviews which can shorten psychological distance improve credibility and offset suspicion of 'like advertising', when absent it is easier to press the pause button.

The point of convergence with existing research lies in that social proof mainly raises salience and initial liking rather than directly persuading and individuals usually remain in the transition zone from awareness to consideration and require subsequent verification and fit gates to undertake (Cialdini et al., 1999; Muchnik, Aral & Taylor, 2013; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

This study emphasises two types of boundary. First manipulative cues activate persuasion knowledge induce defence and resistance and make the path fall back to waiting and verification. Second identity and situational pressures such as herd anxiety or mismatch of use scenarios will pull interest back to a de-fandomised neutral evaluation frame focusing only on workmanship price and non-partnership experience. Mechanistically it can be summarised in three steps. First topicality and peer cues raise attention and saving at the event peak but fall back rapidly in about three days. Second fit transfer makes the appropriate persona spill over favourability and improve recall, mismatch spills over into doubt. Third after identifying manipulative cues individuals actively seek independent reviews and cross source consistency until verifiable evidence reaches a psychological threshold. From this a critical judgement is proposed that in the high involvement scenario of non-fans × luxury fan cues mainly take effect indirectly through framing and re-interpretation then first place the brand in an explanatory frame of 'worthy of attention/better styling' and then use authenticity and fit to check whether to proceed, over-mobilisation is not only difficult to promote conversion but also erodes credibility and strengthens de-fandomised evaluation. Placed in the overall chain Objective Three is located in the middle stage of reach and amplification to perception framing, Theme Three provides salience and an emotional base tone and Theme Four concretises the persona-brand relationship, then authenticity gatekeeping and result gates determine the different outcomes of purchase waiting substitution or avoidance. In summary fan cues through the two paths of 'emotion/social proof' and 'narrative/fit' indirectly and conditionally rewrite the evaluation frame of non-fans, only when verifiable evidence is sufficient and identity and scene fit are established can judgement move from 'a look' to 'serious consideration'.

5.1.3 Objective 4: To identify the opportunities and challenges for luxury brands in leveraging fan communities as informal brand communicators.

This section centres on the fourth research objective and focuses on how non fans before entering evaluation and choice decide to continue delay or give up through authenticity gatekeeping and result gates. Synthesising Themes Five and Six non fans first search for verifiable evidence to establish basic trust including store presence in hand or on body real photos receipts or orders with time and amount independent third party reviews and cross platform consistency, at the same time they identify templated slogans identical image mass posting control of the comment area and the like as manipulative cues which makes the interest brought by heat quickly turn into doubt and pause. To avoid being drawn into identity signalling audiences tend to adopt de-fandomised evaluation and pull the discussion back to workmanship price quality and the match with personal context. On this basis gate screening is initiated. First look at budget and need then look at credibility and multi source convergence. Once a value or quality 'one vote veto' is triggered it is more likely to delay or turn to substitution. This path is consistent with the main line of the customer journey and also confirms that social proof raises salience more than it directly persuades, when audiences perceive manipulative cues persuasion knowledge is activated and they prioritise entering waiting and verification (Cialdini et al., 1999; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Muchnik, Aral & Taylor, 2013; Sunstein, 2017; boyd, 2014).

This study further finds in the Chinese platform context of luxury which is high involvement and identity sensitive that a 'one vote veto' on value and quality is sufficient to cut off immediately the interest chain triggered by fan content forming an empirical correction to the linear assumption of visibility equals conversion (Muchnik, Aral & Taylor, 2013). Mechanistically it can be summarised in three points. First verification comes first, non fans usually first check independent reviews and examine cross source consistency and only continue when the minimum credibility threshold is met, second risk avoidance, once quality red flags authenticity doubts or value conflicts appear there is a tendency to delay or substitute, third manipulative cues trigger distrust and after identifying comment control or mass posting people often enter waiting and verification or even avoidance. Placed in the overall chain the third

lens is located at the end gate after reach and amplification to perception framing. Authenticity gatekeeping determines whether it is possible to enter an assessable state from being seen and being framed and result gates ultimately lead to purchase waiting substitution or avoidance. The conclusion is that the final behaviour of non-fans depends on a closely connected gatekeeping and gate chain, only when evidence is verifiable and information converges and value and budget match at the same time can interest be transformed into action, once manipulative cues value conflicts or quality red flags appear the more common direction is watching and waiting or substitution and the role of fan content therefore presents as indirect and conditional.

5.2 Managerial Implications & Recommendations

5.2.1 Preliminary Insight: Endorser Selection & Fan-Community Co-governance

To provide a common baseline for subsequent recommendations on reach, framing and boundaries, this section first proposes a key insight that in the selection and placement of endorsers for luxury brands in China, the evaluation object should be expanded from the individual artist to the artist plus his or her fan community, and that through fan backbone mapping, co creation boundaries and cold start coordination, the amplification effect of fans should be translated from emotional heat into verifiable, retrievable and matchable information and conversion paths. As secondary spreaders and intermediary nodes, fans will spill over the brand narrative to non fan circles through UGC, and their influence is first reflected in salience and framing (Two Step Flow; Network diffusion, see Katz 1957; Watts and Dodds 2007; Münch et al. 2021).

One possible solution is to establish a Fan Backbone Mapping and Steward Council. Phase One maps the backbone and mid level clusters, focusing on structural influence and cross circle reach; Phase Two jointly drafts with the backbone creation briefs and negative lists (anti comment control, anti mass posting), shifting to evidence priority and de fandomised expression (real try ons, in store presence, pros and cons presented together, traceable information packs); Phase Three led by the backbone produces same item or price or authenticity information packs and verification paths, adopting indicators such as verification clicks, diversity of comments and the

proportion of non-fan interactions to replace single exposure. In terms of cost, fan digital labour is mostly voluntary, and interest driven (Jenkins 1992 or 2006; Fiske 1992; Hills 2013; Wang 2020; Linden and Linden 2018), but reciprocity and attribution, transparent boundaries and anti-manipulation principles are needed to balance efficiency and ethics.

5.2.1 Lens 1: Reach & Amplification

A key insight is that the short window visibility brought by fans around 3 to 14 days needs to be quickly translated into verifiable, retrievable, and comparable information assets; otherwise, being seen or being discussed remains at the level of salience and is difficult to enter evaluation and conversion. Chapter Four shows that events and interactions push content to discovery, trending and homepage, and non-fans mostly save first and then verify; after identifying comment control and mass posting they turn to waiting and verification. This is consistent with the view that social proof only raises salience in the upstream of the journey and needs to be taken over by Evaluation (Cialdini et al., 1999; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) and fits the models of collaborative diffusion by ordinary nodes and of visibility not equalling persuasion (Watts and Dodds, 2007; Muchnik et al., 2013). One possible solution is to adopt evidence first first screen during peak periods, placing verifiable evidence and key parameters on the first screen, and then presenting emotional materials; to structure same item, price, stock and authenticity into save and compare ready information packs with unified labels and timelines, and to implement collaboration guidelines against comment control and mass posting. Evaluation first screen dwell time, saves or wish lists, verification clicks, comment diversity and red flag public opinion; when deviation occurs correct according to “cooling down, clarification, supplementary evidence”.

5.2.2 Lens 2: Perception & Framing

A key insight is that it is necessary to guide emotional atmosphere times social proof towards a neutral and verifiable worth a look framing, retain the positive transfer of endorser and brand fit, and suppress the drag of mismatch and emotional backlash. Chapter Four shows that a fitting persona can in the short term enhance youthfulness and approachability; once it is identified as comment control, mass posting or

excessive retouching, favourability quickly returns to waiting and verification. This mechanism is consistent with the views that social proof raises salience rather than directly persuading and that fit is constrained by authenticity and information quality and accords with the persuasion knowledge explanation that perceiving manipulation activates defence. One possible solution is to normalise wind tunnel testing of fit for non-fan samples (A or B measurement of Endorser Brand Fit and like advertising or sense of distance), if the threshold is not met then adjust or switch to a life oriented evidence line; provide a de-fandomised neutral view (weaken slogans and hints of comment control, strengthen real try ons, presentation of pros and cons, scenario based explanations); curate a credible UGC pool, aggregating third party evaluations, in hand real shots, in store presence and receipts and other evidence, and use cross source convergence as the standard for release, directing salience into assessable.

5.2.3 Lens 3: Behaviour & Boundaries

A key insight is that before any conversion action, users need to first pass through the credibility gate whether there is verifiable evidence and whether manipulative cues exist and the outcome gate whether budget and need fit and whether value and quality meet the standard. Chapter Four shows that non fans verify first and then act; once red flags or a one vote veto on value and quality appear, there is an easy shift into delay or substitution. This is consistent with social proof raising salience and needing to be taken over by independent evaluations and cross source convergence in Evaluation; manipulative cues will activate persuasion knowledge and strengthen waiting and checking (Cialdini et al., 1999; Muchnik, Aral & Taylor, 2013 ; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016 ; Sunstein,2009 ; boyd, 2014). One possible solution is to productise the verification path and embed it into content pages and product pages, aggregating third party evaluations and buyer feedback, providing cross platform consistency indicators and evidence traceability; launch authenticity and workmanship proof packs, front loading credibility to the first screen; establish a red flag radar and response scripts, monitoring comment control, mass posting and quality complaints and executing in sequence cooling down, clarification and supplementary evidence; add a budget and scenario matcher to help judge with price bands and scenario suggestions whether it is worth it and whether it will be used. Evaluation focuses on verification

clicks to add to basket and conversion, return rate, the proportion of delay and substitution, and handling time, with monthly reviews to correct.

5.3 Final conclusions

5.3.1 Originality and contribution to scholarship

This study focuses on the issue of how fans indirectly influence Gen Z non fans in the context of Chinese luxury goods, adopts a multi method design of netnography and semi structured interviews, and completes the established A&O. On the basis of systematically reviewing the literature on fan culture, social cues and the customer journey, it proposes and tests with evidence an indirect influence chain composed of reach → framing → gatekeeping or gates. This framework rewrites the role of fan content from linear persuasion to conditional transfer and makes clear that social proof driven by fans first enhances salience and a worth a look framing, while real conversion depends on subsequent credibility gates independent evaluations, cross source consistency and outcome gates matching of budget, value and quality.

At the theoretical level, the study makes contextualised extensions to two classical models. First, it combines social proof with the customer journey, revealing the mechanism difference that visibility does not equal persuasion, and proposes de fandomised evaluation as a key process by which non fans maintain autonomy of judgement. Second, with the help of the two step flow and network diffusion perspective, it emphasises cascading amplification driven by the collaboration of ordinary nodes rather than single point KOLs in the Chinese platform ecology. The study also provides boundary conditions. When manipulative cues such as comment control, templated mass posting and excessive retouching appear, counter hype or reactance is triggered, making the path return to waiting and verification, thereby explaining the pattern that heat is difficult to convert in the context of luxury goods.

At the methodological and conceptual level, the thesis uses the analytical device of three lenses plus six themes to achieve triangulated corroboration between interviews and platform evidence, and proposes operable concepts such as instrumental cues, information packs and verification paths and red flag cues to describe the micro

mechanisms from attention to choice. Overall, the study localises Western communication and social proof theories to the context of Chinese luxury goods and Gen Z nonfans, provides a generalisable conceptual framework and a set of reusable qualitative analysis paths, and lays a theoretical and methodological foundation for subsequent research on indirect influence in high involvement categories.

5.3.2 Limitations and areas for further research

Limitation

Limitation	How it could bias findings	Extrapolation boundary	Suggested remedy in future work
Cross-sectional, single time-window design (same period for all data)	Cannot observe temporal change or causal ordering; the recurring 3–14-day “visibility window” is noted but not tested for persistence/seasonality	Patterns within one marketing window only; weaker claims across cycles/seasons	Longitudinal/panel tracking across multiple cycles; time-series or event-study analyses
Public-UGC-only netnography on Xiaohongshu/Weibo/Douyin (excludes private domains, offline chains)	Overlooks closed-loop verification (evidence → fit → outcome) in brand WeChat/member groups; may miss after-sales feedback and repeat purchase dynamics	Generalisable primarily to public-platform ecologies; private-domain dynamics unknown	Add private-domain ethnography and member-community observation; link to CRM/after-sales data where feasible
Algorithmic visibility bias towards “heat”/interactions	Inflates weight of highly interactive posts; underestimates low-	Biased salience/weighting of cues on public feeds	Time-stratified sampling; shadow profiles; manual searches; (where

	interaction but meaningful evidence		permitted) API/archival pulls to capture low-interaction items
Small qualitative corpus (8 interviews; 26 UGC screenshots) focused on mechanism explanation	Depth over breadth; transferability limited; rare patterns may be missed	Chinese Gen-Z non-fans in luxury context on three public platforms	Mixed-methods expansion (survey + behavioural logs); larger, stratified samples
Interview recall bias (order/frequency of seeing, searching, comparing)	Timing and sequence details may be imprecise	Sequence inferences tentative	Stimulated recall with prompts/screenshots; media diaries; passive digital traces (with consent)
Narrow context scope (Gen-Z, luxury category, China; three platforms)	Limits generalisation to other ages, categories (non-luxury), and platform ecologies	Applicability beyond the stated scope is uncertain	Comparative designs across age cohorts, city tiers, brand tiers, and categories; platform-by-platform replications

Table 9: Study limitations and boundaries

Areas for further research

Research path	Core aim	Design & data	Example interventions / measures	Expected contribution
Longitudinal panel tracking across marketing cycles	Test time-series and lag effects of salience, verification, and gates	Follow the same non-fans over multiple cycles (rolling netnography + repeat interviews/diaries)	Salience decay; delay from exposure→verification→choice; gate pass/fail rates by cycle	Extends time dimension; reveals temporal dynamics
Mixed-methods integration (survey + behavioural data)	Strengthen mechanism evidence statistically and triangulate with QUAL	Questionnaire linked (where feasible) to clickstream/store visits; built on prior qualitative tracking	Cue-trust scales; verification clicks; dwell time; add-to-wishlist; purchase/proxy conversion	Improves external validity; tightens causal plausibility
City-tier & brand-tier comparisons	Assess transferability boundaries across contexts	Stratified sampling (Tier-1 vs new-Tier-1 cities; core luxury vs affordable luxury)	Differences in de-fandomised evaluation paths; verification depth; budget/fit thresholds	Maps where/when mechanisms travel
A/B interventions & causal identification	Estimate net treatment effects of framing/entry surfaces	Randomised or quasi-experimental tests: evidence-first screen vs emotion-first	Saves; verification clicks; CTR; conversion; bounce	Identifies which cues move which gates; supports causal claims

		screen; neutral de-fandomised framing		
Private-domain communities & closed-loop verification	Observe evidence→fit→outcome gates in closed settings and their link to public platforms	Ethnography/trace data in brand WeChat/member communities; after-sales & repeat-purchase linkage	Time from query→proof; complaint closure; repeat-purchase rates; cross-channel handoffs	Shows public–private complementarity at the credibility gate

Table 10: Areas for further research (actionable designs)

5.4 Overall Project Summary

This study examines how Chinese fan communities indirectly influence Gen Z non-fans' brand cognition and choices in the context of luxury goods. Through a multi method qualitative design netnography plus semi structured interviews, the thesis proposes and validates a three-stage mechanism of reach and amplification, perception and framing, behaviour, and boundaries, showing that fan cues mainly raise salience, while actual conversion depends on credibility and outcome gates. Theoretically, the study contextualises social proof and the customer journey as conditional influence and emphasises the key roles of de fandomised evaluation and verifiable evidence. At the managerial level, it recommends implementing evidence first content presentation, fit testing of endorsers and fan communities, co governance mechanisms with backbone fans, and embedded verification paths. Despite being limited by the cross-sectional design and the visibility of public platforms, this framework provides a transferable analytical perspective for high involvement categories. Overall, this project turns being seen into a testable path from attention to action and proposes actionable levers for responsibly mobilising fan communities.

REFERENCE LIST

Reference list

- Berl, R.E.W., Samarasinghe, A.N., Roberts, S.G., Jordan, F.M. and Gavin, M.C. (2021). Prestige and content biases together shape the cultural transmission of narratives. *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 3. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/ehs.2021.37>.
- Boyd, D. (2014). *It's complicated: the Social Lives of Networked teens*. Yale University Press.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, [online] 3(2), pp.77–101. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Caruana, E., Roman, M., Sánchez, J.H. and Solli, P. (2015). Longitudinal Studies. *Journal of Thoracic Disease*, 7(11), pp.537–540. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3978/j.issn.2072-1439.2015.10.63>.
- Cialdini, R.B., Wosinska, W., Barrett, D.W., Butner, J. and Gornik-Durose, M. (1999). Compliance with a Request in Two Cultures: The Differential Influence of Social Proof and Commitment/Consistency on Collectivists and Individualists. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, [online] 25(10), pp.1242–1253. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167299258006>.
- CNNIC (2024). *The 53 rd Statistical Report on China's Internet Development*. [online] Available at: <https://www.cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/202405/P020240509518443205347.pdf>.
- Creswell, J. and Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 5th ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Cui, D. and Wu, F. (2024). Toward an operationality perspective on fandom: Exploring Chinese fans' emerging practices in platform-mediated environments. *New Media & Society*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241249134>.

- Dan, M., Wang, J. and Chen, J. (2023). Observations of Chinese fandom: organizational characteristics and the relationships inside and outside the 'Fan circle'. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*, 10(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-023-00197-2>.
- Denzin, N.K. (1978). *The research act : a theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2018). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Duffett, M. (2013). *Understanding fandom: An introduction to the study of media fan culture*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Duke, D. (2023). Why User-Generated Content Is Winning. *Forbes*. [online] Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2023/03/13/why-user-generated-content-is-winning/>.
- Eriksson, P. and Kovalainen, A. (2016). *Qualitative methods in business research*. Los Angeles, California ; London, England: Sage.
- Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: the Opportunity and Challenge of Reflexivity in Research Practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), pp.209–230. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410200200205>.
- Fiske, J. (1992). *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, p.20.
- Friestad, M. and Wright, P. (1994). The persuasion knowledge model: How people cope with persuasion attempts. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(1), pp.1–31. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1086/209380>.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gioia, D.A., Corley, K.G. and Hamilton, A.L. (2013). Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), pp.15–31. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151>.

- Guschwan, M. (2012). Fandom, brandom and the limits of participatory culture. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 12(1), pp.19–40. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540512438154>.
- Hellekson, K. (2015). *The Cambridge companion to American science fiction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hills, M. (2013). Fiske’s ‘textual productivity’ and digital fandom: Web 2.0 democratization versus fan distinction? . *Participations*, Volume 10(1), pp.130–153.
- Hung, K. (2020). Celebrity and Influencer in a Fan Economy: Unfolding the Fans’ Roles in Enhancing Endorsement Effects. in *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Media Fandom*, Robert Andrew Dunn (ed.), Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 323-340.
- Jain, V. and Roy, S. (2016). Understanding meaning transfer in celebrity endorsements: a qualitative exploration. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 19(3), pp.266–286. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/qmr-03-2015-0020>.
- Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Kapferer, J.-N. and Bastien, V. (2012). The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 23(3), pp.244–245. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/jpbm-04-2013-0294>.
- Kapitan, S. and Silvera, D.H. (2016). From Digital Media Influencers to Celebrity endorsers: Attributions Drive Endorser Effectiveness. *Marketing Letters*, [online] 27(3), pp.553–567. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-015-9363-0>.
- Kaplan, A.M. and Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! the Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), pp.59–68. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>.
- Katz, E. (1957). The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-To-Date Report on an Hypothesis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 21(1), pp.61–78. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1086/266687>.

Keen, A. (2007). *The Cult of the Amateur : How today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture and Assaulting Our Economy*. London: Nicholas Brealey.

Kirmani, A. and Zhu, R.J. (2007). Vigilant against Manipulation: The Effect of Regulatory Focus on the Use of Persuasion Knowledge. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 44(4), pp.688–701. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.44.4.688>.

Kozinets, R.V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined*. SAGE.

Lannes, B., Xing, W. and Gu, E. (2025). *2024 China Luxury Goods Market: Navigating Turbulent Waters*. [online] Bain & Company. Available at: <https://www.bain.com/insights/2024-china-luxury-goods-market/>.

Lemon, K.N. and Verhoef, P.C. (2016). Understanding Customer Experience Throughout the Customer Journey. *Journal of Marketing*, [online] 80(6), pp.69–96. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0420>.

Li, F., Larimo, J. and Leonidou, L.C. (2021). Social Media Marketing strategy: definition, conceptualization, taxonomy, validation, and Future Agenda. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, [online] 49(1), pp.51–70. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-020-00733-3>.

Li, Q. (2024). The Transformation of Luxury Brands Marketing Strategies in Social Media. *Advances in Economics, Management and Political Sciences*, 105(1), pp.178–184. doi:<https://doi.org/10.54254/2754-1169/105/20241954>.

Linden, S. and Linden, H. (2018). *FANS AND FAN CULTURES : tourism, consumerism and social media*. S.L.: Palgrave Macmillan.

McKinsey & Company (2024). *What Is Gen z?* [online] McKinsey & Company. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-gen-z>.

Metzler, H. and García, D. (2023). Social drivers and algorithmic mechanisms on digital media. *PsyArXiv (OSF Preprints)*, 19(5). doi:<https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/cxa9u>.

Moreno-Gavara , C. and Jiménez-Zarco , A. (2016). *Global marketing strategies for the promotion of luxury goods*. Hershey, Pennsylvania (701 E. Chocolate Avenue, Hershey, PA 17033, USA): IGI Global, p.38.

- Muchnik, L., Aral, S. and Taylor, S.J. (2013). Social Influence Bias: A Randomized Experiment. *Science*, [online] 341(6146), pp.647–651.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1240466>.
- Peredy, Z., Vigh, L., Quingyu, W. and Muiy, J. (2024). Analysing Generation Z Communication Attitudes, Values and Norms. *Acta Periodica*, [online] 30, pp.4–19.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.47273/ap.2024.30.4-19>.
- Riessman, C.K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2023). *Research Methods for Business Students*. 9th ed. [online] Pearson. Available at:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240218229_Research_Methods_for_Business_Students.
- statista (2023). *Gen Z consumers in China*. [online] Statista. Available at:
<https://www.statista.com/topics/9889/gen-z-consumers-in-china/#topicOverview>.
- Sunstein, C.R. (2009). *On rumors how falsehoods spread, why we believe them, what can be done*. New York, N.Y. Farrar, Straus And Giroux.
- Theocharis, D. and Tsekouropoulos, G. (2025). Sustainable Consumption and Branding for Gen Z: How Brand Dimensions Influence Consumer Behavior and Adoption of Newly Launched Technological Products. *Sustainability*, 17(9), p.4124.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/su17094124>.
- UAL (2020). *UAL Code of Practice on Research Ethics*. [online] Available at:
https://www.arts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/43328/UAL-Code-of-Practice-on-Research-Ethics-October-2020.pdf.
- Wang, Y. (2022). A Conceptual Framework of Contemporary Luxury Consumption. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, [online] 39(3), pp.788–803.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2021.10.010>.

Wang, Z. (2020). The Complicated Digital Fandom: Empowerment and Exploitation of Fans in Digital Media Era. *Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(2), pp.45–50.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.11648/j.hss.20200802.11>.

Watts, D.J. and Dodds, P.S. (2007). Influentials, Networks, and Public Opinion Formation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(4), pp.441–458. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1086/518527>.

Wu, G., Jiang, J. and Wang, X. (2025). Dual Exploitation and the Long Tail Effect: The Affective Labor of Chinese Real Person Slash Fan Production. *Television & New Media*.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/15274764251324474>.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

NAME: Shu Hua				
COLLEGE: London College of Fashion				
IF YOUR RESEARCH INVOLVES PARTICIPANTS, PLEASE COMPLETE QUESTIONS 1 TO 9. IF NOT, GO TO QUESTION 10 BELOW.				
1. Will the participants be: (please tick as appropriate)				
Students at the University Participants outside the University Other (please specify)	<table border="1"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table> Respondents are Gen Z non-fan consumers in China and are not UAL insiders.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. How will participants be recruited and how many will be involved?				
Participants will be recruited through purposive sampling based on their social media activity and interest in fashion/lifestyle content, but who are not fans of brand spokespersons. The study will involve 8 to 10 Gen Z participants from China.				
3. What will the participants be asked to do? (Explain in terms appropriate to a lay person)				
Participants will take part in semi-structured online interviews (via Zoom or similar platform) where they will be asked about their perceptions of fan behaviour on social media and how it affects their judgement and feelings toward luxury fashion brands.				
4. What potential risks to the interests of participants do you foresee and what steps will you take to minimise those risks? (A participant's interests include their physical and psychological well-being, their commercial interests; and their rights of privacy and reputation).				
Potential risks include discomfort in discussing social media behaviour or brand preferences. To minimise these risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation is voluntary and withdrawal is allowed at any time without penalty. • All responses will be anonymised. • Pseudonyms will be used in data storage and reporting. 				
5. What potential risks to yourself as research student do you foresee and what steps will you take to minimise those risks? (e.g. does your research raise issues of personal safety for you or others involved in the project, especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises)				
As the interviews are conducted online, personal safety risks are minimal. To further reduce risk: All interviews will be conducted via secure digital platforms No personal addresses or contact details will be shared.				
6. Please attach a copy of proposed written consent form and information sheet to be given to participants. If you are not obtaining written consent or supplying an information sheet, please explain the reasons for this.				
Attached: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
7. Does your project involve children or vulnerable adults e.g. a person with a learning disability? YES/NO				
If YES, you must refer to the Guidance Note on Informed Consent in the Code of Practice on Research Ethics and obtain a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. <table border="1" style="float: right;"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>				
Please tick to confirm this has been obtained: No No minors or vulnerable groups are involved.				
Please refer to the guidance note on data protection available at http://www.arts.ac.uk/research/researching-actual/researcher-support/ before answering the next question. Please consider the value of coding; the importance of secure storage and disposal of personal information, particularly sensitive data (e.g. records of health, origin, criminal record etc.)				

8. Will you be obtaining personal data from any of the participants? YES/NO

If YES:

- (a) **Give details:** Basic demographic information (e.g., age group, social media habits), and subjective opinions on brand perceptions.
- (b) **How will you store and use this information during the course of your research?**
Data will be stored securely on a password-protected drive. Only anonymised data will be used in analysis and reporting.
- (a) **What parts of this information will be confidential?**
All interview transcripts and identifiable data.
- (b) **Will you separate personal identifiers from other (coded) personal data, and if so how will you safeguard the key?**
Yes, names and contact details will be stored separately from coded transcripts.
- (c) **Will personal data be irreversibly anonymised or, if you have separated the data, will the linking code between the two databases be destroyed?**
Yes, once data is transcribed and coded, identifying information will be deleted.
- (d) **At the conclusion of your research:**
- (i) **Which of your data sets do you intend to retain personally for use in future research?** None.
 - (ii) **Which do you intend to archive for other researchers?** None.
 - (iii) **Which do you intend to destroy?** None.
- (e) **Depending on your answers to (f):**
- (iv) **If you intend to retain certain data sets for future use or to archive them: (i.i) How will they be stored?**
On a password-protected university or personal encrypted drive.
- (i.ii) Will participants be informed what data will be retained, and will their consent be obtained for this?**
Yes, this will be stated in the information sheet and consent form.
- (v) **If you intend to destroy certain data sets at the conclusion of the research:**
- (ii.i) **Explain why this is appropriate**
 - (ii.ii) **How will you ensure that the data will be disposed of in such a way that there is no risk of its confidentiality being compromised**
Secure deletion of files and emptying of trash to ensure data is irrecoverable.

9. Will payments to participants be made? YES/NO

(If YES, please state amount and whether payment is for out-of-pocket expenses, or a fee)

10. Will any restrictions be placed on the publication of results? YES/NO

(If YES, please state the nature of the restrictions, e.g. details of any confidentiality agreement)

11. I confirm my responsibility to deliver the project in accordance with the Code of Practice on Research Ethics of the University of the Arts London (the University). In signing this form, I am also confirming that:

- a) **The form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.**
- b) **There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.**
- c) **I undertake to conduct the project as set out in the application unless deviation is agreed by the University and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter sent by the relevant College Research body and/or the University's Research Ethics Sub-Committee.**
- d) **I understand and accept that the ethical propriety of this project may be monitored by the relevant College Research body and/or the University's Research Ethics Sub-Committee.**

Signature of
Researcher:

Hua Shu

Date: 2025/06/21

12. I support this project and have reviewed it with the applicant:

Signature of *Dr. Bruno Cignacco*

Supervisor: _____ Date: 27/6/2025

APPENDIX 2: INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT SIGNED CONSENT FORMS

Participate 01 (P01)

ual:

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: Fan Culture as Informal Brand Power: An Exploratory Study of How Chinese Fan Communities Influence non-fans Gen Z Consumers' Decision-Making and Brand perception in the Luxury Fashion Brand

Student Lead: Shu Hua

Email address: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

Phone number: +44 07784694355

Dear participants,

You are invited to participate in:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring how Chinese fan communities influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' perceptions, emotional responses, and purchasing decisions toward luxury fashion brands via social media engagement.

Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate.

Why have you been approached?

You have been selected because you are a Chinese Gen Z consumer interested in fashion/lifestyle but not a current fan of any luxury brand ambassador. Your experiences and opinions are valuable for understanding how fan-driven communication indirectly shapes consumer brand perceptions.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

You will take part in an online semi-structured interview (30–45 minutes) conducted via Zoom or WeChat. The interview will cover your observations and opinions regarding fan behaviours on social media and how they may impact your perception of fashion brands.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. All responses will be kept strictly confidential.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

While there are no direct personal benefits, your input will contribute to academic research on fan culture, branding, and Gen Z consumer behaviour. You may also gain insights into your own consumption habits.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Your interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All data will be anonymised and stored securely. Personal identifiers will be removed, and data will only be used for research purposes. You may withdraw your data at any time before anonymisation.

ual:

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to be de-identified in any photographs intended for public publication, before the point of publication
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions or want to withdraw my consent?

Name: Shu Hua

Email: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

PRIVACY NOTICE

Your personal data will be processed by UAL on its managed systems for research purposes with your explicit consent.

Your personal data will be anonymised before the end of the project (September 2025) and securely deleted thereafter.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information.

CONSENT TEMPLATE

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet
2. I agree to participate in the research project as described
3. I agree to the items checked below:

- to be interviewed
- that my voice will be audio recorded
- to be observed and for field notes to be taken
- that information obtained may be published in an anonymised form.

4. I acknowledge that:

- (a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
- (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
- (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.

ual:

- (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant's Consent

'I agree to the above as indicated and give my explicit consent under GDPR Art.6(1)(a) and Art.9(2)(a) for my personal data to be processed by UAL as indicated on this form, including any special category data I may choose to provide'

Participant
:

Yixin Han
(Signature)

Date:

13/07/2025

Participants should be given a copy of this after it has been signed.

ual:

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: Fan Culture as Informal Brand Power: An Exploratory Study of How Chinese Fan Communities Influence non-fans Gen Z Consumers' Decision-Making and Brand perception in the Luxury Fashion Brand

Student Lead: Shu Hua

Email address: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

Phone number: +44 07784694355

Dear participants,

You are invited to participate in:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring how Chinese fan communities influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' perceptions, emotional responses, and purchasing decisions toward luxury fashion brands via social media engagement.

Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate.

Why have you been approached?

You have been selected because you are a Chinese Gen Z consumer interested in fashion/lifestyle but not a current fan of any luxury brand ambassador. Your experiences and opinions are valuable for understanding how fan-driven communication indirectly shapes consumer brand perceptions.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

You will take part in an online semi-structured interview (30–45 minutes) conducted via Zoom or WeChat. The interview will cover your observations and opinions regarding fan behaviours on social media and how they may impact your perception of fashion brands.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. All responses will be kept strictly confidential.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

While there are no direct personal benefits, your input will contribute to academic research on fan culture, branding, and Gen Z consumer behaviour. You may also gain insights into your own consumption habits.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Your interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All data will be anonymised and stored securely. Personal identifiers will be removed, and data will only be used for research purposes. You may withdraw your data at any time before anonymisation.

ual:

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to be de-identified in any photographs intended for public publication, before the point of publication
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions or want to withdraw my consent?

Name: Shu Hua

Email: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

PRIVACY NOTICE

Your personal data will be processed by UAL on its managed systems for research purposes with your explicit consent.

Your personal data will be anonymised before the end of the project (September 2025) and securely deleted thereafter.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information.

CONSENT TEMPLATE

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet
2. I agree to participate in the research project as described
3. I agree to the items checked below:

- to be interviewed
- that my voice will be audio recorded
- to be observed and for field notes to be taken
- that information obtained may be published in an anonymised form.

4. I acknowledge that:
 - (a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
 - (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
 - (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.

ual:

- (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant's Consent

'I agree to the above as indicated and give my explicit consent under GDPR Art.6(1)(a) and Art.9(2)(a) for my personal data to be processed by UAL as indicated on this form, including any special category data I may choose to provide'

Participant :  Date: 2017/2025
(Signature)

Participants should be given a copy of this after it has been signed.

ual:

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: Fan Culture as Informal Brand Power: An Exploratory Study of How Chinese Fan Communities Influence non-fans Gen Z Consumers' Decision-Making and Brand perception in the Luxury Fashion Brand

Student Lead: Shu Hua

Email address: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

Phone number: +44 07784694355

Dear participants,

You are invited to participate in:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring how Chinese fan communities influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' perceptions, emotional responses, and purchasing decisions toward luxury fashion brands via social media engagement.

Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate.

Why have you been approached?

You have been selected because you are a Chinese Gen Z consumer interested in fashion/lifestyle but not a current fan of any luxury brand ambassador. Your experiences and opinions are valuable for understanding how fan-driven communication indirectly shapes consumer brand perceptions.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

You will take part in an online semi-structured interview (30–45 minutes) conducted via Zoom or WeChat. The interview will cover your observations and opinions regarding fan behaviours on social media and how they may impact your perception of fashion brands.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. All responses will be kept strictly confidential.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

While there are no direct personal benefits, your input will contribute to academic research on fan culture, branding, and Gen Z consumer behaviour. You may also gain insights into your own consumption habits.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Your interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All data will be anonymised and stored securely. Personal identifiers will be removed, and data will only be used for research purposes. You may withdraw your data at any time before anonymisation.

ual:

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to be de-identified in any photographs intended for public publication, before the point of publication
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions or want to withdraw my consent?

Name: Shu Hua

Email: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

PRIVACY NOTICE

Your personal data will be processed by UAL on its managed systems for research purposes with your explicit consent.

Your personal data will be anonymised before the end of the project (September 2025) and securely deleted thereafter.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information.

CONSENT TEMPLATE

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet

2. I agree to participate in the research project as described

3. I agree to the items checked below:

to be interviewed

that my voice will be audio recorded

to be observed and for field notes to be taken

that information obtained may be published in an anonymised form.

4. I acknowledge that:

(a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).

(b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.

(c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.

ual:

- (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant's Consent

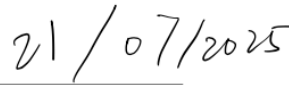
'I agree to the above as indicated and give my explicit consent under GDPR Art.6(1)(a) and Art.9(2)(a) for my personal data to be processed by UAL as indicated on this form, including any special category data I may choose to provide'

Participant
:



(Signature)

Date:



21 / 07 / 2025

Participants should be given a copy of this after it has been signed.

ual:

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: Fan Culture as Informal Brand Power: An Exploratory Study of How Chinese Fan Communities Influence non-fans Gen Z Consumers' Decision-Making and Brand perception in the Luxury Fashion Brand

Student Lead: Shu Hua

Email address: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

Phone number: +44 07784694355

Dear participants,

You are invited to participate in:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring how Chinese fan communities influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' perceptions, emotional responses, and purchasing decisions toward luxury fashion brands via social media engagement.

Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate.

Why have you been approached?

You have been selected because you are a Chinese Gen Z consumer interested in fashion/lifestyle but not a current fan of any luxury brand ambassador. Your experiences and opinions are valuable for understanding how fan-driven communication indirectly shapes consumer brand perceptions.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

You will take part in an online semi-structured interview (30–45 minutes) conducted via Zoom or WeChat. The interview will cover your observations and opinions regarding fan behaviours on social media and how they may impact your perception of fashion brands.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. All responses will be kept strictly confidential.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

While there are no direct personal benefits, your input will contribute to academic research on fan culture, branding, and Gen Z consumer behaviour. You may also gain insights into your own consumption habits.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Your interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All data will be anonymised and stored securely. Personal identifiers will be removed, and data will only be used for research purposes. You may withdraw your data at any time before anonymisation.

ual:

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to be de-identified in any photographs intended for public publication, before the point of publication
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions or want to withdraw my consent?

Name: Shu Hua

Email: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

PRIVACY NOTICE

Your personal data will be processed by UAL on its managed systems for research purposes with your explicit consent.

Your personal data will be anonymised before the end of the project (September 2025) and securely deleted thereafter.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information.

CONSENT TEMPLATE

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet

2. I agree to participate in the research project as described

3. I agree to the items checked below:

- to be interviewed
- that my voice will be audio recorded
- to be observed and for field notes to be taken
- that information obtained may be published in an anonymised form.

4. I acknowledge that:

- (a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
- (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
- (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.

ual:

- (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant's Consent

'I agree to the above as indicated and give my explicit consent under GDPR Art.6(1)(a) and Art.9(2)(a) for my personal data to be processed by UAL as indicated on this form, including any special category data I may choose to provide'

Participant : Shunqi Cai Date: 21/07/2025
(Signature)

Participants should be given a copy of this after it has been signed.

ual:

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: Fan Culture as Informal Brand Power: An Exploratory Study of How Chinese Fan Communities Influence non-fans Gen Z Consumers' Decision-Making and Brand perception in the Luxury Fashion Brand

Student Lead: Shu Hua

Email address: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

Phone number: +44 07784694355

Dear participants,

You are invited to participate in:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring how Chinese fan communities influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' perceptions, emotional responses, and purchasing decisions toward luxury fashion brands via social media engagement.

Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate.

Why have you been approached?

You have been selected because you are a Chinese Gen Z consumer interested in fashion/lifestyle but not a current fan of any luxury brand ambassador. Your experiences and opinions are valuable for understanding how fan-driven communication indirectly shapes consumer brand perceptions.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

You will take part in an online semi-structured interview (30–45 minutes) conducted via Zoom or WeChat. The interview will cover your observations and opinions regarding fan behaviours on social media and how they may impact your perception of fashion brands.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. All responses will be kept strictly confidential.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

While there are no direct personal benefits, your input will contribute to academic research on fan culture, branding, and Gen Z consumer behaviour. You may also gain insights into your own consumption habits.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Your interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All data will be anonymised and stored securely. Personal identifiers will be removed, and data will only be used for research purposes. You may withdraw your data at any time before anonymisation.

ual:

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to be de-identified in any photographs intended for public publication, before the point of publication
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions or want to withdraw my consent?

Name: Shu Hua

Email: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

PRIVACY NOTICE

Your personal data will be processed by UAL on its managed systems for research purposes with your explicit consent.

Your personal data will be anonymised before the end of the project (September 2025) and securely deleted thereafter.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information.

CONSENT TEMPLATE

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet
2. I agree to participate in the research project as described
3. I agree to the items checked below:

- to be interviewed
- that my voice will be audio recorded
- to be observed and for field notes to be taken
- that information obtained may be published in an anonymised form.

4. I acknowledge that:

- (a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
- (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
- (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.

ual:

- (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant's Consent

'I agree to the above as indicated and give my explicit consent under GDPR Art.6(1)(a) and Art.9(2)(a) for my personal data to be processed by UAL as indicated on this form, including any special category data I may choose to provide'

Participant
:

林恒衡
(Signature)

Date:

2025.07.22

Participants should be given a copy of this after it has been signed.

ual:

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: Fan Culture as Informal Brand Power: An Exploratory Study of How Chinese Fan Communities Influence non-fans Gen Z Consumers' Decision-Making and Brand perception in the Luxury Fashion Brand

Student Lead: Shu Hua

Email address: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

Phone number: +44 07784694355

Dear participants,

You are invited to participate in:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring how Chinese fan communities influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' perceptions, emotional responses, and purchasing decisions toward luxury fashion brands via social media engagement.

Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate.

Why have you been approached?

You have been selected because you are a Chinese Gen Z consumer interested in fashion/lifestyle but not a current fan of any luxury brand ambassador. Your experiences and opinions are valuable for understanding how fan-driven communication indirectly shapes consumer brand perceptions.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

You will take part in an online semi-structured interview (30–45 minutes) conducted via Zoom or WeChat. The interview will cover your observations and opinions regarding fan behaviours on social media and how they may impact your perception of fashion brands.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. All responses will be kept strictly confidential.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

While there are no direct personal benefits, your input will contribute to academic research on fan culture, branding, and Gen Z consumer behaviour. You may also gain insights into your own consumption habits.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Your interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All data will be anonymised and stored securely. Personal identifiers will be removed, and data will only be used for research purposes. You may withdraw your data at any time before anonymisation.

ual:

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to be de-identified in any photographs intended for public publication, before the point of publication
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions or want to withdraw my consent?

Name: Shu Hua

Email: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

PRIVACY NOTICE

Your personal data will be processed by UAL on its managed systems for research purposes with your explicit consent.

Your personal data will be anonymised before the end of the project (September 2025) and securely deleted thereafter.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information.

CONSENT TEMPLATE

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet
2. I agree to participate in the research project as described
3. I agree to the items checked below:
 - to be interviewed
 - that my voice will be audio recorded
 - to be observed and for field notes to be taken
 - that information obtained may be published in an anonymised form.
4. I acknowledge that:
 - (a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
 - (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
 - (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.

ual:

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: Fan Culture as Informal Brand Power: An Exploratory Study of How Chinese Fan Communities Influence non-fan Gen Z Consumers' Decision-Making and Brand perception in the Luxury Fashion Brand

Student Lead: Shu Hua

Email address: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

Phone number: +44 07784694355

Dear participants,

You are invited to participate in:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring how Chinese fan communities influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' perceptions, emotional responses, and purchasing decisions toward luxury fashion brands via social media engagement.

Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate.

Why have you been approached?

You have been selected because you are a Chinese Gen Z consumer interested in fashion/lifestyle but not a current fan of any luxury brand ambassador. Your experiences and opinions are valuable for understanding how fan-driven communication indirectly shapes consumer brand perceptions.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

You will take part in an online semi-structured interview (30–45 minutes) conducted via Zoom or WeChat. The interview will cover your observations and opinions regarding fan behaviours on social media and how they may impact your perception of fashion brands.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. All responses will be kept strictly confidential.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

While there are no direct personal benefits, your input will contribute to academic research on fan culture, branding, and Gen Z consumer behaviour. You may also gain insights into your own consumption habits.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Your interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All data will be anonymised and stored securely. Personal identifiers will be removed, and data will only be used for research purposes. You may withdraw your data at any time before anonymisation.

ual:

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to be de-identified in any photographs intended for public publication, before the point of publication
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions or want to withdraw my consent?

Name: Shu Hua

Email: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

PRIVACY NOTICE

Your personal data will be processed by UAL on its managed systems for research purposes with your explicit consent.

Your personal data will be anonymised before the end of the project (September 2025) and securely deleted thereafter.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information.

CONSENT TEMPLATE

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet

2. I agree to participate in the research project as described

3. I agree to the items checked below:

- to be interviewed
- that my voice will be audio recorded
- to be observed and for field notes to be taken
- that information obtained may be published in an anonymised form.

4. I acknowledge that:

- (a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
- (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
- (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.


ual:

- (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant's Consent

'I agree to the above as indicated and give my explicit consent under GDPR Art.6(1)(a) and Art.9(2)(a) for my personal data to be processed by UAL as indicated on this form, including any special category data I may choose to provide'

Participant
:



(Signature)

Date:

2025.07.23

Participants should be given a copy of this after it has been signed.

ual:

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: Fan Culture as Informal Brand Power: An Exploratory Study of How Chinese Fan Communities Influence non-fans Gen Z Consumers' Decision-Making and Brand perception in the Luxury Fashion Brand

Student Lead: Shu Hua

Email address: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

Phone number: +44 07784694355

Dear participants,

You are invited to participate in:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring how Chinese fan communities influence non-fan Gen Z consumers' perceptions, emotional responses, and purchasing decisions toward luxury fashion brands via social media engagement.

Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate.

Why have you been approached?

You have been selected because you are a Chinese Gen Z consumer interested in fashion/lifestyle but not a current fan of any luxury brand ambassador. Your experiences and opinions are valuable for understanding how fan-driven communication indirectly shapes consumer brand perceptions.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

You will take part in an online semi-structured interview (30–45 minutes) conducted via Zoom or WeChat. The interview will cover your observations and opinions regarding fan behaviours on social media and how they may impact your perception of fashion brands.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. All responses will be kept strictly confidential.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

While there are no direct personal benefits, your input will contribute to academic research on fan culture, branding, and Gen Z consumer behaviour. You may also gain insights into your own consumption habits.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Your interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All data will be anonymised and stored securely. Personal identifiers will be removed, and data will only be used for research purposes. You may withdraw your data at any time before anonymisation.

ual:

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to be de-identified in any photographs intended for public publication, before the point of publication
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions or want to withdraw my consent?

Name: Shu Hua

Email: h.shu0620241@arts.ac.uk

PRIVACY NOTICE

Your personal data will be processed by UAL on its managed systems for research purposes with your explicit consent.

Your personal data will be anonymised before the end of the project (September 2025) and securely deleted thereafter.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information.

CONSENT TEMPLATE

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet
2. I agree to participate in the research project as described
3. I agree to the items checked below:
 - to be interviewed
 - that my voice will be audio recorded
 - to be observed and for field notes to be taken
 - that information obtained may be published in an anonymised form.
4. I acknowledge that:
 - (a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
 - (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
 - (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.

ual:

- (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant's Consent

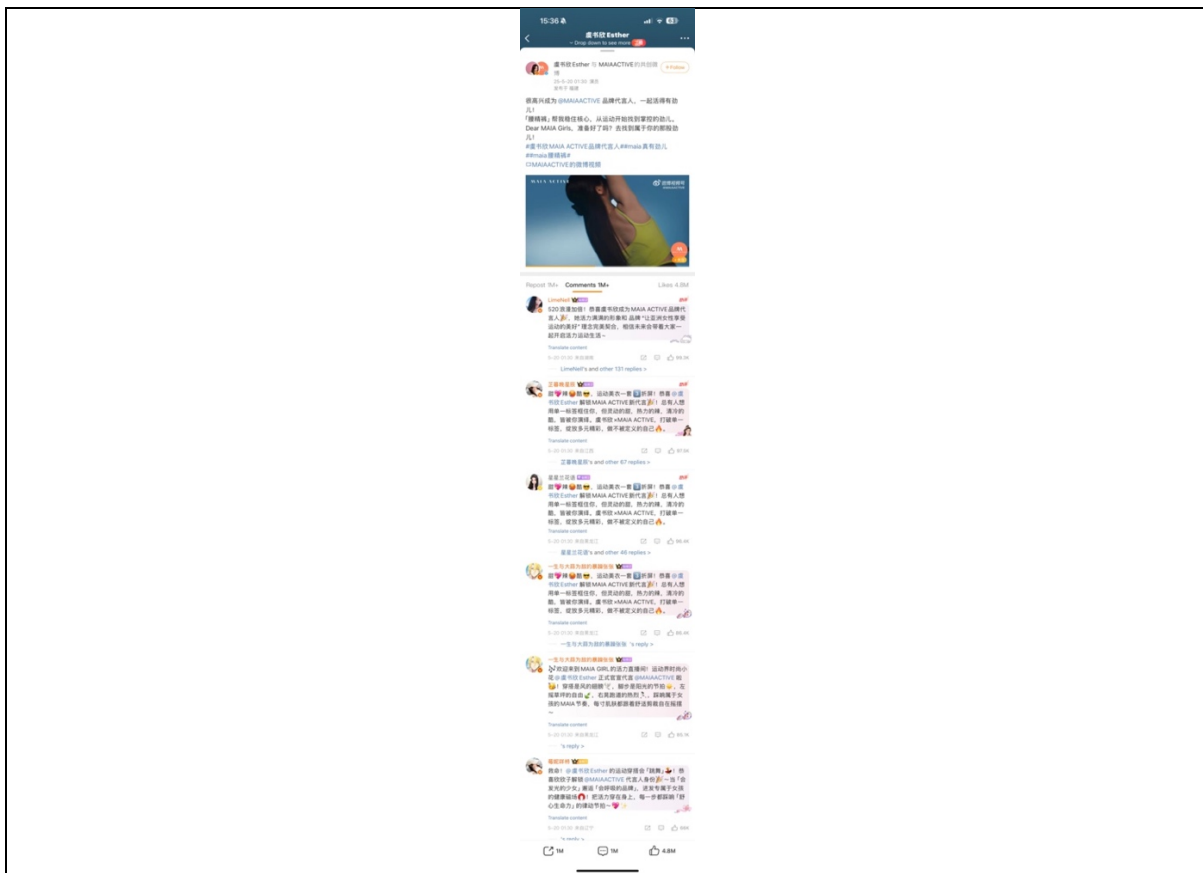
'I agree to the above as indicated and give my explicit consent under GDPR Art.6(1)(a) and Art.9(2)(a) for my personal data to be processed by UAL as indicated on this form, including any special category data I may choose to provide'

Participant : 女兆 亦如 Date: 2025.07.25
(Signature)

Participants should be given a copy of this after it has been signed.

Appendix 3: Netnography and interview

Appendix 3.1: Netnography



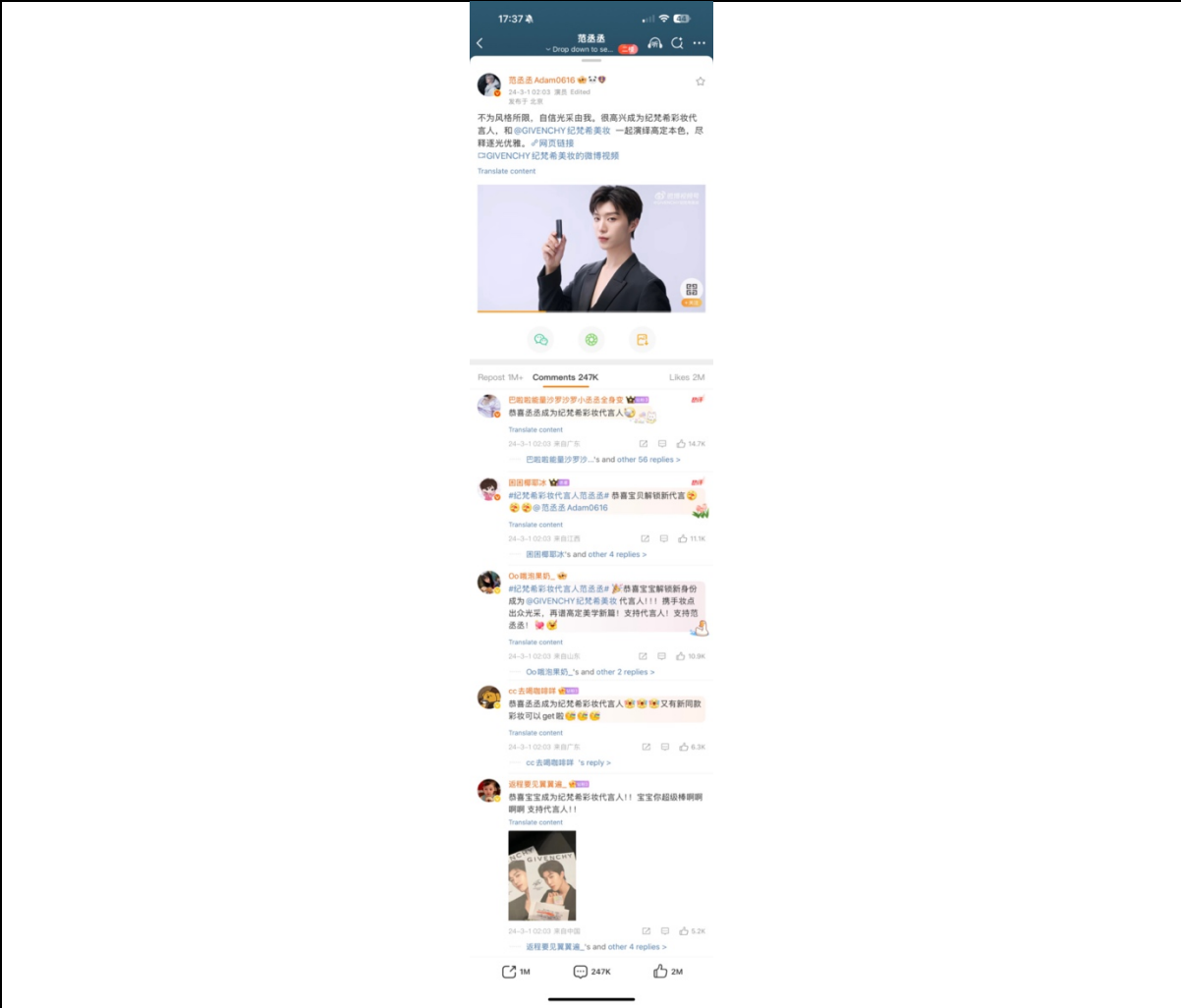
W_01_20250710_MAIAACTIVE_CelebA_Ambassador_or_comment-control_purchase-push

Platform: Weibo
 Date Time: 2025-05-20 01:30
 Account Type: Celebrity account (main post) + Fan accounts (comments)
 Content Type: Ambassador announcement + short video
 Fan Behaviour Type (multi-select): Comment-control/positive flooding; Cheering/support; Purchase mobilisation (discount & set recommendations)
 Entry Surface: Hashtag/Topic; possibly Recommendation feed
 Key Cues: Ambassador “so active”, “3-piece set / big discount”, “Welcome MAIA GIRL”, “healthy/energetic vibe”
 Theme(s): T1 Reach & Amplification; T3 Social proof/affective atmosphere.
 FocusedCode(s): F1.2 Comment control; F3.1 Purchase call-to-action.
 PasserbyTakeaway: Comments are strongly controlled by fans with upbeat tone and purchase prompts → brand framed as energetic/empowering for women.
 ShortQuote (≤10 words): “Congrats on the endorsement”; “3-piece set, 70% off.”



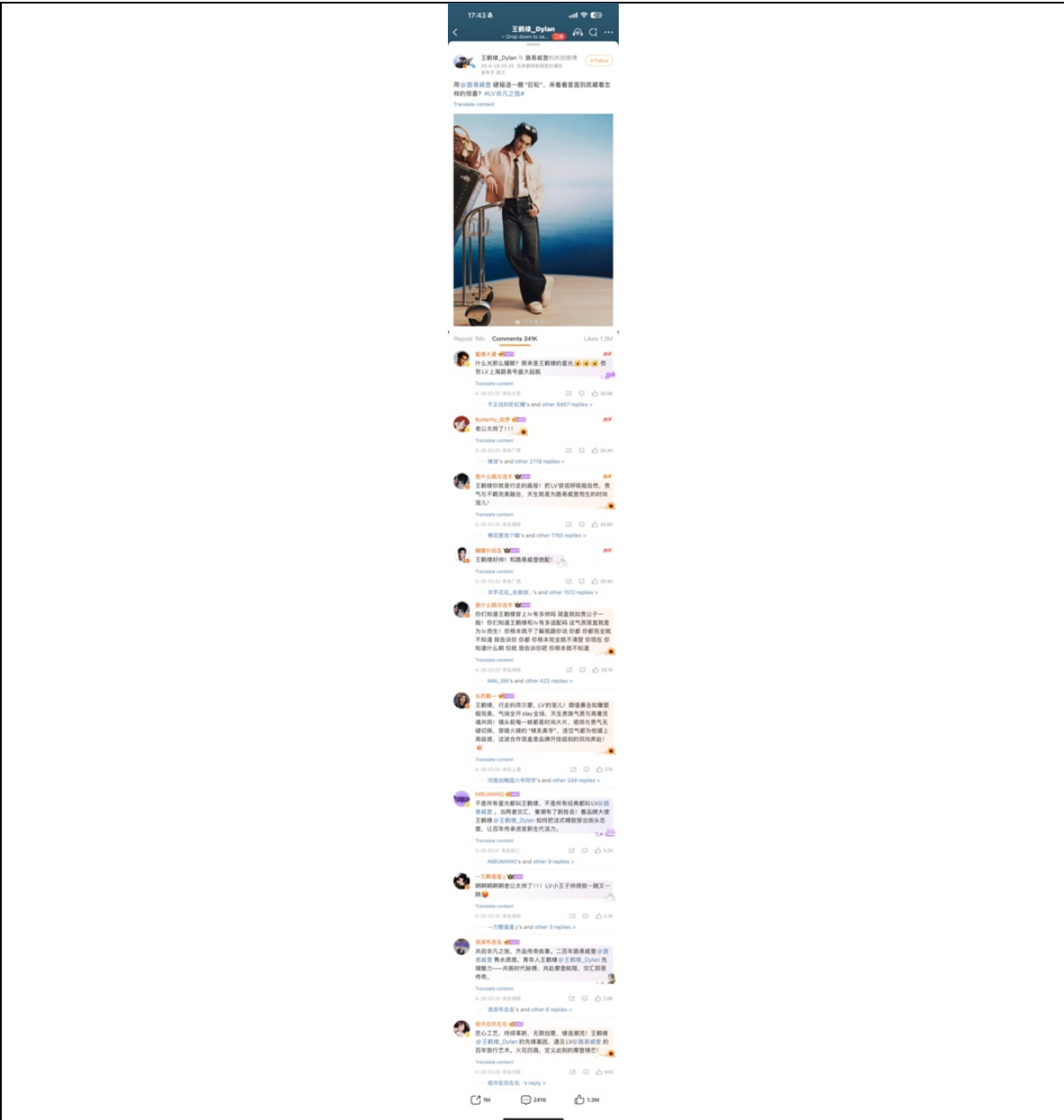
W_02_20250710_DIOR_CelebB_Product_comment-control_seeding_same-photo

Platform: Weibo
 DateTime: 2025-05-14 04:25
 AccountType: Celebrity account (main post) + Fan accounts (image replies)
 ContentType: MOTD product demo/ad video (cushion)
 FanBehaviourType: Comment-control; Word-of-mouth seeding (micro-reviews); Image reposting/same-photo check-ins
 EntrySurface: Hashtag/Topic; possibly Recommendation feed
 KeyCues: "powder texture is great", "long-lasting", multiple identical selfie images, "already bought"
 Theme(s): T1 Reach & Amplification; T2 Instrumental cues; T3 Social proof
 FocusedCode(s): F2.1 Micro-review WOM; F1.2 Comment control
 PasserbyTakeaway: Dense repeat images and short raves reduce search/try-error costs → likely to bookmark first.
 ShortQuote (≤10 words): "Powder texture is amazing"; "Super useful cushion."



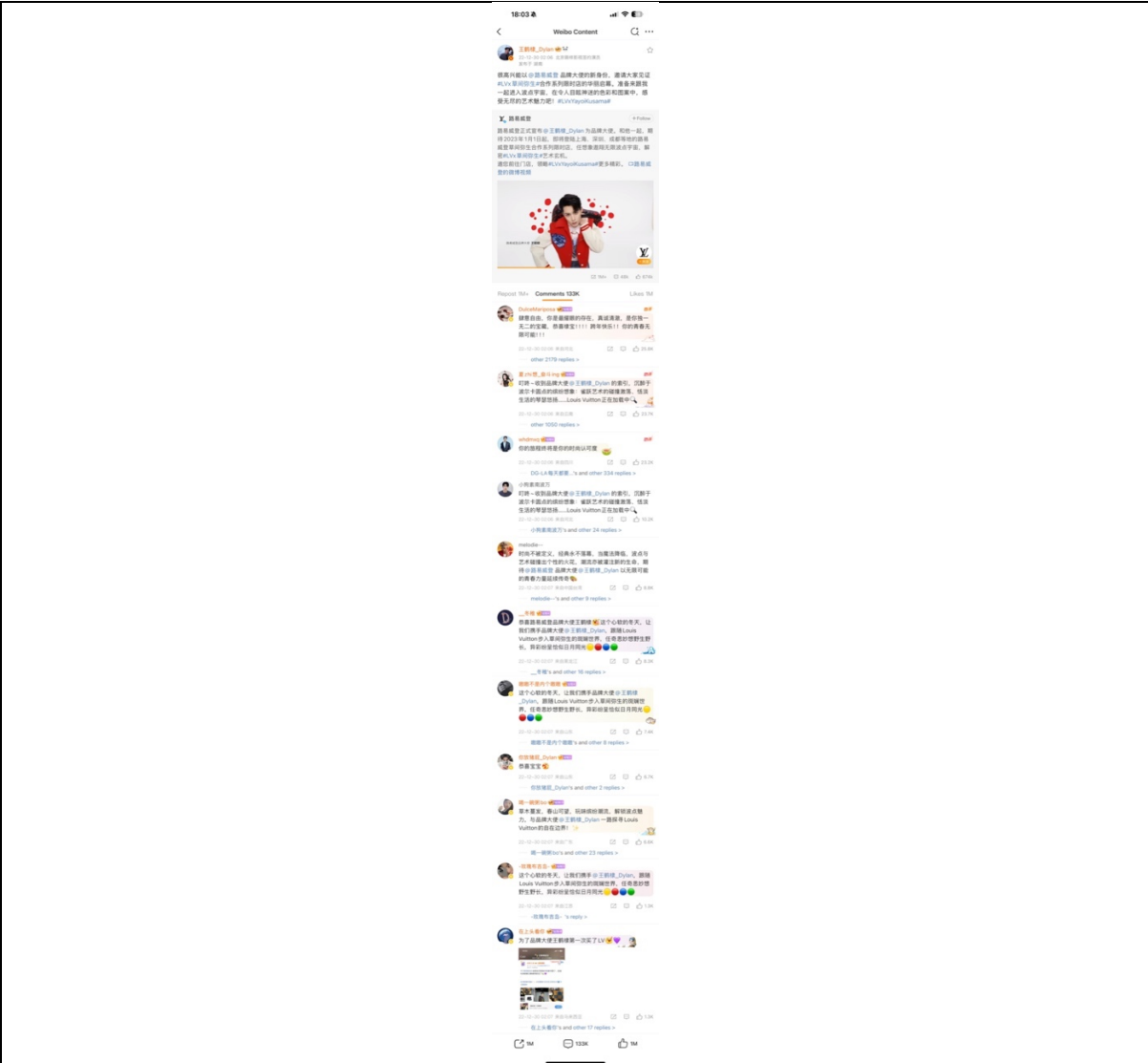
W_03_20240711_GIVENCHY_CelebC_Ambassador_comment-control_check-in

Platform: Weibo
 DateTime: 2024-03-01 02:03
 AccountType: Celebrity account (main post) + Fan accounts (comments & photos)
 ContentType: Ambassador announcement poster
 FanBehaviourType: Comment-control; Cheering; Offline material photos / check-ins; Light purchase intention cues
 EntrySurface: Hashtag/Topic; Recommendation feed
 KeyCues: “congrats on ambassador”, photos of in-store materials, “new makeup to get”
 Theme(s): T1 Reach & Amplification; T3 Social proof/purchase signals
 FocusedCode(s): F1.2 Comment control; F3.2 Purchase proof/check-in
 PasserbyTakeaway: Fans show photos of materials and express support → raises perceived credibility of the brand/ambassador pairing.
 ShortQuote (≤10 words): “Support the endorsement”; “New makeup to get.”



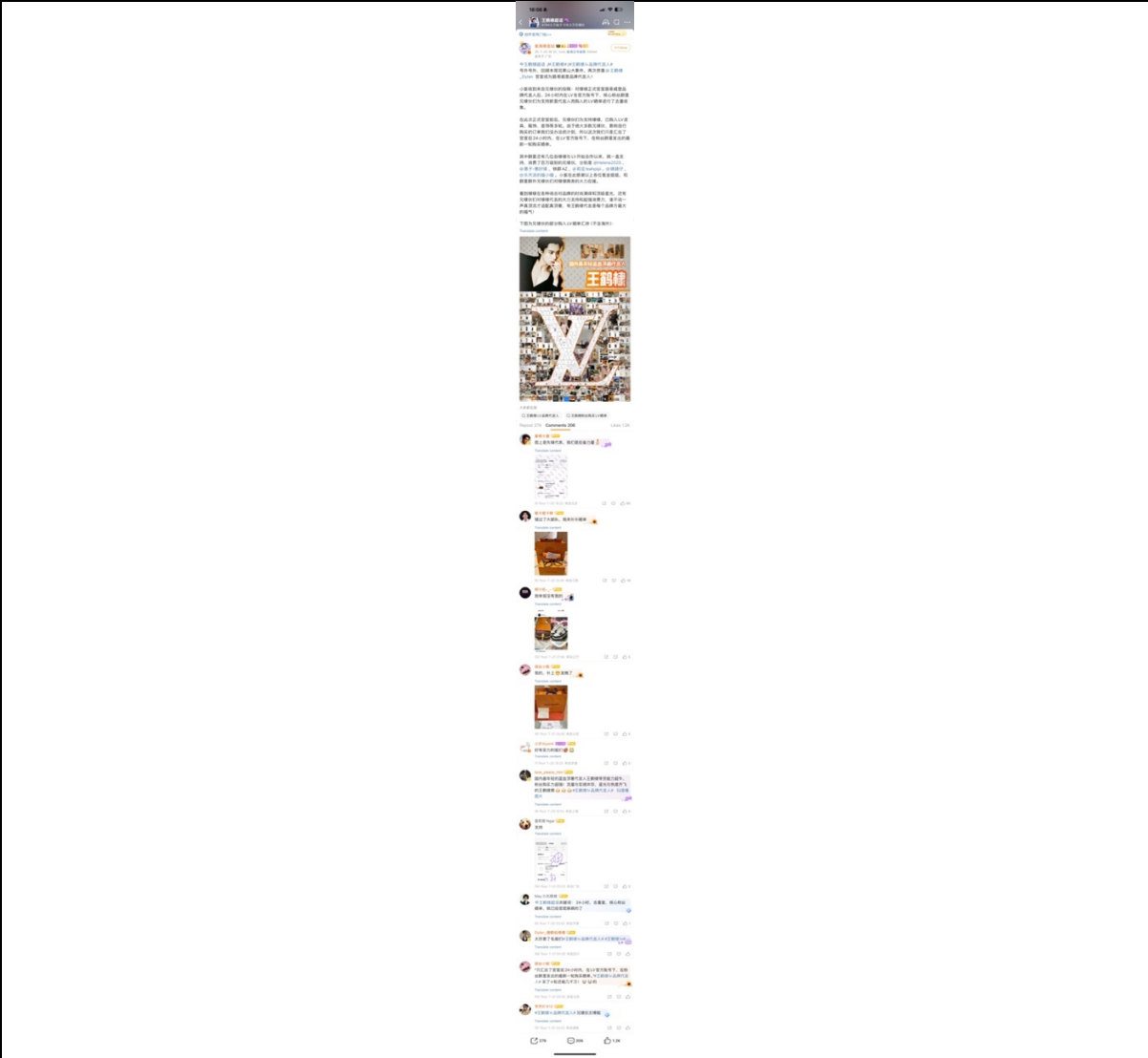
W_04_20250711_LouisVuitton_CelebD_Campaign_comment-control_narrative

Platform: Weibo
 DateTime: 2025-06-28 05:20
 AccountType: Celebrity account + co-created brand campaign post
 ContentType: Campaign key visual (travel theme)
 FanBehaviourType: Comment-control; Emotional mobilisation;
 Brand-meaning/narrative construction (travel, taste, aura)
 EntrySurface: Hashtag/Topic (#...journey)
 KeyCues: travel storytelling, "aura", "high fashion vibe", "prince" framing, lifestyle aspiration
 Theme(s): T4 Informal brand communication; T5 Identity/Affiliation
 FocusedCode(s): F4.1 Narrative extension; F1.2 Comment control
 PasserbyTakeaway: Fans narrate the brand as travel-led taste and status → strong ambience formation around the campaign.
 ShortQuote (≤10 words): "So handsome!"; "Travel-story vibe."



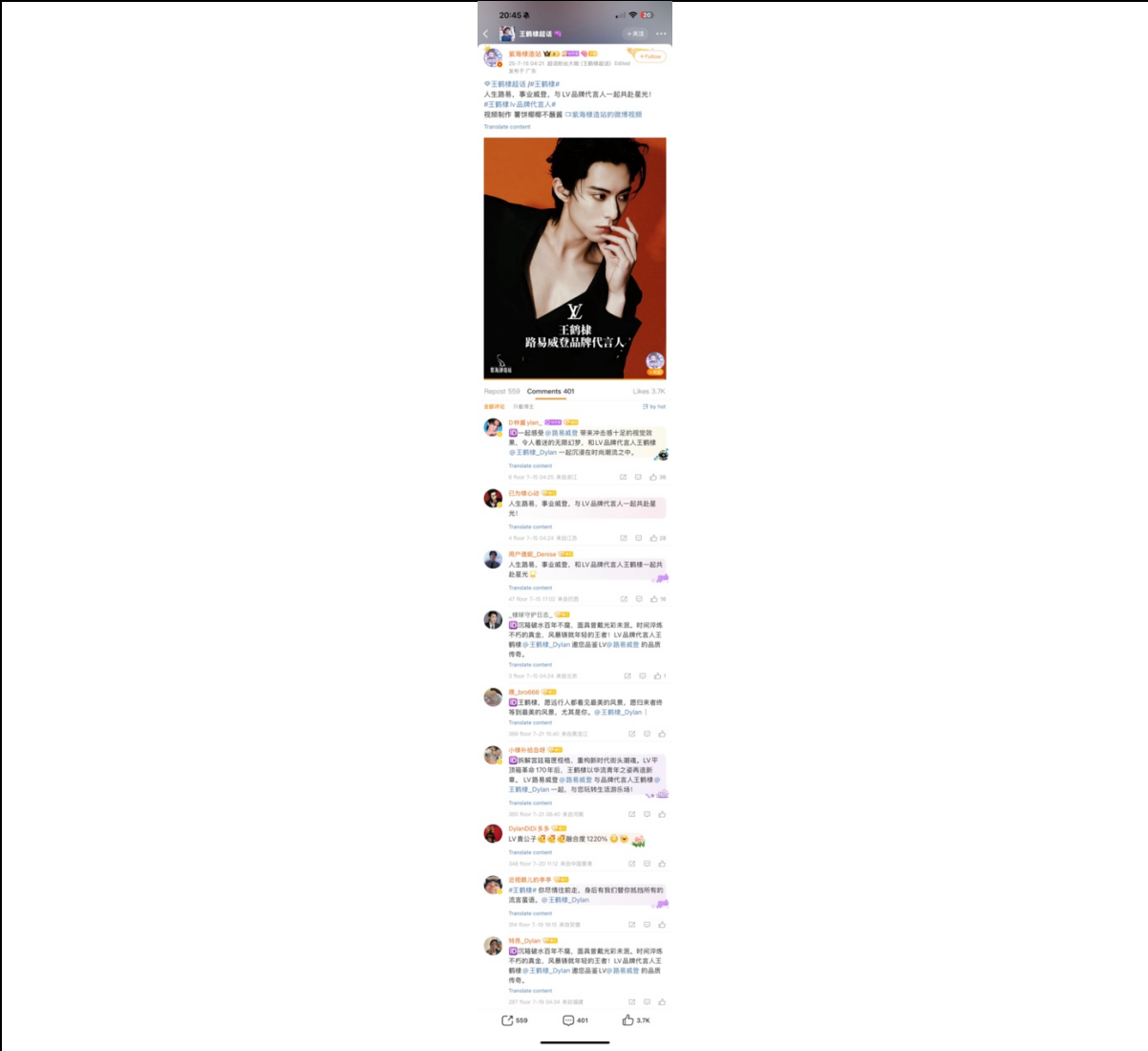
W_05_20250712_LouisVuitton_CelebD_Collab_purchase-proof-check-in_comment-control

Platform: Weibo
 DateTime: 2022-12-30 02:06
 AccountType: Celebrity account (main post) + Fan accounts
 ContentType: Collab/appointment announcement (store activation / installation)
 FanBehaviourType: Purchase proof/receipt mentions; Store check-ins; Comment-control; Emotional mobilisation
 EntrySurface: Hashtag/Topic (#LV×...)
 KeyCues: “bought because of ambassador”, store photos, “first LV purchase”, festive/celebratory tone
 Theme(s): T3 Social proof; T4 Informal diffusion
 FocusedCode(s): F3.2 Purchase proof/check-in; F1.2 Comment control
 PasserbyTakeaway: Fans explicitly attribute purchases to the ambassador and post proof/photos → strong social proof for conversion.
 ShortQuote (≤10 words): “Bought LV because of ambassador”; “Store check-in today.”



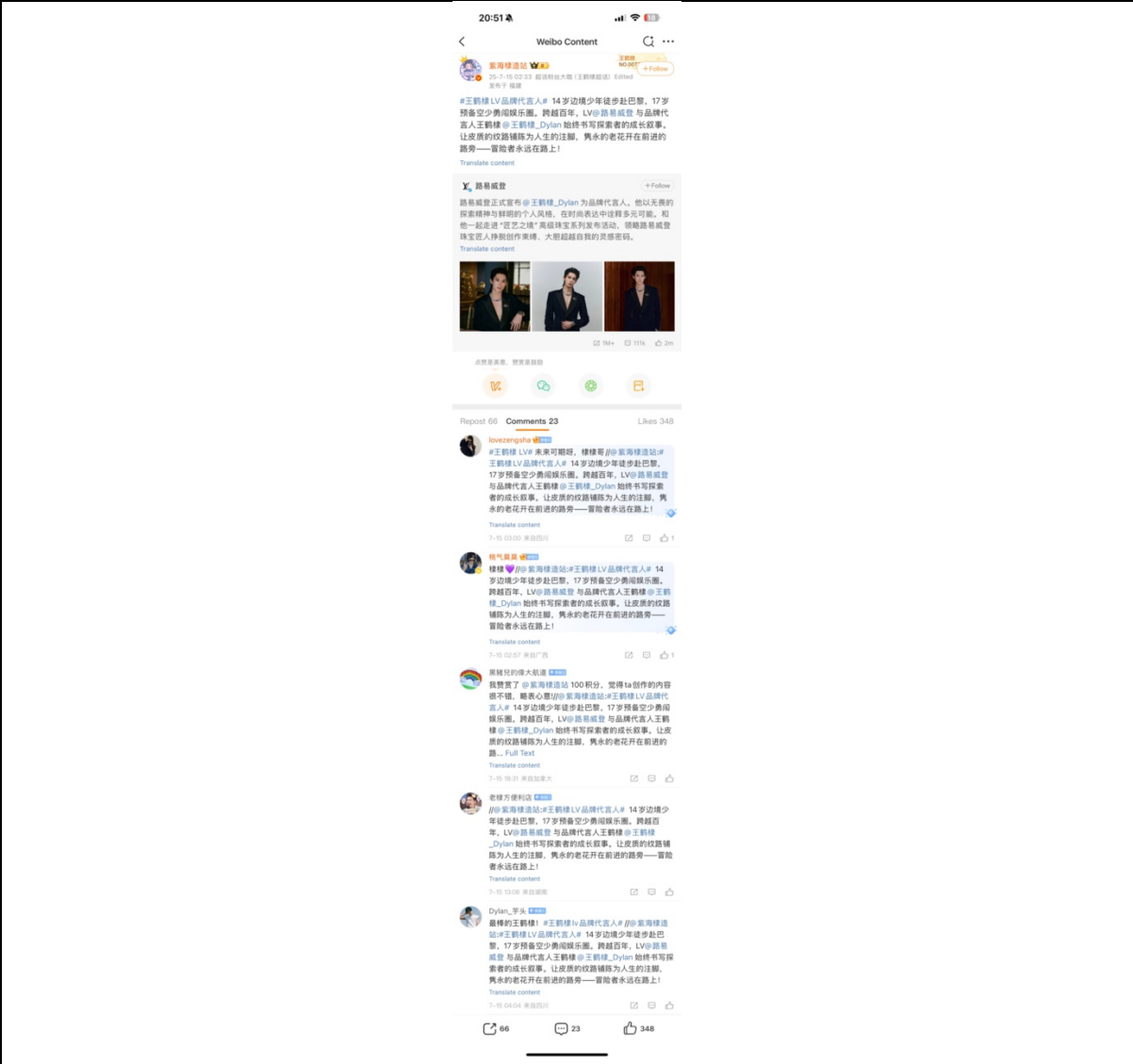
W_06_20250720_LouisVuitton_CelebD_FanDrive_purchase-mobilisation_purchase-proof_check-in

Platform: Weibo
 DateTime: 2025-07-20 09:20
 AccountType: FanClub (main post) + Fans (comments)
 ContentType: Long text fan drive + collage poster (LV mosaic)
 FanBehaviourType: Purchase mobilisation; Purchase proof/receipts; Store check-ins; Data tally/aggregation
 EntrySurface: Super Topic / Hashtag; may also surface via Search/Recommendation
 KeyCues: "post your receipts," collage of buyer photos, unboxing shots, order screenshots
 Theme(s): T1 Reach & Amplification; T3 Social Proof; T4 Informal brand diffusion
 FocusedCode(s): F3.1 Purchase call-to-action; F3.2 Purchase proof/check-in
 PasserbyTakeaway: Organised fan drive with visible receipts suggests real conversion and herd momentum.
 ShortQuote (≤10 words): "Receipt posted." / "Bought because of ambassador."



W_07_20250715_LouisVuitton_CelebD_Ambassador_comment-control_cheering_narrative

Platform: Weibo
 DateTime: 2025-07-15
 AccountType: FanClub (main post) + Fans (hot comments)
 ContentType: Ambassador KV poster (fan-edited video mentioned)
 FanBehaviourType: Comment-control/positive flooding;
 Cheering/support; Narrative framing with slogan lines
 EntrySurface: Hashtag/Topic
 KeyCues: repeated slogan phrases (“walk with the brand,” “shine together”), “fit 1220%,” celebratory tone
 Theme(s): T1 Reach & Amplification; T3 Social Proof; T4 Narrative construction
 FocusedCode(s): F1.2 Comment control; F4.1 Narrative extension
 PasserbyTakeaway: Sloganised praise floods the comments, shaping perceived brand-celebrity fit.
 ShortQuote: “Walk with the brand.” / “Shine together.”



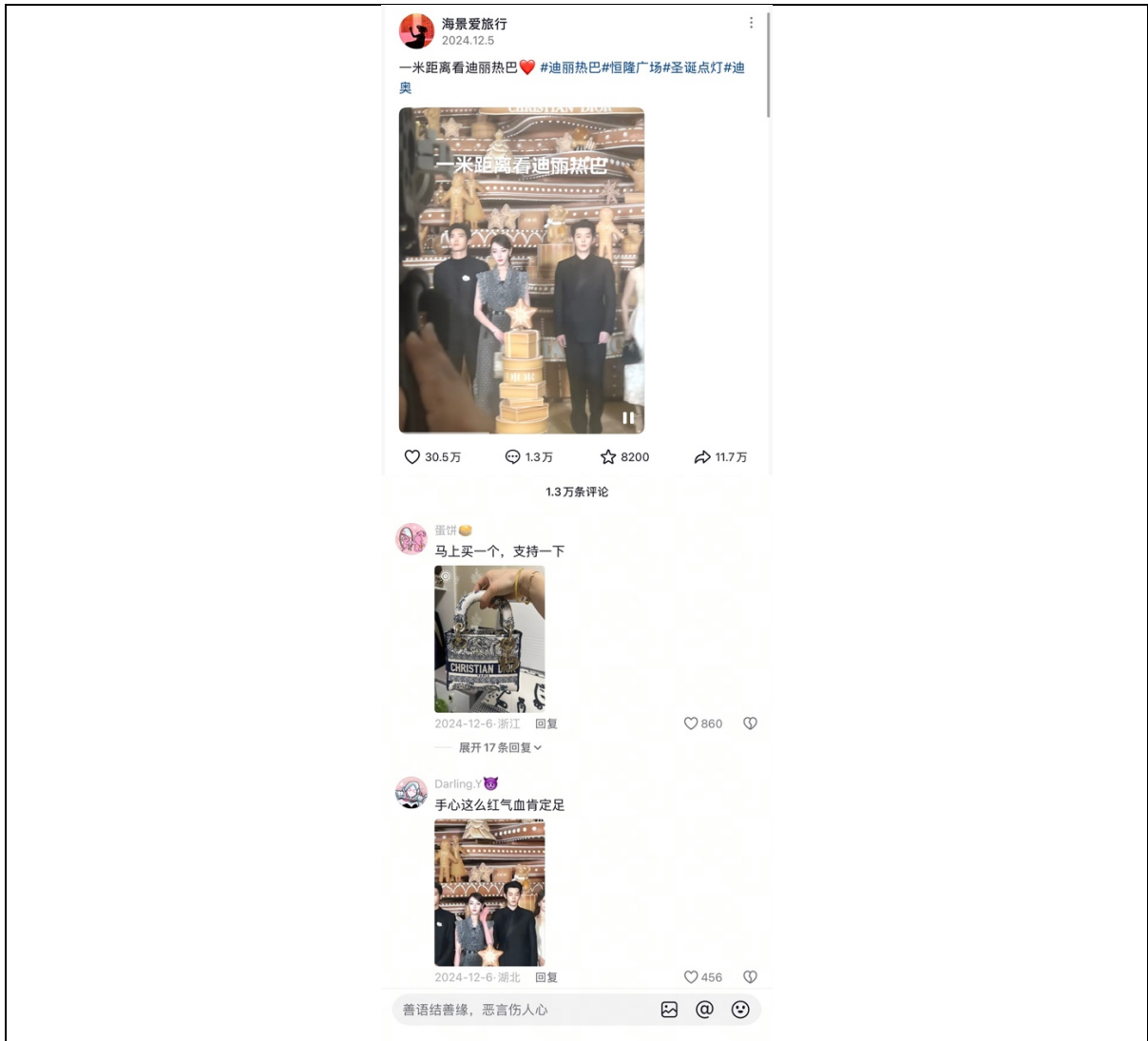
W_08_20250715_LouisVuitton_Brand_Campaign_fan-amplification_template-comments

Platform: Weibo
 DateTime: 2025-07-15
 AccountType: Brand account (main post) + Fans (comments)
 ContentType: Brand announcement + 3 images (growth/explorer storyline)
 FanBehaviourType: Template/copy-paste comments; Cheering; Narrative reinforcement; Light comment-control
 EntrySurface: Brand profile / Hashtag/Topic
 KeyCues: many identical/near-identical comments repeating the brand caption; explorer/road metaphor
 Theme(s): T1 Reach & Amplification; T4 Informal brand communication (fan-led amplification)
 FocusedCode(s): F4.1 Narrative extension; F1.2 Comment control
 PasserbyTakeaway: Brand storyline is echoed verbatim by fans, quickly filling the thread and amplifying message discipline.
 ShortQuote: "Growth story." / "Explorer's path."



W_09_20250720_LouisVuitton_CelebD_Product_toolkit_product-picks_serial-seeding

Platform: Weibo
 DateTime: 2025-07-20 20:44 (thread shows serial posts 7-15 → 7-20)
 AccountType: FanClub (multiple serial posts)
 ContentType: Product pick/toolkit posts (“pick your favourite,” ranking/Top push)
 FanBehaviourType: Toolkit/curation; Seeding across days;
 Engagement/pick CTA; Mobilisation for ranking
 EntrySurface: Search results (keyword “lv”); also Topic/Recommendation
 KeyCues: “pick your favourite,” repeated templates, “Top honour,” star-influence label images
 Theme(s): T2 Instrumental cues (lists/picks); T1 Amplification; T3 Social Proof (ranking signals)
 FocusedCode(s): F2.4 Checklist/toolkit; F1.1/ F1.x Serial seeding (use your closest code, e.g., “F1.1 Repeated seeding” if defined)
 PasserbyTakeaway: Fan account repeatedly pushes curated LV items tied to the ambassador, lowering search/choice costs.
 ShortQuote: “Come pick your favourite.”



D_01_20241205_DIOR_CelebE_Event_purchase-push_purchase-proof_check-in

Platform: Douyin
 DateTime: 2024-12-05
 AccountType: Media/Creator post + Fans/Passers-by in comments
 ContentType: Brand event video (mall Christmas lighting)
 FanBehaviourType: Purchase mobilisation; Purchase proof (bag photo); Event check-in; Affective praise
 EntrySurface: Hashtags/Topic feed (#...lighting, brand tag)
 KeyCues: "1-meter away," "buy one to support," unboxing/photo of Lady bag
 Theme(s): T1 Reach & Amplification; T3 Social Proof; T4 Informal diffusion
 FocusedCode(s): F3.1 Purchase CTA; F3.2 Purchase proof; F1.1 Offline event visibility
 PasserbyTakeaway: Proximity-to-celeb event triggers supportive buying and receipt/photos—strong herd signal.
 ShortQuote (≤10 words): "Buy one to support."



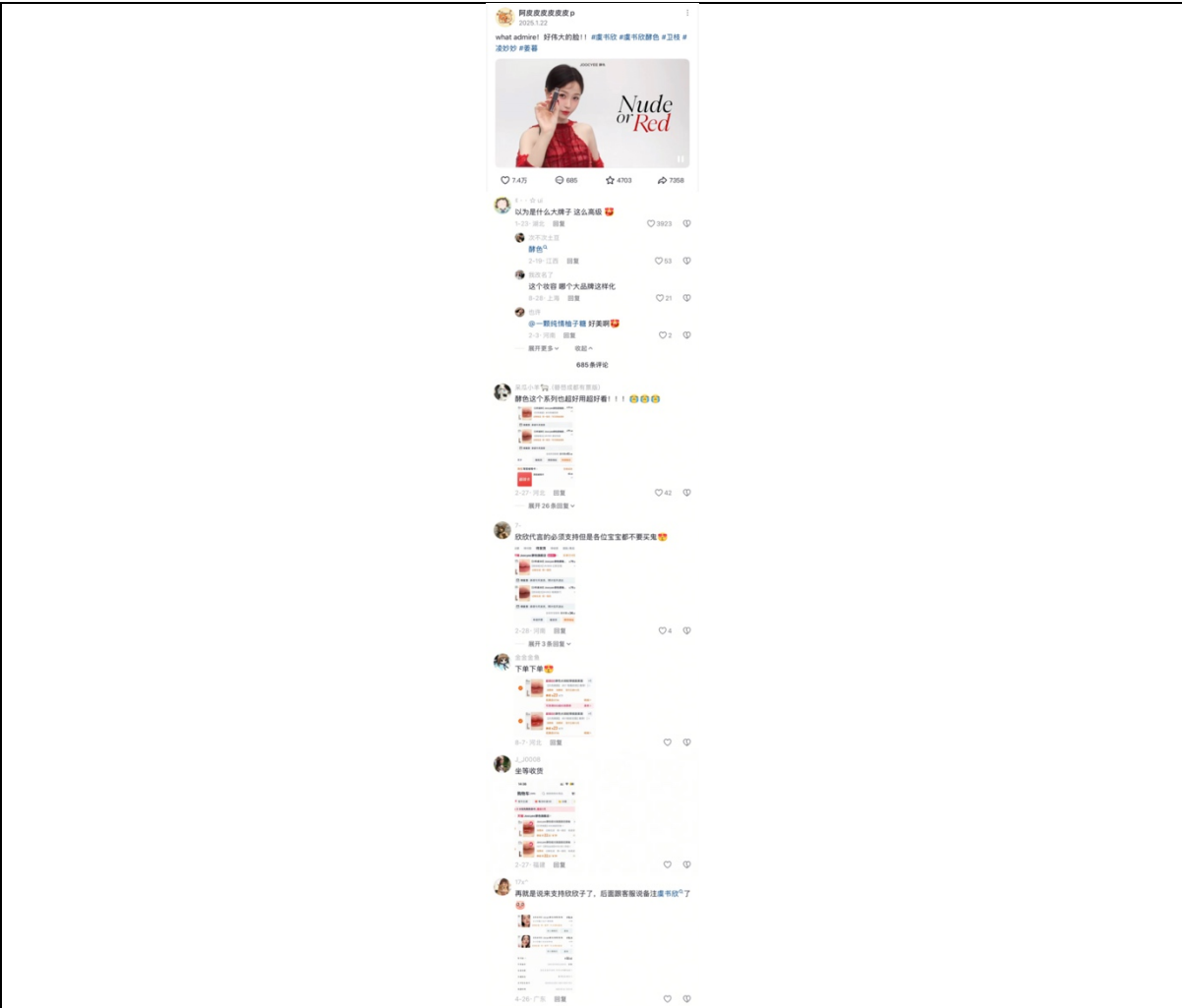
D_02_20241115_LouisVuitton_CelebD_InStore_purchase-proof_product-seeding_discussion

Platform: Douyin
 DateTime: 2024-11-15 (from visible comment timestamps)
 AccountType: Passer-by/Creator video + Fans
 ContentType: In-store appearance video (celebrity holding sneaker)
 FanBehaviourType: Purchase proof (“ordered/picked up”); Product seeding (own photos); Price/quality discussion
 EntrySurface: Recommendation feed / Search
 KeyCues: “already ordered,” shelf/receipt shots, repeated product photos
 Theme(s): T1 Amplification; T2 Instrumental cues; T3 Social Proof
 FocusedCode(s): F3.2 Purchase proof; F2.1 Micro-review; F2.2 User product photos
 PasserbyTakeaway: Thread mixes orders placed + real-life photos → lowers uncertainty, boosts conversion intent.
 ShortQuote: “Placed the order.”



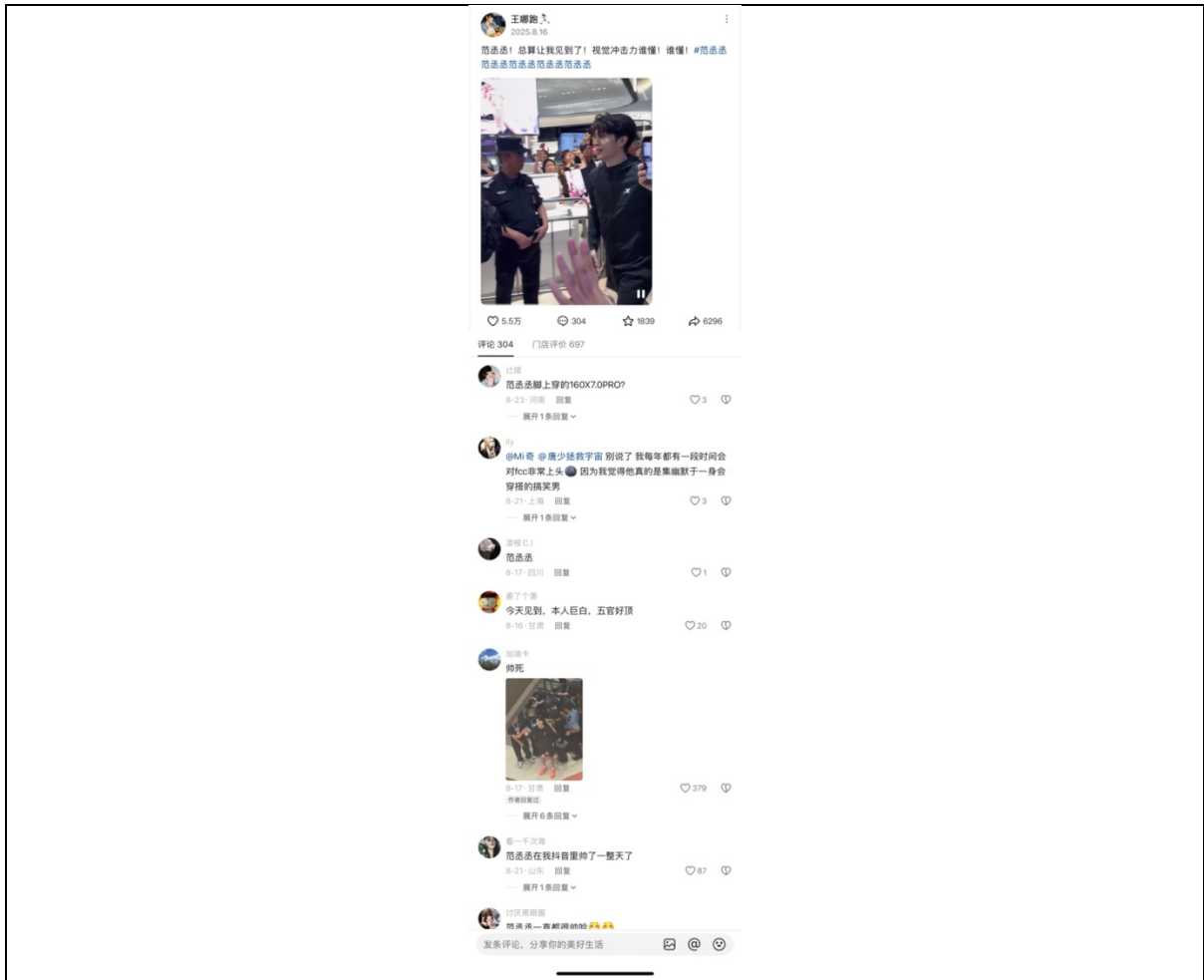
D_03_20250825_SmartphoneBrandX_CelebF_RetailScreen_offline-checkins_ooh-amplification

Platform: Douyin
 DateTime: 2025-08-25
 AccountType: Creator video (retail display) + Fans
 ContentType: Retail/OOH screen takeover (multiple demo phones / mall big screens)
 FanBehaviourType: Offline check-ins; Photo/video reposts of big screens; Affective acclaim
 EntrySurface: Recommendation feed / Nearby
 KeyCues: mall LED walls, “so classy,” “front wall big screen is playing,” crowd photos
 Theme(s): T1 Amplification; T4 Informal brand communication; T5 Identity/Affiliation (public visibility → pride)
 FocusedCode(s): F1.4 OOH/retail takeover; F4.1 Narrative extension (quality/‘classy’ framing)
 PasserbyTakeaway: High-visibility retail screens spark fan check-ins and prestige framing that travel beyond the store.
 ShortQuote: “Front wall big screen is playing.”



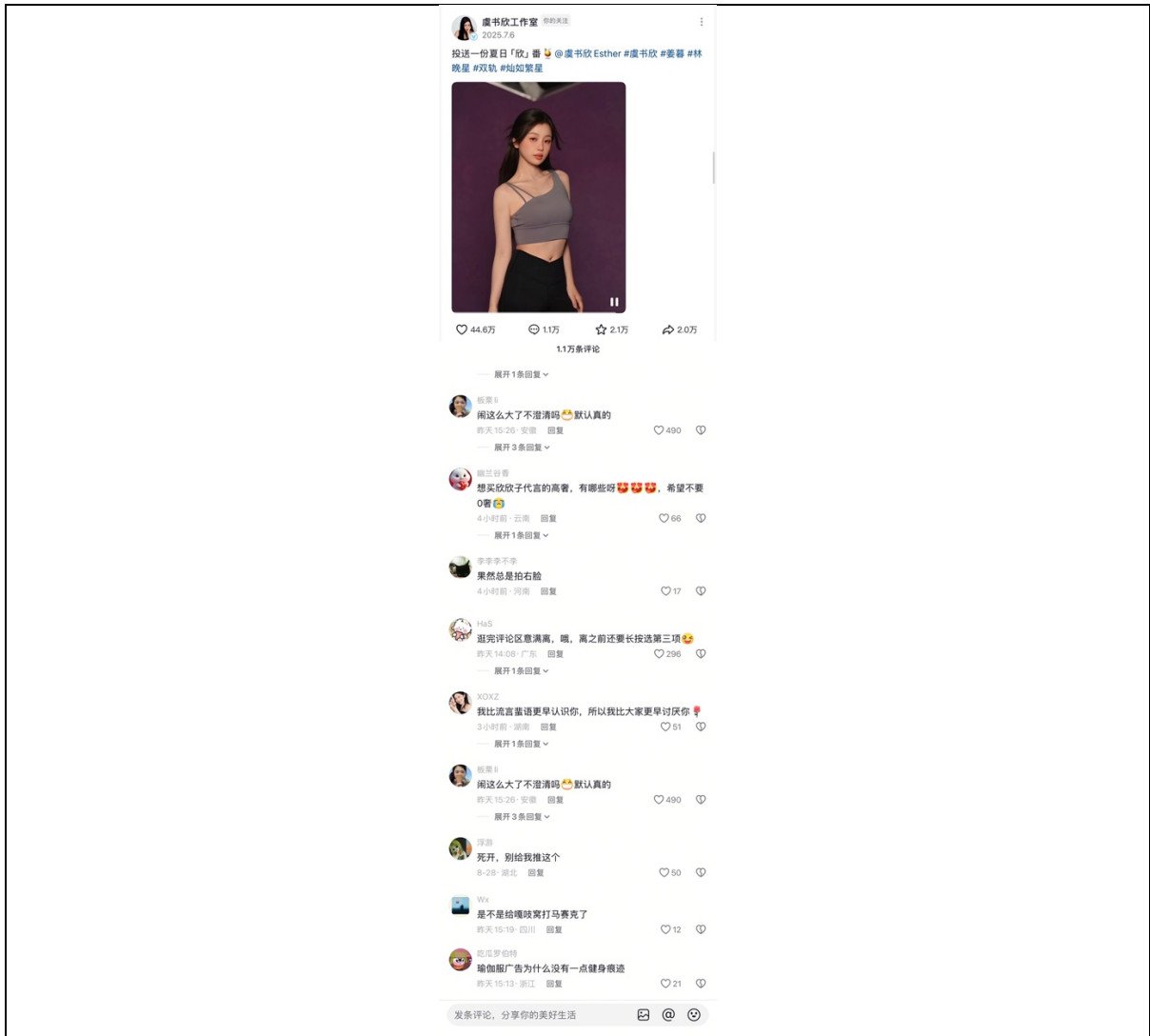
D_04_20250122_Joocyee_Influencer_Product_review_purchase-screenshots_purchase-push

Platform: Douyin
 DateTime: 2025-01-22
 AccountType: Influencer review + Fans
 ContentType: Beauty product review video (shade 'Nude or Red')
 FanBehaviourType: Purchase CTA ("place order"); Order/checkout screenshots; Waiting-for-delivery updates; Advocacy ("support the ambassador")
 EntrySurface: Hashtag/Topic feed
 KeyCues: "placing order," multiple SKU screenshots, "support ambassador but beware ghost sellers"
 Theme(s): T2 Instrumental cues (screenshots, SKU links); T3 Social Proof
 FocusedCode(s): F3.1 Purchase CTA; F3.2 Purchase proof (order/checkout screens); F2.3 Link/SKU evidence
 PasserbyTakeaway: Order screenshots + 'waiting to receive' comments make the purchase feel normal and low-risk.
 ShortQuote: "Placing the order." / "Waiting for delivery."



D_05_20250816_Xtep_Cel
ebF_InStore_offline-
crowd_product-
query_check-in.

Platform: Douyin
 DateTime: 2025-08-16
 AccountType: Passer-by creator (main video) + Fans/Passers-by (comments)
 ContentType: In-store sighting video (crowd around celebrity)
 FanBehaviourType: Offline crowd/onsite check-in; Product ID queries; Affective praise
 EntrySurface: Recommendation / Hashtag
 KeyCues: “finally saw him,” “which model is he wearing 160X7.0 PRO?” crowd photos
 Theme(s): T1 Reach & Amplification; T2 Instrumental cues; T5 Identity/Affiliation
 FocusedCode(s): F1.1 Offline event visibility; F2.1 Product Q&A; F5.1 Parasocial proximity
 PasserbyTakeaway: Celebrity sighting pulls heavy foot traffic; users start asking exact SKU details.
 ShortQuote (≤10 words): “Which model is he wearing?”



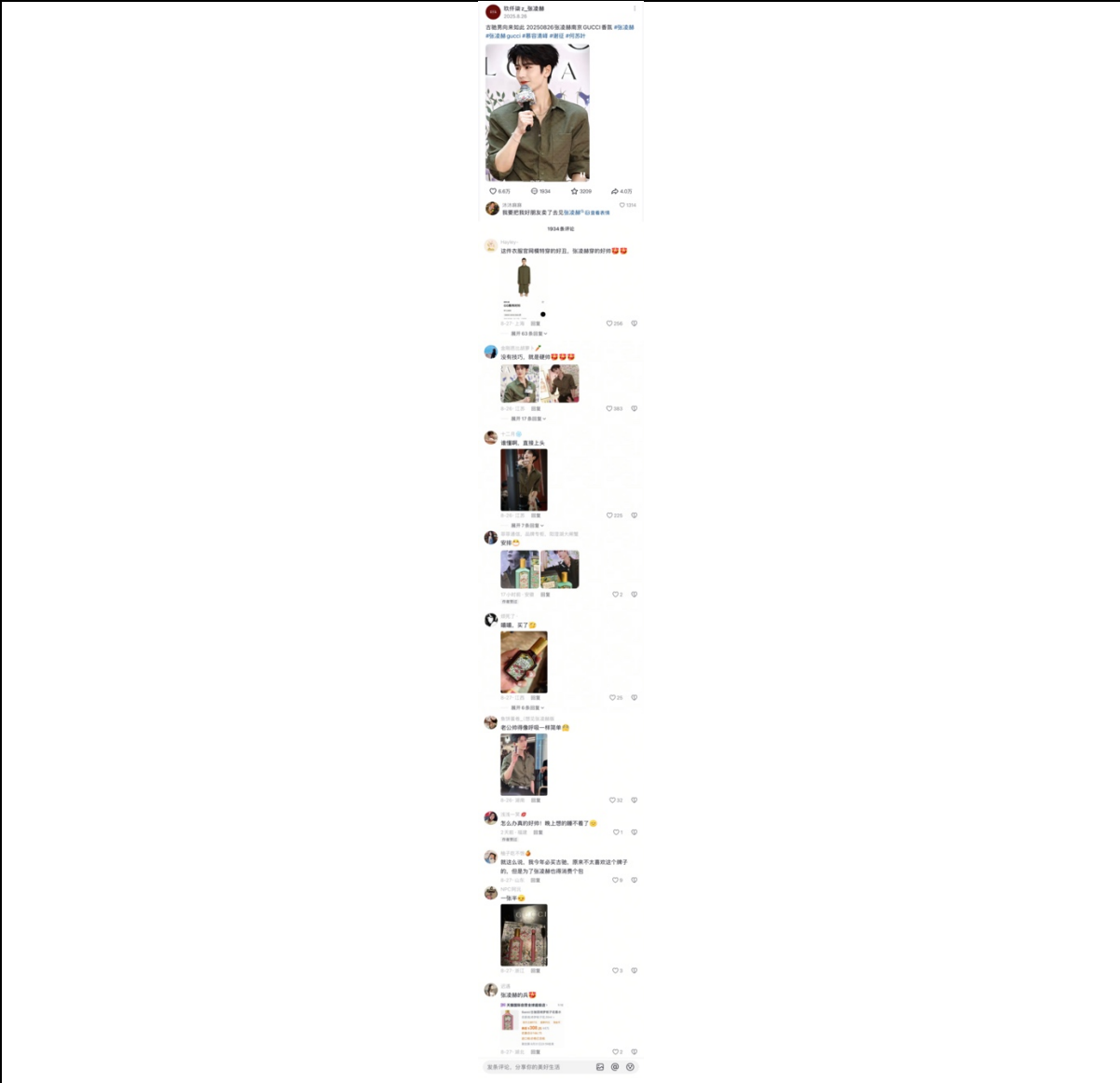
**D_06_20250706_MAIAAC
TIVE_CelebA_Product_mixed-sentiment_purchase-intent_discussion**

Platform: Douyin
 DateTime: 2025-07-06
 AccountType: Studio/PR account (main post) + Mixed commenters
 ContentType: Ambassador photo/video (yoga apparel)
 FanBehaviourType: Purchase intent queries (“which items are endorsed?”); Mixed sentiment / pushback; Affective praise
 EntrySurface: Recommendation / Hashtag
 KeyCues: “want to buy ambassador’s pieces,” “please don’t push this,” body/fitness authenticity debate
 Theme(s): T1 Reach; T3 Social proof (light); T6 Contestation/Backlash
 FocusedCode(s): F2.1 Purchase enquiry; F6.1 Critical counter-comments
 PasserbyTakeaway: Exposure is high but comment section shows both interest and resistance—ambivalence may temper conversion.
 ShortQuote: “Which endorsed styles are there?”



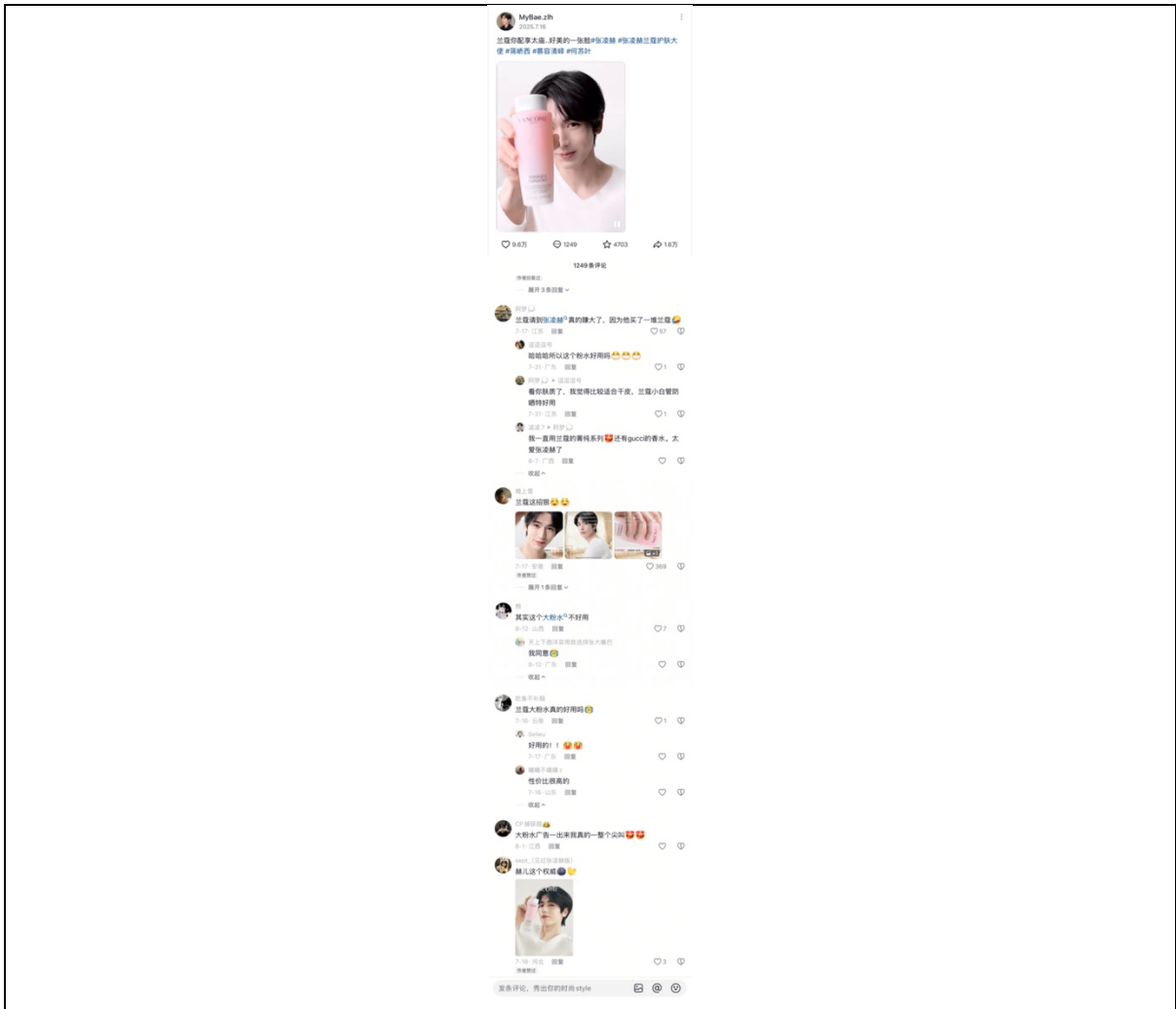
D_07_20250816_Xtep_Cel
ebF_EventBTS_humour_
meme_rivalry-talk.

Platform: Douyin
 DateTime: 2025-08-16
 AccountType: Fan/creator video + Fans
 ContentType: Event BTS (staff holding backdrop/logo board)
 FanBehaviourType: Humour/meme-making; Brand rivalry talk;
 Affective mobilisation
 EntrySurface: Recommendation / Search
 KeyCues: jokes about staff, "tonight's business war," teasing competitors, long reply chains
 Theme(s): T4 Informal brand communication; T5 Identity/Affiliation;
 T1 Reach
 FocusedCode(s): F4.1 Narrative/banter extension; F5.2 In-group humour
 PasserbyTakeaway: Playful BTS turns into viral meme thread, strengthening in-group identity and brand talkability.
 ShortQuote: "This is tonight's business war."



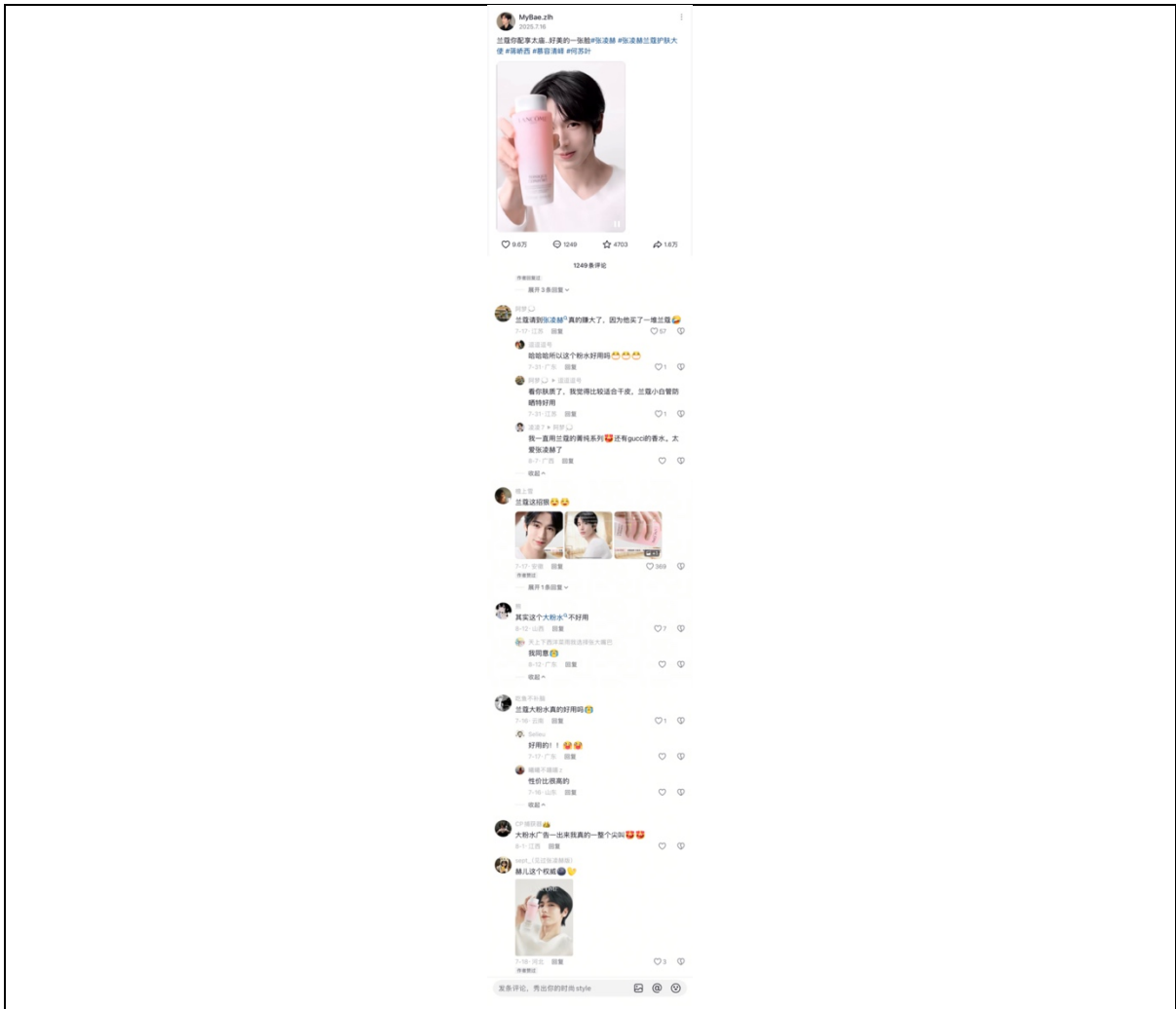
D_08_20250826_Gucci_CelebG_Event_fragrance_purchase-proof_product-seeding_check-in

Platform: Douyin
 DateTime: 2025-08-26
 AccountType: Fan/aggregator post + Fans
 ContentType: Fragrance event photo/video
 FanBehaviourType: Purchase proof (bottle photos); Product seeding; Event check-ins; Affective praise
 EntrySurface: Hashtag/Topic
 KeyCues: "bought it," close-ups of perfume, venue selfies
 Theme(s): T2 Instrumental cues; T3 Social proof; T1 Amplification
 FocusedCode(s): F3.2 Purchase proof; F2.2 User product photos; F1.3 Event check-in
 PasserbyTakeaway: Multiple commenters show bought items and onsite shots → strong conversion signals.
 ShortQuote: "Bought it already."



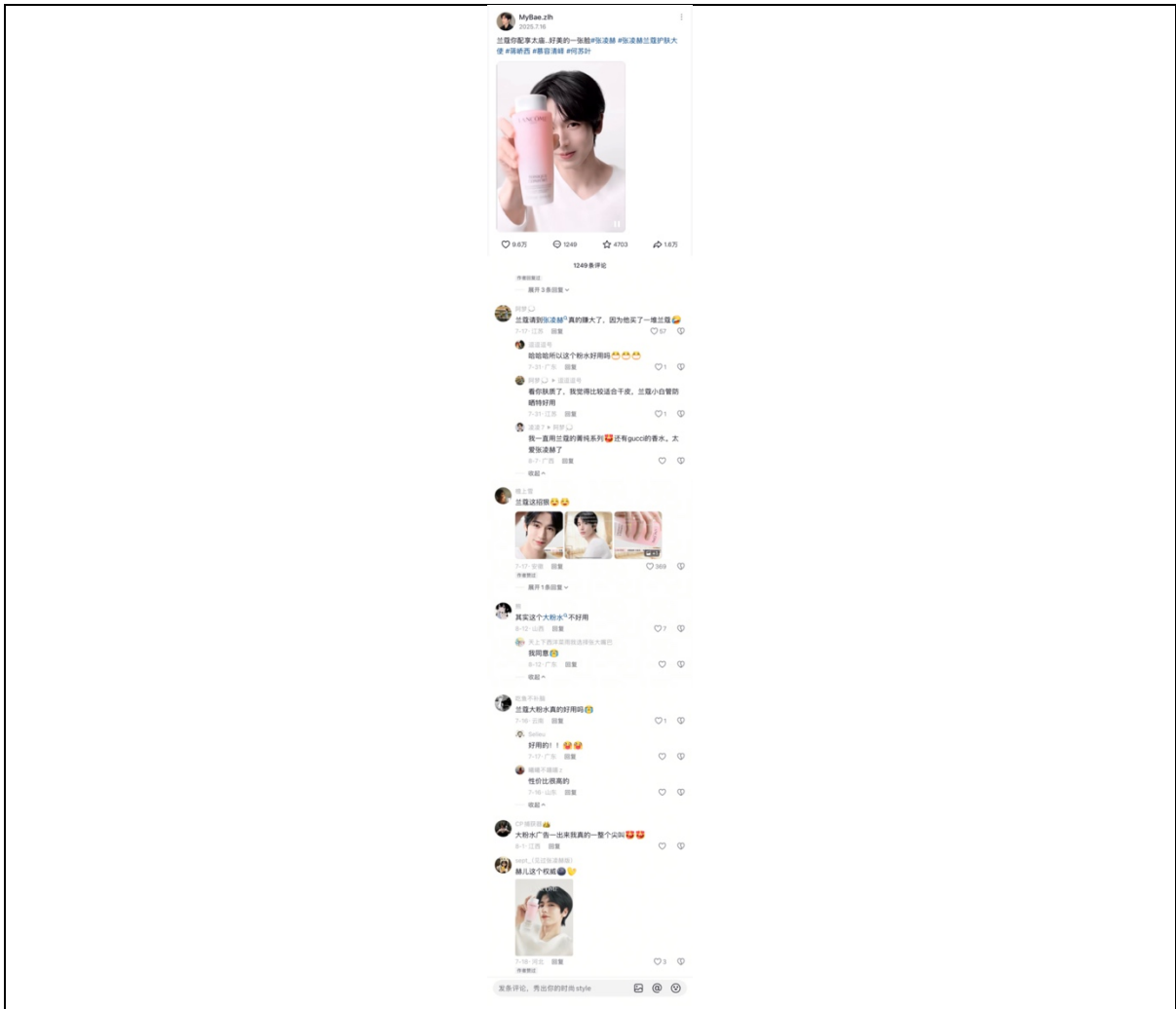
D_09_20250716_Lancome_CelebG_Product_review_testimonials_purchase-motivation

Platform: Douyin
 DateTime: 2025-07-16
 AccountType: Fan/creator amplification + Fans
 ContentType: Skincare ad clip (toner)
 FanBehaviourType: Micro-reviews/testimonials; Own photos;
 Ambassador-driven purchase motivation; Usability Q&A
 EntrySurface: Recommendation / Hashtag
 KeyCues: “bought a lot because of him,” “is this good for dry skin?”,
 side-by-side product photos
 Theme(s): T2 Instrumental cues; T3 Social proof
 FocusedCode(s): F2.1 Micro-review; F2.2 User photos; F3.1
 Purchase motivation (ambassador)
 PasserbyTakeaway: Thread blends usage tips, skin-type suitability
 and ‘bought because of him’ claims—normalising purchase.
 ShortQuote: “Because of him I bought it.”



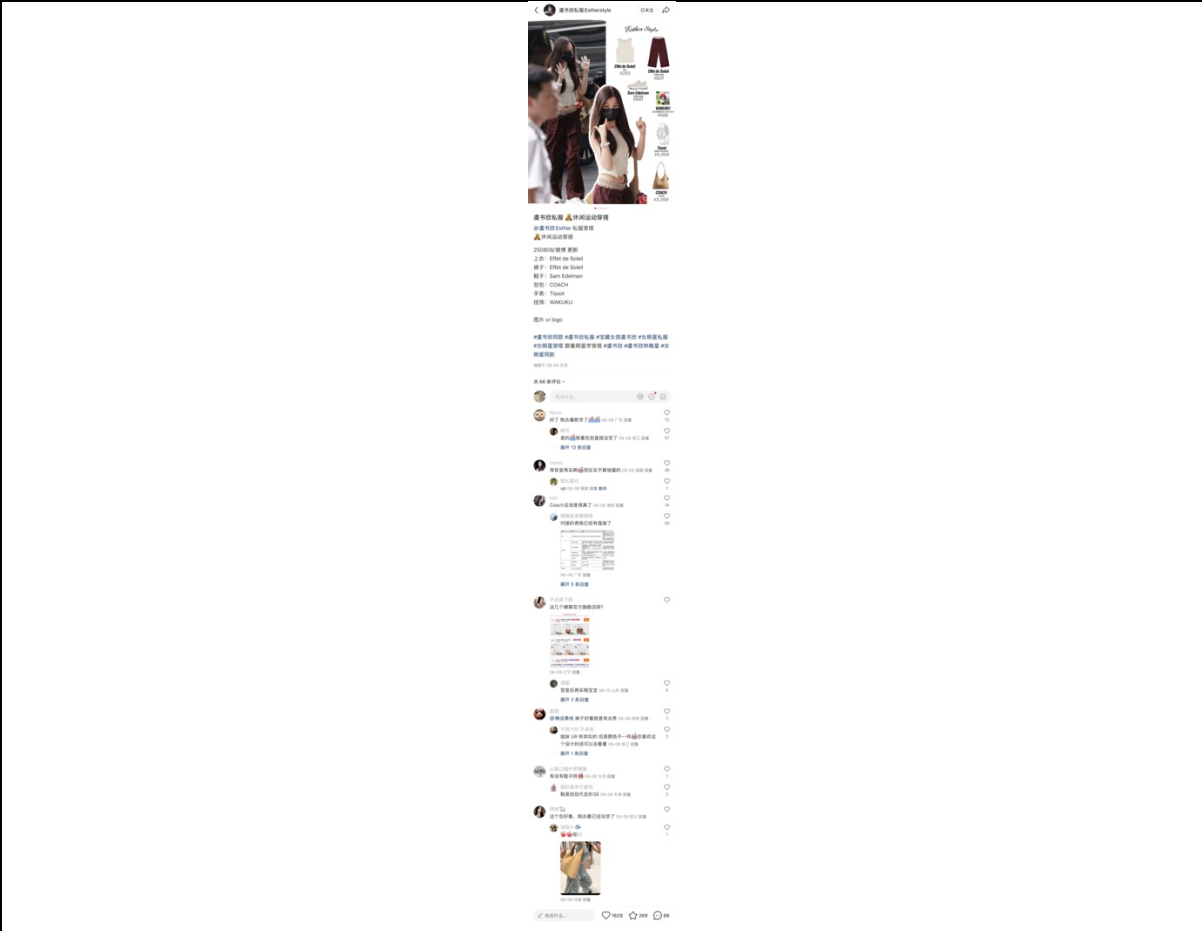
D_09_20250716_Lancome_CelebG_Product_review_testimonials_purchase-motivation

Platform: Douyin
 DateTime: 2025-07-16
 AccountType: Fan/creator amplification + Fans
 ContentType: Skincare ad clip (toner)
 FanBehaviourType: Micro-reviews/testimonials; Own photos;
 Ambassador-driven purchase motivation; Usability Q&A
 EntrySurface: Recommendation / Hashtag
 KeyCues: “bought a lot because of him,” “is this good for dry skin?”,
 side-by-side product photos
 Theme(s): T2 Instrumental cues; T3 Social proof
 FocusedCode(s): F2.1 Micro-review; F2.2 User photos; F3.1
 Purchase motivation (ambassador)
 PasserbyTakeaway: Thread blends usage tips, skin-type suitability
 and ‘bought because of him’ claims—normalising purchase.
 ShortQuote: “Because of him I bought it.”



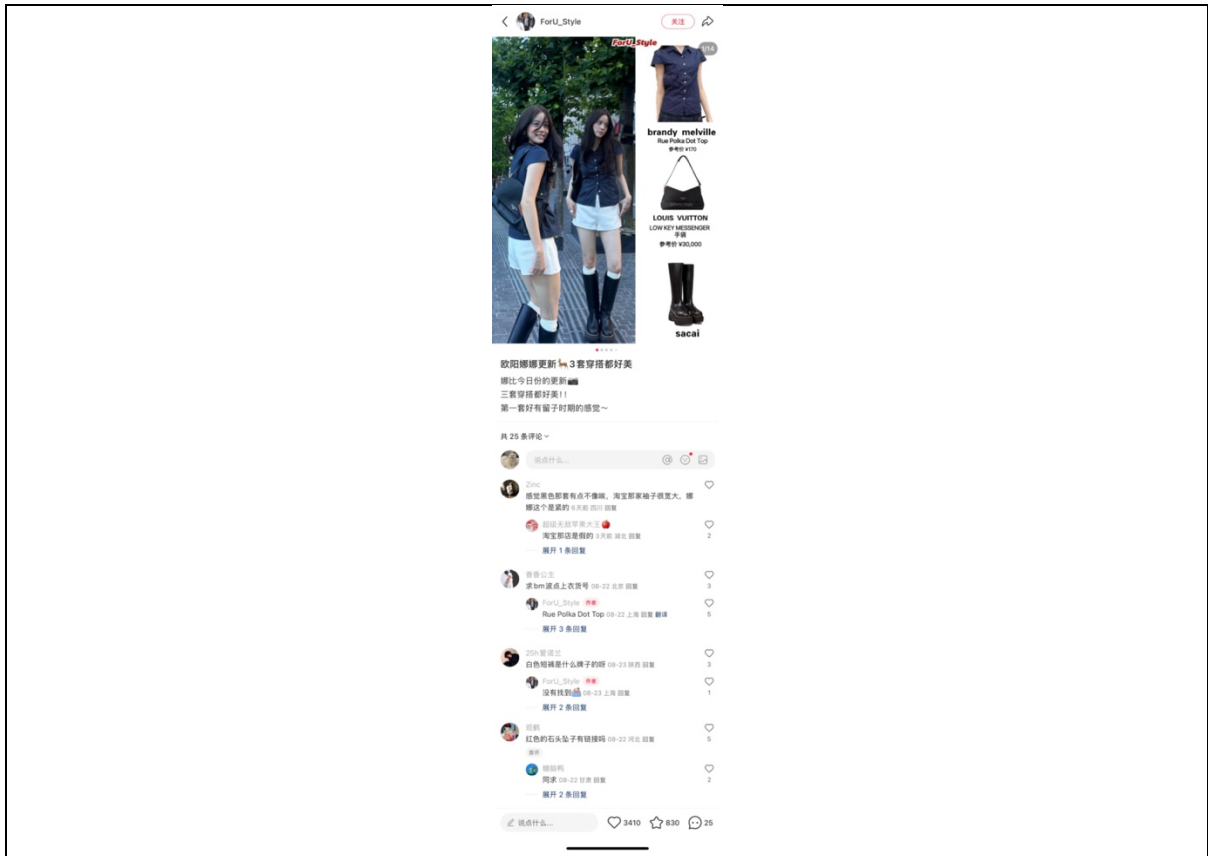
D_09_20250716_Lancome_CelebG_Product_review_testimonials_purchase-motivation

Platform: Douyin
 DateTime: 2025-07-16
 AccountType: Fan/creator amplification + Fans
 ContentType: Skincare ad clip (toner)
 FanBehaviourType: Micro-reviews/testimonials; Own photos;
 Ambassador-driven purchase motivation; Usability Q&A
 EntrySurface: Recommendation / Hashtag
 KeyCues: “bought a lot because of him,” “is this good for dry skin?”,
 side-by-side product photos
 Theme(s): T2 Instrumental cues; T3 Social proof
 FocusedCode(s): F2.1 Micro-review; F2.2 User photos; F3.1
 Purchase motivation (ambassador)
 PasserbyTakeaway: Thread blends usage tips, skin-type suitability
 and ‘bought because of him’ claims—normalising purchase.
 ShortQuote: “Because of him I bought it.”




X_01_20250808_MultiBrand_CelebA_Toolkit_purchase-proof

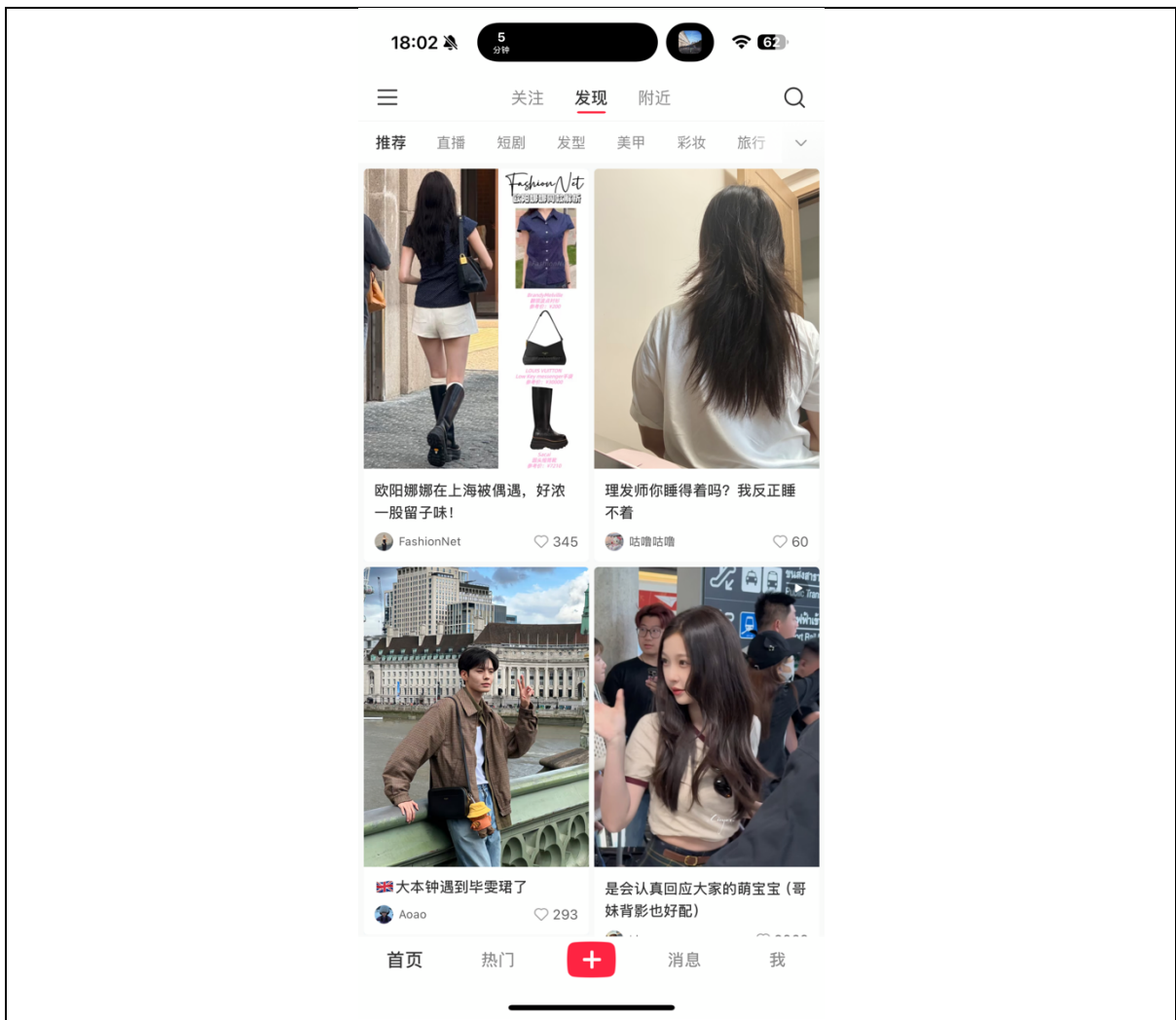
Platform: XHS
 DateTime: 2025-08-08
 AccountType: Fan styling aggregator (main post) + fans/passers-by (comments)
 ContentType: Outfit toolkit collage (brand + price list)
 FanBehaviourType: Toolkit/ID mapping; Purchase proof (bag photo); SKU/where-to-buy Q&A
 EntrySurface: Followed account / Recommendation
 KeyCues: item board with prices; invoice screenshot; user handbag photo
 Theme(s): T2 Instrumental cues; T3 Social proof
 FocusedCode(s): F2.4 Toolkit checklist; F3.2 Purchase proof; F2.1 Product enquiry
 PasserbyTakeaway: Ready-made shopping list + real buyer photos lower search and risk.
 ShortQuote (≤10 words): “Buying this to support.” / “Any link for this?”



X_02_20250822_MultiBrand_CelebH_Toolkit_ID-mapping_QA

Platform: XHS
 DateTime: 2025-08-22
 AccountType: Fashion aggregator (main post) + users (comments)
 ContentType: Three-look toolkit (top, bag, boots) with reference prices
 FanBehaviourType: ID mapping; Link/stock requests; Authenticity debate (“that Taobao shop is fake”)
 EntrySurface: Recommendation / Search
 KeyCues: “please share link,” “what brand is the white skirt,” authenticity warnings
 Theme(s): T2 Instrumental cues; T6 Contestation/verification
 FocusedCode(s): F2.4 Toolkit; F2.1 Q&A; F6.1 Authenticity check
 PasserbyTakeaway: Crowd answers brand/source questions, while peers flag fakes → guides safer buying.
 ShortQuote: “Link for the polka-dot top?”

	<p>Platform: XHS Date Time: 2025-08-10 (capture) Account Type: Fan styling aggregator – account overview Content Type: Profile/grid showing series of toolkit posts (CELINE, SUPREME, etc.) Fan Behaviour Type: Serial seeding across styles; Curated outfit libraries; Brand co-occurrence mapping Entry Surface: Profile / Search Key Cues: repeated “Esther Style” boards; multi-brand layouts; consistent templates Theme(s): T1 Reach & amplification; T2 Instrumental cues Focused Code(s): F1.1 Serial seeding; F2.4 Toolkit Passerby Takeaway: Systematic toolkits create a one-stop library → lowers ongoing search cost. Short Quote: “Preppy / vintage / fantasy styles—full sets listed.”</p>
<p>X_03_20250810_MultiBrand_CelebA_AccountGrid_serial-seeding_toolkit</p>	




X_04_20250828_MultiBrand_CelebH_Discovery_al go-push_toolkit.

Platform: XHS
 DateTime: 2025-08-28
 AccountType: Discovery feed cards (media/aggregators)
 ContentType: Recommendation tiles incl. outfit breakdown card
 FanBehaviourType: Algorithmic push of toolkit content; Street-sighting framing
 EntrySurface: Discovery/Recommendation
 KeyCues: "spotted in Shanghai," outfit board with prices/links
 Theme(s): T1 Reach & amplification; T2 Instrumental cues
 FocusedCode(s): F1.3 Algorithmic exposure; F2.4 Toolkit
 PasserbyTakeaway: Toolkits are surfaced passively in Discover, extending reach beyond followers.
 ShortQuote: "Spotted... looks very slim!"

共 6 条评论 ∨

说点什么... @ 😊 📷


MercuryRosy (见过露思 5 次版) 12
 还有这几件 🍷 也是简简单单但就是很好看

 03-07 回复

首评

🐼 www 7
 因为脸好看 🍷, 也很瘦。感觉脸好看, 大多数衣服穿起来都会很好看 08-04 辽宁 回复

🐻 用户已注销 1
 图5白裤子有平替吗 03-14 回复

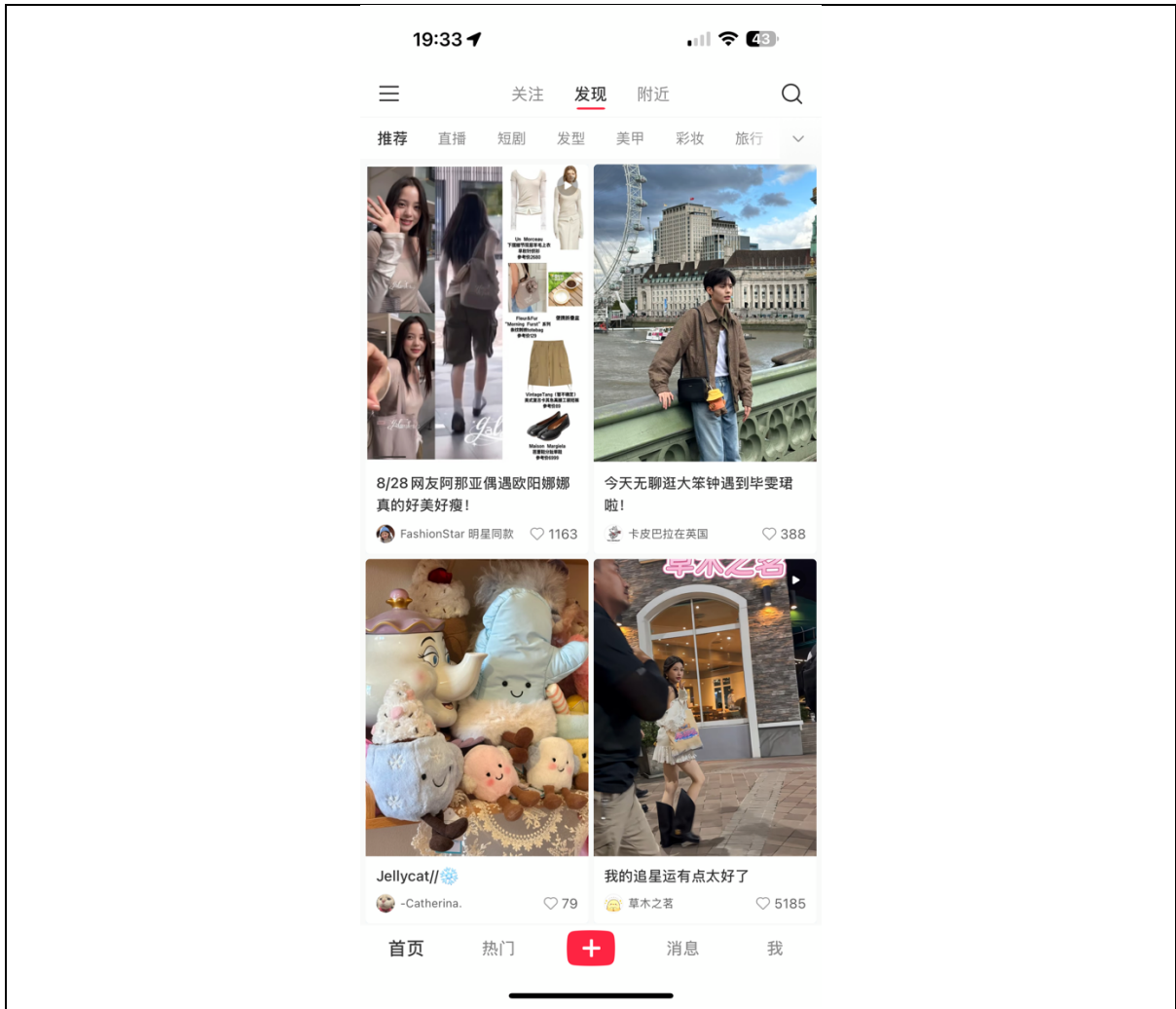
🎨 爱画画的PP 1
 同问 07-15 回复

👤 睡不着的时候就数羊 1
 这件是哪个品牌的


说点什么... ❤️ 594 🌟 222 💬 6

X_05_20250307_MultiBrand_CelebH_Comments_QA_brand-requests

Platform: XHS
 DateTime: 2025-03-07
 AccountType: Comment thread under outfit post
 ContentType: Comment collage (comparisons, 'any dupe', brand ID requests)
 FanBehaviourType: Crowdsourced ID; Fit/dupe discussion; Affective appearance talk
 EntrySurface: Comments
 KeyCues: "any alternative for the white shorts," "which brand is this top," reference photo replies
 Theme(s): T2 Instrumental cues; T3 Social proof (consensus)
 FocusedCode(s): F2.1 Q&A; F2.5 Dupe/alt sourcing
 PasserbyTakeaway: Thread functions as live buying guide—crowd supplies IDs and substitutes.
 ShortQuote: "Which brand is this?" / "Any dupe?"



X_06_20250828_MultiBrand_CelebH_Discovery_algo-push_street-sighting.

Platform: XHS
 DateTime: 2025-08-28
 AccountType: Discovery feed (multiple creators)
 ContentType: Tiles: outfit breakdown + street-sighting short video
 FanBehaviourType: Algorithmic amplification; Sighting/"lucky encounter" narratives
 EntrySurface: Discovery/Recommendation
 KeyCues: "encountered today," outfit board with SKUs/prices
 Theme(s): T1 Reach & amplification; T4 Informal brand communication (sighting narrative)
 FocusedCode(s): F1.3 Algorithmic exposure; F4.1 Narrative extension (encounter/luck)
 PasserbyTakeaway: Sighting stories + toolkits spread brand cues to non-followers in feed.
 ShortQuote: "Ran into her—so lucky!"

Appendix 3.2: interview transcript and initial code

Transcript - Participant 01	Initial coding
<p>The interview opened with the following Introduction (Opening Script) for Section 3.4.2 Semi-structured Narrative Interview.</p> <p>Part 1-----</p> <p>Interviewer: Could you describe a time on Douyin, Xiaohongshu or Weibo when you saw fans creating content and supporting or promoting a luxury brand or its celebrity endorser?</p> <p>Participate 01: I am not an anyones fan [1]. The last time was a Zhao Lusi live clip-on Weibo. It hit the trending list, a friend sent it to me, and then the app kept pushing it into my feed [2]. Fans quickly made “same item” lists with shopping links and the pieces blew up [3]. As a casual viewer, it made the items feel very current, so I looked up the brand and prices and saved a couple for later[4]. Another one was a while back when Jackson Yee endorsed Armani Beauty and handed out gifts at a concert. Social media went wild and friends who could not go jumped on the official site for the gift sets so they would not miss out. For me, that fan buzz does lift the brand and makes it seem younger and more talked about[5]. Sometimes it also feels a bit overhyped, so I usually check reviews and think it through before buying.</p> <p>Interviewer: What did you see and how was it presented?</p> <p>Participate 01: I saw it on Douyin as a livestream highlights clip within a post.</p> <p>Interviewer: How did this content enter your feed? For example, via recommendations, trending topics, shares, search results or interactions from accounts you follow.</p> <p>Participate 01: It appeared via the platform’s recommendations and was also in the trending topics at the time.</p> <p>Interviewer: Earlier I showed examples of fan support or promotion on social media. Have you encountered similar content on the platforms you use?</p> <p>Participate 01: Yes. I often see fans making “same item” lists, recommendation roundups and coordinated comments. The same-item lists and review packs affect me most because they lower the effort to check things, so I look up prices and reviews</p>	<p>Non-fan Self-Identification [1]</p> <p>Trending Virality & Algorithmic Push [2]</p> <p>Fan ‘Same-Item’ Lists Lowered Effort [3]</p> <p>Price Check & Wishlisting [4]</p> <p>Endorser Halo on Brand Youthfulness [5]</p>

<p>[6]. If the comments look too controlled, I read it as over-marketing and become more cautious [7].</p> <p>Part 2-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When you come across this fan content on social media, what is your immediate reaction? Please describe in your own words. It could be curiosity, interest, feeling annoyed, feeling inspired, indifference, or anything else.</p> <p>Participate 01: Curiosity. My first thought is, why is this suddenly everywhere? [8] Is it genuinely good or just fan-driven? I'll usually tap into the "same item" lists to check the brand, price, and some real reviews. [9]</p> <p>Interviewer: Did this content change your view of the brand or its products? If so, please explain how, for example changes in perception, favourability, trust, or purchase intention.</p> <p>Participate 01: It does a bit. If it is an artist I like or respect, the brand gets a small boost and I am more willing to look into it. If not, I just browse and move on. If the comments feel too "managed", it puts me off. [10]</p> <p>Interviewer: How long do these feelings typically last? During or after that time, do you talk about them with others, for example with friends, family or on social media?</p> <p>Participate 01: With artists I like, it sticks, and I may keep the product on a shortlist. With others, it fades once the buzz dies down. [11] If it is a hot topic I will chat briefly with friends, and when opinions are split, I will check reviews before deciding. [12]</p> <p>Part 3-----</p> <p>Interviewer: In your view, what impact, if any, do these fan posts have on the brand's overall image? Please summarise in your own words.</p> <p>Participate 01: Overall, fan posts raise the brand's visibility and make it feel current and talked about. If I see real outfits and honest reviews, the brand feels more relatable, and I am more willing to investigate it. If it floods my feed and the comments look managed, I get sceptical. [13]</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it make the brand appear more trustworthy, more fashionable, or more authentic, or conversely less authentic or overhyped? Which words would you use to describe the effect?</p>	<p>Effort Reduction via Fan Toolkits [6]</p> <p>Over-Marketing Scepticism [7]</p> <p>Curiosity as Primary Affect [8]</p> <p>Independent-Review Verification [9]</p> <p>Conditional Endorser-Led Favourability [10]</p> <p>Short-Lived Effects [11]</p> <p>Light Social Sharing [12]</p>
--	---

<p>Participate 01: Fans sharing genuine usage experiences and styling ideas can spark an “I could try that” feeling and boost goodwill towards the brand [14], but once the content floods my feed and the messaging becomes homogeneous, it quickly leads to aesthetic fatigue. [15]</p> <p>Interviewer: Have these fan posts ever changed how you feel about a brand, for example liking it more, becoming indifferent or feeling averse? Please give an example.</p> <p>Participate 01: Yes. Real user experience, styling ideas and pros and cons do lift my favourability as a non-fan, and I might add the item to a shortlist. If it turns into constant flooding or obvious agenda-pushing, I cool off, wait it out or avoid the brand.</p> <p>Part 4-----</p> <p>Interviewer: I will now show you a few example screenshots of common fan activities on social media. These are from public sources and have been anonymised and are provided only to aid understanding. Based on these images, would they influence your purchase intentions or subsequent behaviour?</p> <p>Participate 01: Yes. If the price is within my range and the endorser is someone I like [16], I do feel like giving it a try. The kind of “same item” lists and styling shots in the image reduce the effort for me, so I usually save it or add it to a wishlist.</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you then search for the brand or product? If yes, please say how you searched and what you found.</p> <p>Participate 01: I take a quick look but do not go deep. I will glance at the brand page or the shop page for price, basics, and a few third-party reviews. Unless it really clicks with me, I will not research further.</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you discuss it with others, or look up additional reviews? If yes, on which platforms or through which channels?</p> <p>Participate 01: I do not usually bring it up because I already know the brand well. If friends are hyping it or there is controversy, I will chat briefly and, if needed, check independent reviews to confirm. [17]</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it lead you to avoid the brand? If yes, please explain the reasons and context.</p>	<p>Authenticity Heuristic: Real Outfits/Reviews [13]</p> <p>Authentic UGC Try-It Nudge [14]</p> <p>Feed Flooding → Aesthetic Fatigue [15]</p> <p>Price & Endorser Fit as Consideration Gate [16]</p>
--	--

<p>Participate 01: I would not avoid a brand just because of fan posts. If it turns into heavy flooding, obvious comment management or negative pile-ons, I might wait it out. [18] otherwise, the impact is neutral to slightly positive.</p> <p>Part 5-----</p> <p>Interviewer: what effects do you think these fan activities have on the brand? Please share your views on both positive and negative aspects. Is there anything else you would like to add, such as thoughts, experiences, or examples?</p> <p>Participate 01: Overall, I see fan activity as an amplifier. It raises brand visibility and makes the brand feel younger and more talked about. Genuine styling and reviews lower the effort for me and can move me from awareness to consideration or a wishlist when the price is within reach, and I like the endorser. The downside is feed flooding and overly uniform comments that make me question authenticity and feel fatigued, so I tend to wait and check independent reviews. I would not avoid a brand purely because of fan posts. For a non-fan like me the impact is mostly short-term attention and shifts in favourability, while purchase depends on product quality, credible reviews, and budget. One more point, diverse and authentic user voices help, scripted one-note messaging hurts. [19]</p> <p>Part 6-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When choosing luxury fashion products, what factors do you usually consider? You may speak about design, craftsmanship and materials, price, brand reputation, availability, and channels, after sales service, others' reviews and assessments, and sustainability, and briefly indicate their order of importance and why.</p> <p>Participate 01: I look first at brand reputation, then price and design. If the materials, craftsmanship and comfort are solid, I keep considering[20]. I also think about everyday fit and how easy it is to care for.</p> <p>Interviewer: Do you feel your preferences for certain brands come mainly from your own lifestyle and values, or are they influenced by others' commentary including fan communities? Which carries more weight for you and why? Please give an example if you can.</p> <p>Participate 01: Both matter, but my lifestyle and values carry more weight. I prefer brands that emphasise sustainability and comfortable materials</p>	<p>Independent-Review Verification [17]</p> <p>Wait-It-Out Strategy (No Boycott) [18]</p> <p>Fan-Amplifier under Authenticity Gatekeeping [19]</p>
--	--

because that fits my day-to-day choices. Other people's views still play a part, especially genuine fan or consumer posts with real outfits and usage, which make me more willing to explore. If the comments are one sided or read like ads, my trust drops. As a non-fan, these voices are a reference, not the final decision.

Interviewer: If your favourite luxury brand released a new product and the endorser's fan community showed a polarised response with some strongly recommending it and others clearly opposing it, would this affect how you view the brand and what you choose to do? If you have not experienced this, please answer using a similar imagined situation and say what actions you might take, such as continuing to follow, searching for more information, waiting, or changing your purchase decision.

Participate 01: It would have some effect. If there is heavy hype, I take it as excessive marketing and my interest falls. If there is strong resistance, I check the reasons and whether it relates to values or quality. I usually wait and look for independent reviews, then decide based on my needs and budget. If the product suits me, I may still buy it, though my overall impression of the brand becomes more complicated.

Quality/Comfort/Materials as Final Gate [20]

Values Fit [21]

<p>Interviewer: When you come across this fan content on social media, what is your immediate reaction? Please describe in your own words. It could be curiosity, interest, feeling annoyed, feeling inspired, indifference, or anything else.</p> <p>Participate 02: <i>Most of the time I feel indifferent and scroll on. If I think an outfit looks good, I might check the fan club's posts for her off duty looks to see the brand, just a quick look</i> [27]. As a non-fan it usually nudges me from no attention to mild attention.</p> <p>Interviewer: Did this content change your view of the brand or its products? If so, please explain how, for example changes in perception, favourability, trust, or purchase intention.</p> <p>Participate 02: It rarely changes how I see a luxury brand. Luxury brands have solid equity. <i>An endorsement makes the intended brand image more concrete</i>,[28] but fan posts alone do not shift my judgement or purchase decision.</p> <p>Interviewer: How long do these feelings typically last? During or after that time, do you talk about them with others, for example with friends, family or on social media?</p> <p>Participate 02: <i>Positive feelings fade quickly, and I do not usually bring them up. If something feels negative, I may vent to friends and glance at a couple of independent reviews. The feeling does not last long unless it keeps resurfacing, or it involves an artist I particularly like.</i> [29]</p> <p>Part 3-----</p> <p>Interviewer: In your view, what impact, if any, do these fan posts have on the brand's overall image? Please summarise in your own words.</p> <p>Participate 02: I do think fan posts reinforce and make the brand image more concrete for me. They amplify the link between the brand and the endorser and raise exposure, and they project the celebrity's lifestyle onto the brand so it is easier for me to identify with it. <i>The focus can also shift from the product to the person, and the effect is mostly a short-term lift in talkability and attention.</i> [30]</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it make the brand appear more trustworthy, more fashionable, or more authentic, or conversely less authentic or overhyped? Which words would you use to describe the effect?</p>	<p>Indifference Baseline; Looks-Good Nudge [27]</p> <p>Endorsement Concretised Brand Image [28]</p> <p>Short-Lived Visibility Amplifier [29]</p>
---	--

<p>Participate 02: <i>When the content feels genuine and informative the brand seems more trustworthy and more lived-in. But when it is formulaic and floods my feed, it feels inauthentic and hyped, and I feel sceptical.</i> [31]</p> <p>Interviewer: Have these fan posts ever changed how you feel about a brand, for example liking it more, becoming indifferent or feeling averse? Please give an example.</p> <p>Participate 02: There is some change. For example, as mentioned earlier, <i>Zhang Jingyi's viral Burberry look refreshed my view of the brand. I used to think it was rather traditional, but her styling made it feel younger and easier to wear</i> [32]. I would consider buying if I had a need. After Krystal Jung started with Ralph Lauren, many styling posts appeared on Xiaohongshu, <i>not only from fans but also from fashion creators. They made the brand feel more every day and wearable. Seeing these posts does shift how I see the brand. Since some are from fans and some from creators, they are useful references for me and can influence my thinking to some extent.</i> [33]</p> <p>Part 4-----</p> <p>Interviewer: I will now show you a few example screenshots of common fan activities on social media. These are from public sources and have been anonymised and are provided only to aid understanding. Based on these images, would they influence your purchase intentions or subsequent behaviour?</p> <p>Participate 02: A little. The “same item” shots and try-on images lower the effort and make me consider it for a moment. <i>Whether I buy still depends on my current need and budget. I usually just scroll on or save it rather than purchase straight away.</i> [34]</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you then search for the brand or product? If yes, please say how you searched and what you found.</p> <p>Participate 02: Not really. If I do not need it, I will not search. I only look it up when I am already choosing something or when the information looks genuinely useful.</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you discuss it with others, or look up additional reviews? If yes, on which platforms or through which channels?</p>	<p>Short-Term Talkability, Limited Choice Impact [30]</p> <p>Authenticity Heuristic: Informative = Trustworthy [31]</p> <p>Exemplar Reframing (Burberry Younger/Wearable) [32]</p> <p>Cross-Source Convergence (Fans + Creators) [33]</p>
---	---

<p>Participate 02: No. I do not usually discuss it with friends or check extra reviews because of fan posts, unless there is obvious controversy. [35]</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it lead you to avoid the brand? If yes, please explain the reasons and context.</p> <p>Participate 02: No. For luxury I prioritise design, wearability, and price. I will only hold off if my feed gets flooded or the comments feel inauthentic.</p> <p>Part 5-----</p> <p>Interviewer: what effects do you think these fan activities have on the brand? Please share your views on both positive and negative aspects. Is there anything else you would like to add, such as thoughts, experiences, or examples?</p> <p>Participate 02: The impact on me is small. Fan posts mostly raise visibility and give a short bump in attention. What matters is objective information. When I look up a luxury item, I check whether the post is blindly praising or gives clear details and downsides. If it shows real try-ons, comparisons and balanced pros and cons, I use it as a reference. If it feels copy-pasted or floods my feed, I downgrade it or ignore it. In the end I decide based on product quality, independent reviews, and my budget. [36]</p> <p>Part 6-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When choosing luxury fashion products, what factors do you usually consider? You may speak about design, craftsmanship and materials, price, brand reputation, availability, and channels, after sales service, others' reviews and assessments, and sustainability, and briefly indicate their order of importance and why.</p> <p>Participate 02: I look at design, price, brand reputation, wearability, and durability. If materials and build are weak, I rule it out. I also think about everyday use and my budget before deciding.</p> <p>Interviewer: Do you feel your preferences for certain brands come mainly from your own lifestyle and values, or are they influenced by others' commentary including fan communities? Which carries more weight for you and why? Please give an example if you can.</p> <p>Participate 02: Mainly from my lifestyle and the way I dress. Other people's comments including fan posts are a reference. Real try-ons and long-term feedback</p>	<p>Need/Budget Gatekeeping [34]</p> <p>Limited Search/Discussion Unless Controversy [35]</p> <p>[36] Flooding/Inauthenticity → Downgrade</p>
--	--

can nudge me to look closer, but they do not decide for me. [37]

Interviewer: If your favourite luxury brand released a new product and the endorser's fan community showed a polarised response with some strongly recommending it and others clearly opposing it, would this affect how you view the brand and what you choose to do? If you have not experienced this, please answer using a similar imagined situation and say what actions you might take, such as continuing to follow, searching for more information, waiting, or changing your purchase decision.

Participate 02: Heavy fan hype mostly raises awareness because I do not usually follow celebrity content. If there is strong resistance, I check the reason. *If it involves values such as discrimination, I am unlikely to buy* [38], which is more about the brand than the fans. Overall fan behaviour has a limited effect on me. It shifts attention in the short term rather than the final choice. *I rely on product quality, independent reviews and whether it fits my style.* [39]

[37] Informational Social Proof (Non-decisive)

[38] Values Triggered Avoidance

[39] Product-Led Final Decision

Transcript - Participant 03	Initial coding
<p>The interview opened with the following Introduction (Opening Script) for Section 3.4.2 Semi-structured Narrative Interview.</p> <p>Part 1-----</p> <p>Interviewer: Could you describe a time on Douyin, Xiaohongshu or Weibo when you saw fans creating content and supporting or promoting a luxury brand or its celebrity endorser?</p> <p>Participate 03: I saw a Xiaohongshu post of Jennie wearing Chanel at the Met Gala. The comments were mostly fans saying it was eye catching and that they loved it. That kind of high traffic post makes me notice the brand and gives me a brief lift in favourability, though I do not act straight away.</p> <p>Interviewer: What did you see and how was it presented?</p> <p>Participate 03: Xiaohongshu photo and text post posted by fans.</p> <p>Interviewer: How did this content enter your feed? For example, via recommendations, trending topics, shares, search results or interactions from accounts you follow.</p> <p>Participate 03: It showed up under Trending and on my home recommendations[40]. It seems to be a mix of high engagement and algorithm push.</p> <p>Interviewer: Earlier I showed examples of fan support or promotion on social media. Have you encountered similar content on the platforms you use?</p> <p>Participate 03: Yes. Typical behaviours include compiling the outfit breakdown, tagging the brands worn and coordinated support or comment management [41] . These lower the effort for me to learn about the brand and find same items and prices. If the control looks too strong I tend to wait and see [42].</p> <p>Part 2-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When you come across this fan content on social media, what is your immediate reaction? Please describe in your own words. It could be curiosity, interest, feeling annoyed, feeling inspired, indifference, or anything else.</p>	<p>[40] Trending + Algorithm Push Exposure</p> <p>[41] Fan Toolkits Lower Effort</p> <p>[42] Perceived Comment Control → Wait-and-See</p>

<p>Participate 03: It depends on how I feel about the celebrity and the brand. <i>Most of the time I am interested because it appears on my home feed and the platform pushes what matches my preferences. Jennie and Chanel were like that. As a non-fan, passively seeing this kind of fan content gives me a slight nudge to pay attention</i> [43].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did this content change your view of the brand or its products? If so, please explain how, for example changes in perception, favourability, trust, or purchase intention.</p> <p>Participate 03: Yes. It deepens my impression of the brand. <i>A celebrity can offer a new interpretation, making the brand feel younger or more every day</i> [44], which lifts its image. For a non-fan, <i>these concrete examples bring the brand a bit closer and less distant</i> [45].</p> <p>Interviewer: How long do these feelings typically last? During or after that time, do you talk about them with others, for example with friends, family or on social media?</p> <p>Participate 03: <i>Usually the feeling fades after about three days</i> [46]. If I really like it, it can last a month or two and <i>I might share it with friends to discuss. I tend to share when the styling really stands out or the topic is hot, and sometimes I will also glance at more reviews</i> [47].</p>	<p>[43] Algorithmic Personalisation → Mild Attention</p> <p>[44] Endorser Reframing (Younger/Everyday)</p> <p>[45] Reduced Psychological Distance</p>
<p>Part 3-----</p> <p>Interviewer: In your view, what impact, if any, do these fan posts have on the brand's overall image? Please summarise in your own words.</p> <p>Participate 03: Mostly positive. Endorsers are usually carefully chosen so the fit is there, and fan reposting lifts exposure, which nudges my impression in a good direction. <i>The effect is mainly visibility and talkability, not a change in how I judge the product itself</i> [48].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it make the brand appear more trustworthy, more fashionable, or more authentic, or conversely less authentic or overhyped? Which words would you use to describe the effect?</p> <p>Participate 03: <i>It feels more fashionable and more talked about, but not necessarily more authentic</i> [49]. <i>The celebrity's polished image creates aspiration and makes the brand look perfected, which adds some distance</i> [50]. Words I would use include fashionable, uplifted, high visibility, clearer</p>	<p>[46] Short-Lived Uplift Window</p> <p>[47] Social Sharing Trigger</p> <p>[48] Visibility/Talkability ↑, Product Judgement Stable</p>

interpretation, and less authentic, somewhat packaged, heavy on marketing.

Interviewer: Have these fan posts ever changed how you feel about a brand, for example liking it more, becoming indifferent or feeling averse? Please give an example.

Participate 03: Yes. For example, when Chanel featured Wang Yibo, many comments praised the fit, but my own taste does not see him as particularly fashion forward, so my favourability dropped a little. It made me think the brand was prioritising traffic and sales and that diluted the aesthetic and image [51]. It would not change a purchase instantly, but it makes me wait and check independent reviews [52].

Part 4-----

Interviewer: I will now show you a few example screenshots of common fan activities on social media. These are from public sources and have been anonymised and are provided only to aid understanding. Based on these images, would they influence your purchase intentions or subsequent behaviour?

Participate 03: It does not directly make me buy. The effect is positive though. Seeing the brand again keeps it top of mind [53] and reinforces LV's image of a stylish, refined, youthful male. For me it is a short lift in attention and favourability.

Interviewer: Did you then search for the brand or product? If yes, please say how you searched and what you found.

Participate 03: Possibly. If the product interests me or I am already choosing, I will do a quick search. I usually check price, basics, try on shots and a few third-party reviews [54].

Interviewer: Did you discuss it with others, or look up additional reviews? If yes, on which platforms or through which channels?

Participate 03: I take a quick glance at the comments. I know most of it is fans defending and supporting the celebrity. If I am genuinely interested, I look for more objective reviews elsewhere, such as independent tests, forums or buyer feedback on shopping sites [55].

Interviewer: Did it lead you to avoid the brand? If yes, please explain the reasons and context.

[49] Fashionability Lift, Authenticity Not Guaranteed

[50] Aspirational Polish → Distance

[51] Endorser-Brand Misfit → Favourability Drop

[52] Independent-Review Gatekeeping

[53] Mere-Exposure Top-of-Mind

<p>Participate 03: No. I would not avoid a brand because of fan posts. <i>I care more about the brand's design, quality, and reputation, unless there are clear issues with values or product quality</i> [56].</p> <p>Part 5-----</p> <p>Interviewer: what effects do you think these fan activities have on the brand? Please share your views on both positive and negative aspects. Is there anything else you would like to add, such as thoughts, experiences, or examples?</p> <p>Participate 03: Both. On the positive side it raises visibility, keeps the brand in the conversation and <i>transfers the endorser's vibe to the brand, giving a short lift in recall and favourability</i> [57]. On the negative side heavy hype and forced bundling feel inauthentic, <i>and if I notice comment control or pile on my trust drops, and I wait for independent reviews</i> [58]. For a non-fan like me the effect is mainly on attention and perception, while purchase still depends on product quality, credible reviews and budget.</p> <p>Part 6-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When choosing luxury fashion products, what factors do you usually consider? You may speak about design, craftsmanship and materials, price, brand reputation, availability, and channels, after sales service, others' reviews and assessments, and sustainability, and briefly indicate their order of importance and why.</p> <p>Participate 03: I look at design, brand and price, and I also consider genuine user posts and friends' advice. <i>If the information feels reliable I look further, if it feels agenda driven I treat it as background only</i> [59].</p> <p>Interviewer: Do you feel your preferences for certain brands come mainly from your own lifestyle and values, or are they influenced by others' commentary including fan communities? Which carries more weight for you and why? Please give an example if you can.</p> <p>Participate 03: Mainly my lifestyle and personal taste. Other people's comments still have an effect, <i>especially when there is a clear consensus like quality issues or not being suited to shorter people. Even if I like it, I will drop it for now</i> [60]. <i>Fan or consumer try on and long-term feedback are useful, pure hype I usually ignore</i> [61].</p>	<p>[54] Consideration Info Pack</p> <p>[55] Seek Objective Sources (Forums/Buyer Feedback)</p> <p>[56] Product-Led; Values/Quality as Hard Gate</p> <p>[57] Endorser Vibe Transfer (Short Recall Lift)</p> <p>[58] Comment Control/Pile-ons → Trust Drop + Wait</p>
--	--

<p>Interviewer: If your favourite luxury brand released a new product and the endorser's fan community showed a polarised response with some strongly recommending it and others clearly opposing it, would this affect how you view the brand and what you choose to do? If you have not experienced this, please answer using a similar imagined situation and say what actions you might take, such as continuing to follow, searching for more information, waiting, or changing your purchase decision.</p> <p>Participate 03: No. I will notice the polarized reactions, but I read them as idol centred and not very relevant to my choice [62]. I decide based on product merit, independent reviews, and my budget, and I add friends' real experiences when I can [63].</p>	<p>[59] Reliability Filter vs Agenda-Driven</p> <p>[60] Consensus Heuristic Overrides Liking</p> <p>[61] Try-ons + Long-Term Feedback Are Useful</p> <p>[62] Polarisation Read as Idol-Centred</p> <p>[63] Final Anchor: Product Merit + Independent Reviews + Budget</p>
---	--

<p>Transcript - Participant 04</p>	<p>Initial coding</p>
<p>The interview opened with the following Introduction (Opening Script) for Section 3.4.2 Semi-structured Narrative Interview.</p> <p>Part 1-----</p>	

Interviewer: Could you describe a time on Douyin, Xiaohongshu or Weibo when you saw fans creating content and supporting or promoting a luxury brand or its celebrity endorser?

Participate 04: I saw posts on Xiaohongshu during LV's big ship launch event in Shanghai. Fans compiled Ouyang Nana's full looks before, during and after the event, with photos and short clips plus brand tags and "same item" notes. It was everywhere for a few days, so even as a non-fan I kept bumping into it and the brand stayed on my radar for a while [64].

Interviewer: What did you see and how was it presented?

Participate 04: Xiaohongshu. Mainly photo and text with some short videos, mostly posted by fan accounts [65].

Interviewer: How did this content enter your feed? For example, via recommendations, trending topics, shares, search results or interactions from accounts you follow.

Participate 04: It showed up under Trending and on my home feed. After I opened a few celebrity or official posts, the algorithm assumed I was interested and kept pushing more fan "organic" posts, like same-item lists and timeline roundups [66]. The event itself was huge, and LV invited lots of celebrities, so fan content around it was very dense. What stuck with me most was Ouyang Nana on Xiaohongshu people broke down her looks in detail from arriving in Shanghai, through the event, to after it, with photos and short clips, brand tags and same-item links. I am not her fan, but I kept seeing it repeatedly, so for a while I paid more attention to the brand [67].

Interviewer: Earlier I showed examples of fan support or promotion on social media. Have you encountered similar content on the platforms you use?

Participate 04: Yes, I often see it. Typical practices include compiling the idol's outfits and tagging the brands, attaching same-item or purchase information; during events they make timeline and look compilations; in the comments people queue up to show support or manage the comments; when there are giveaways they mass-post fixed copy. In addition, when a brand officially announces an endorser or a "brand friend", the comments section of the official account is often taken over by fans,

[64] Event Spike → Brand Salience

[65] XHS Fan-Posted Formats (Photo+Text+Short Video)

[66] Algorithmic Reinforcement after Light Interest

[67] Look Deconstruction + Same-Item Links Drive Attention

who collectively show support and flood the reviews; when the brand launches interactive giveaways, this kind of copy-pasted wording is, in my view, quite overwhelming, and it feels as if you cannot see any genuine comments from ordinary users at all [68].

Part 2-----

Interviewer: When you come across this fan content on social media, what is your immediate reaction? Please describe in your own words. It could be curiosity, interest, feeling annoyed, feeling inspired, indifference, or anything else.

Participate 04: My first reaction depends on which celebrity it is. If I like or know them, I will take a quick look; most of the time I just ignore it [69]. I do not usually open fan driven brand posts unless the visuals are very striking, then I might tap in; if I do not recognise the celebrity, I usually skip it [70].

Interviewer: Did this content change your view of the brand or its products? If so, please explain how, for example changes in perception, favourability, trust, or purchase intention.

Participate 04: There is some impact. If the brand's image and the endorser feel mismatched, or I am not keen on the celebrity, my overall favourability towards the brand drops. For the product itself I care more about fit, how it looks on me and whether I like the design, so if it suits me I would still buy it [71].

Interviewer: How long do these feelings typically last? During or after that time, do you talk about them with others, for example with friends, family or on social media?

Participate 04: The feeling usually lasts only for a few days after the announcement, so it is a short promotional effect. By the time I visit a store it is often just a vague impression. Luxury stores rarely display endorsers prominently [72], so any dip in favourability is mostly temporary. I do discuss it with friends, usually those who share a similar view of the brand or the celebrity.

Part 3-----

Interviewer: In your view, what impact, if any, do these fan posts have on the brand's overall image? Please summarise in your own words.

[68] Coordinated Fan Actions Crowd Out Authentic Comments

[69] Endorser Affinity Gate

[70] Visual Salience Threshold

[71] Endorser-Brand Fit Impacts Favourability; Product Fit Overrides

[72] Short-Lived Attitude Shift + Offline Dilution

<p>Participate 04: It depends on the content. Flooded comments under official posts do little for me. Fan-made styling breakdowns, same-item info and real-life shots, like the Ouyang Nana posts, help me understand the pieces quickly and sometimes get me interested. As a non-fan, that “informative + in-context” style makes the brand feel more wearable and real [74].</p>	<p>[73] Peer Discussion (Selective)</p>
<p>Interviewer: Did it make the brand appear more trustworthy, more fashionable, or more authentic, or conversely less authentic or overhyped? Which words would you use to describe the effect?</p>	
<p>Participate 04: It mostly feels over-marketed. When my feed is filled with purchase-driven content, I push back. I care more about detailed, high-quality posts than salesy messaging. Many brands spend heavily on marketing and the outputs feel samey with controlled wording. Words I’d use: excessive, repetitive, boring [75].</p>	<p>[74] Informative + In-Context UGC Boosts Relatability</p>
<p>Interviewer: Have these fan posts ever changed how you feel about a brand, for example liking it more, becoming indifferent or feeling averse? Please give an example.</p>	
<p>Participate 04: Yes, there is a shift. If I find more low-key, niche content by searching myself, my favourability rises. On the flip side, the recent LV saturation plus fan flooding gave me aesthetic fatigue and cooled my interest. I have not visited LV or followed its updates for a while, and the heavy use of monogram repeated everywhere reinforced that feeling [76].</p>	<p>[75] Over-Marketing Triggers Reactance</p>
<p>Part 4-----</p>	
<p>Interviewer: I will now show you a few example screenshots of common fan activities on social media. These are from public sources and have been anonymised and are provided only to aid understanding. Based on these images, would they influence your purchase intentions or subsequent behaviour?</p>	
<p>Participate 04: These screenshots nudge me to investigate it. If I like the endorser, I remember the style and feel a short lift in purchase interest. Whether I buy still depends on practicality and price [77], so I usually save it or go in store first.</p>	<p>[76] Aesthetic Fatigue from Saturation</p>
<p>Interviewer: Did you then search for the brand or product? If yes, please say how you searched and what you found.</p>	

<p>Participate 04: I looked up the Chanel 25 because of Dua Lipa and Jennie. I like them both, so I checked the size, materials and try on photos, which moved me from seeing to considering. I first came across it via fan posts and short videos on Xiaohongshu and Douyin, which packaged the info neatly and made it easy for me to follow up [78].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you discuss it with others, or look up additional reviews? If yes, on which platforms or through which channels?</p> <p>Participate 04: I shared the brand's campaign film with friends because I really like the two artists. I also glanced at the comments, but I tend to look for independent reviews and buyer feedback [79].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it lead you to avoid the brand? If yes, please explain the reasons and context.</p> <p>Participate 04: After searching and reading fan posts I felt the bag looked less good in everyday use than in the campaign. That clearly reduced my purchase desire. The price was also much higher than I expected, so my interest cooled quickly. It would not make me avoid the brand. My decision still comes down to whether the design suits me and whether the price is acceptable. Fan content mainly serves as a reminder and an initial nudge.</p> <p>Part 5-----</p> <p>Interviewer: what effects do you think these fan activities have on the brand? Please share your views on both positive and negative aspects. Is there anything else you would like to add, such as thoughts, experiences, or examples?</p> <p>Participate 04: I value quality over slogan style flooding or pure promotion. Good posts have a positive effect when they add substance, offer a fresh angle, highlight details that nonfans care about or show interesting real-life contexts. Excessive zeal and uniform messaging tend to put me off. As a non-fan it mainly shapes my attention and perception, while purchase depends on the product, price, and independent reviews [81].</p> <p>Part 6-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When choosing luxury fashion products, what factors do you usually consider? You may speak about design, craftsmanship and materials, price, brand reputation, availability, and channels, after sales service, others' reviews and assessments, and</p>	<p>[77] Endorser-Induced Short Lift in Purchase Interest</p> <p>[78] Fan Posts Package Info → Seeing→ Considering</p> <p>[79] Social Sharing + Independent Review Seeking</p> <p>[80] Every day-Use Reality Check + Price Shock Cool Intent</p>
--	---

sustainability, and briefly indicate their order of importance and why.

Participate 04: I look at design first. Whether it looks good and distinctive and whether it fits my wardrobe. Whether the quality and materials suit me and are easy to care for and durable. I treat luxury as a long-term purchase. Next, I look at the brand. Whether it holds value and whether it is often discounted. If it is frequently on sale I hold back and wait for a good promotion. Finally, I look at price [82]. Whether it is within my budget.

Interviewer: Do you feel your preferences for certain brands come mainly from your own lifestyle and values, or are they influenced by others' commentary including fan communities? Which carries more weight for you and why? Please give an example if you can.

Participate 04: Social media promotion in recent years does shape what I notice, but my lifestyle and values still lead. Miu Miu has been very popular, and I receive a lot of content so I pay more attention, yet the style does not really fit me. After trying it I felt it was not right. I now have a clearer sense of what suits me. Other people's comments including fan posts are a reference. I map them to my own needs quickly and decide whether it fits, without changing my personal criteria [83].

Interviewer: If your favourite luxury brand released a new product and the endorser's fan community showed a polarised response with some strongly recommending it and others clearly opposing it, would this affect how you view the brand and what you choose to do? If you have not experienced this, please answer using a similar imagined situation and say what actions you might take, such as continuing to follow, searching for more information, waiting, or changing your purchase decision.

Participate 04: It does affect how I see the brand. Strong controversy usually means the product or brand is very hot for a while. I am lower key and do not like loud pieces, so I tend to avoid them unless the design really speaks to me. I do not recall a truly polarised fan scenario. Most of the time fans show one sided support, especially large traffic communities with strong spending power, and the focus is more on the idol than the brand. That kind of atmosphere makes me wait, look for independent reviews and check real life wear before deciding.

[81] Substance over Slogans; Attention ≠ Purchase

[82] Design/Quality Priority + Wait Strategy for Value

[83] Lifestyle-Led Criteria; Fans' Comments as Reference Only

	[84] Polarisation / One-Sided Fan Support → Wait-and-Verify

Transcript - Participant 05	Initial coding
<p>The interview opened with the following Introduction (Opening Script) for Section 3.4.2 Semi-structured Narrative Interview.</p> <p>Part 1-----</p> <p>Interviewer: Could you describe a time on Douyin, Xiaohongshu or Weibo when you saw fans creating content and supporting or promoting a luxury brand or its celebrity endorser?</p> <p>Participant 05: I saw on Xiaohongshu that a luxury brand endorsed by a celebrity was getting a strong response. Fans and many regular users wanted to buy and copied the styling. For me it was more like passive notice and mild interest, so I had a quick look [85].</p> <p>Interviewer: What did you see and how was it presented?</p> <p>Participant 05: Xiaohongshu and Douyin. Mainly photo and text posts, with some short videos [86].</p> <p>Interviewer: How did this content enter your feed? For example, via recommendations, trending topics, shares, search results or interactions from accounts you follow.</p>	<p>[85] Passive notice & mild interest; celebrity-led glance</p> <p>[86] Platforms & formats: XHS/Douyin; photo+text with some short video</p>

<p>Participate 05: It came up on the recommendation feed. After I opened a few related posts, the app kept pushing more to my home page even though I am not a fan [87].</p> <p>Interviewer: Earlier I showed examples of fan support or promotion on social media. Have you encountered similar content on the platforms you use?</p> <p>Participate 05: I do not really track what counts as typical fan behaviour, so I seldom have a clear memory of it. I have occasionally seen same item lists or styling imitation, but I have not paid attention to large scale flooding or comment management[88].</p> <p>Part 2-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When you come across this fan content on social media, what is your immediate reaction? Please describe in your own words. It could be curiosity, interest, feeling annoyed, feeling inspired, indifference, or anything else.</p> <p>Participate 05: I feel curious. I usually tap in to see the styling, what the item is and roughly how much it costs. If it feels too salesy, I scroll past [89].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did this content change your view of the brand or its products? If so, please explain how, for example changes in perception, favourability, trust, or purchase intention.</p> <p>Participate 05: It has a small effect. It helps me remember the brand and gives a slight short term lift in favourability, but it does not change my overall view. In the end I care about design, build and how it looks on me [90].</p> <p>Interviewer: How long do these feelings typically last? During or after that time, do you talk about them with others, for example with friends, family or on social media?</p> <p>Participate 05: It lasts about one to two weeks. I will mention it to friends and maybe drop a link in a chat. Once the buzz fades or I am not shopping, the feeling fades too [91].</p> <p>Part 3-----</p> <p>Interviewer: In your view, what impact, if any, do these fan posts have on the brand’s overall image? Please summarise in your own words.</p>	<p>[87] Algorithmic push after light interaction</p> <p>[88] Non-fan rarely tracks “typical fan behaviours”; occasional same-item/‘inspired’ styling seen</p> <p>[89] Immediate reaction = curiosity; check styling/item/price; “salesy” → skip</p> <p>[90] Small, short-term lift; memory/favourability ↑; final judgement is product-led</p>
---	--

<p>Participate 05: I think the impact is significant. Fan posts act like an amplifier, strengthening the link between brand and endorser, boosting exposure and talkability, and projecting the celebrity’s vibe onto the brand [92]. As a non-fan I remember the brand more quickly and feel a short lift in interest, while action still depends on the product itself.</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it make the brand appear more trustworthy, more fashionable, or more authentic, or conversely less authentic or overhyped? Which words would you use to describe the effect?</p> <p>Participate 05: It affects trust, fashionability and authenticity. When posts are varied, genuine and informative the brand feels more stylish, persuasive and credible [93]. If there is comment management, flooding and uniform wording it feels less authentic and overly marketed and I get fatigue. Words I would use for the positive side are stylish, image lift and high visibility, and for the negative side excessive, repetitive and boring [94].</p> <p>Interviewer: Have these fan posts ever changed how you feel about a brand, for example liking it more, becoming indifferent or feeling averse? Please give an example.</p> <p>Participate 05: There is a shift. Take Balenciaga’s chunky platform sneakers as an example. I did not feel strongly at first, but on social media they are often linked with a showy styling vibe, and fan or user posts amplify that association. My favourability dropped and I now connect the product more with flashiness than with design substance, which reduces my purchase interest [95].</p> <p>Part 4-----</p> <p>Interviewer: I will now show you a few example screenshots of common fan activities on social media. These are from public sources and have been anonymised and are provided only to aid understanding. Based on these images, would they influence your purchase intentions or subsequent behaviour?</p> <p>Participate 05: Yes. I think the item looks good, but with a male endorser and a comments section full of fangirl praise, it feels like wearing it would be “copying someone”, so my desire to buy drops. It may work better for women. For me it feels like social pressure rather than a product cue, so I would not buy proactively [96].</p>	<p>[91] Affect window 2 weeks; light sharing; fades with buzz</p> <p>[92] Fan posts as an “amplifier”; stronger brand–endorser link & talkability</p> <p>[93] When varied/genuine/informative → trust, fashionability, authenticity ↑</p> <p>[94] Negative cues: comment-management/flooding/uniform wording → inauthenticity & fatigue</p> <p>[95] Negative transfer example (Balenciaga chunky platforms) → intent ↓</p>
--	--

<p>Interviewer: Did you then search for the brand or product? If yes, please say how you searched and what you found.</p> <p>Participate 05: No. If I do not need it I do not search, and when it starts flooding my feed I even avoid it [97].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you discuss it with others, or look up additional reviews? If yes, on which platforms or through which channels?</p> <p>Participate 05: Not really. We mostly talk about the fan behaviour itself, not detailed product reviews [98].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it lead you to avoid the brand? If yes, please explain the reasons and context.</p> <p>Participate 05: A little impact, but not enough to avoid the brand. I wait and reassess based on design and price [99].</p>	<p>[96] Social-pressure misfit (male endorser + fangirl-praise context) → wouldn't buy proactively</p>
<p>Part 5-----</p> <p>Interviewer: what effects do you think these fan activities have on the brand? Please share your views on both positive and negative aspects. Is there anything else you would like to add, such as thoughts, experiences, or examples?</p> <p>Participate 05: Overall, there are upsides and downsides. Take Wang Yibo as an example. His image and reach can drive attention and make the product more memorable for a while [100]. However, when some extreme fans flood feeds or behave in an over-the-top way, I end up thinking about the fandom first and my goodwill drops, which then transfers to the brand and lowers my intent to buy. At times it feels like the fan noise eclipses the brand [101].</p>	<p>[97] No search without need; flooding triggers avoidance</p> <p>[98] Talk focuses on fan behaviour, not product reviews</p>
<p>Part 6-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When choosing luxury fashion products, what factors do you usually consider? You may speak about design, craftsmanship and materials, price, brand reputation, availability, and channels, after sales service, others' reviews and assessments, and sustainability, and briefly indicate their order of importance and why.</p> <p>Participate 05: I look at design first, then brand reputation and price. Whether the design suits my everyday style matters most. A reliable brand helps</p>	<p>[99] Not enough to boycott; wait & reassess on design/price</p>

my judgement, and finally I check if the price fits my budget [102].

Interviewer: Do you feel your preferences for certain brands come mainly from your own lifestyle and values, or are they influenced by others' commentary including fan communities? Which carries more weight for you and why? Please give an example if you can.

Participate 05: Mainly from my lifestyle and values. Other people's comments including fan views are a reference. If there is consistent feedback about quality or fit I rethink, but I do not change my standards based on comments alone [103].

Interviewer: If your favourite luxury brand released a new product and the endorser's fan community showed a polarised response with some strongly recommending it and others clearly opposing it, would this affect how you view the brand and what you choose to do? If you have not experienced this, please answer using a similar imagined situation and say what actions you might take, such as continuing to follow, searching for more information, waiting, or changing your purchase decision.

Participate 05: Not much. Polarised fan reactions are mostly about the idol, while I focus on the product's design, build and price. A similar case is Shawn Yue's brand MADNESS, which many accused of plagiarism yet it stayed very hot. For me that shows buzz does not equal product merit, so I go back to the item itself before deciding [104].

[100] Positive spillover case: Wang Yibo → attention & memorability ↑ (short-term)

[101] Negative spillover: extreme fan noise eclipses the brand → goodwill & intent ↓

[102] Decision weights: Design > Brand reputation > Price

[103] Preference source: lifestyle/values lead; others' comments = reference only

	[104] Polarisation read as idol-centred; return to product merit
--	--

Transcript - Participant 06	Initial coding
<p>The interview opened with the following Introduction (Opening Script) for Section 3.4.2 Semi-structured Narrative Interview.</p> <p>Part 1-----</p> <p>Interviewer: Could you describe a time on Douyin, Xiaohongshu or Weibo when you saw fans creating content and supporting or promoting a luxury brand or its celebrity endorser?</p> <p>Participate 06: My understanding of “creating content” is the secondary compilation and sharing that fans do around a brand or its endorser. For example, I often see people making collections of a particular celebrity’s brand endorsements, daily outfits and airport looks. On Xiaohongshu and Weibo there are many “celebrity same-item” accounts that mark the identical pieces, and some even state the brand, line, style code, as well as the price and where to buy. Sometimes they also make comparison images or simple styling suggestions and keep updating along a timeline. For me, these collections are information-dense, save me from searching everywhere, make it easier to remember the brand, and I sometimes save them first and consider them later [105].</p> <p>Interviewer: What did you see and how was it presented?</p> <p>Participate 06: Mainly on Weibo and Xiaohongshu. Mostly photo and text posts, with the occasional short video or edit. Photo and text are easier for me to save and revisit [106].</p> <p>Interviewer: How did this content enter your feed? For example, via recommendations, trending topics, shares, search results or interactions from accounts you follow.</p> <p>Participate 06: Usually via the home feed or celebrity topic pages, and it also pops up through trending discussions or shares. Even if I do not follow it deliberately, the algorithm and the hype bring it to me [107].</p>	<p>[105] “Same-item” curation as secondary compilation; info-dense; save for later</p> <p>[106] Platforms & formats: Weibo/XHS; photo+text dominant; short video occasional</p>

Interviewer: Earlier I showed examples of fan support or promotion on social media. Have you encountered similar content on the platforms you use?

Participate 06: Yes, I have. For various reasons fans will launch boycotts and leave concentrated comments in the comment sections. I remember one time I am not quite sure which brand, when the brand or its agent repeatedly wrote the endorser's name incorrectly. Afterwards, fans pushed the topic onto the trending list, and left comments pressing for answers under the brand's posts and in its live streams, and they also went to official customer service to ask what was going on and demanded a formal apology. But I have rarely seen a real apology, and I feel some brands have a rather aloof attitude. For a passer by like me, this makes me notice the brand, but it also makes me associate it with a lack of professionalism, and my trust is reduced [108].

Part 2-----

Interviewer: When you come across this fan content on social media, what is your immediate reaction? Please describe in your own words. It could be curiosity, interest, feeling annoyed, feeling inspired, indifference, or anything else.

Participate 06: If I am not a fan I usually tap not interested or just scroll past. With a little goodwill I still tend to ignore it. If I really like the person I might give a like and move on, not usually opening the same item posts. The exception is someone with a very distinct style. I once saw a fan edit on Xiaohongshu of Ouyang Nana wearing an LV scarf as a bandeau and I did open it and felt interested [109]. For a non-fan like me this kind of edit pulls my attention in.

Interviewer: Did this content change your view of the brand or its products? If so, please explain how, for example changes in perception, favourability, trust, or purchase intention.

Participate 06: There is a change. That fan made video showed me the versatility of scarves and also changed my impression of the LV monogram. It turns out women in their early twenties can wear it in a fresh and relaxed way. I used to think the pattern was a bit dated, but her styling was eye opening and made me more willing to put the brand on my shortlist [110]. So I think fan made videos are sometimes useful for me. I usually save it first, then search for the same item and the price, look at real

[107] Entry paths: home feed, celebrity topics, trending & shares; algorithm delivers it

[108] Boycott/comment swarming after name error; brand seen as aloof; trust ↓

[109] As a non-fan: tap "not interested"/scroll; like & move on; distinct style is exception

<p>buyer photos and the material composition, pay attention to whether cleaning and care are troublesome, and think about whether it can match the clothes in my wardrobe. If I pass by a store I will quickly feel the texture [111].</p> <p>Interviewer: How long do these feelings typically last? During or after that time, do you talk about them with others, for example with friends, family or on social media?</p> <p>Participate 06: The feeling does not have a set length and is mostly a strong in-the-moment like. I usually share it with friends right away and say things like this looks great and I did not know you could wear it like that. The short burst of discussion makes me pay more attention for a while, then it depends on whether I actually need something [112].</p> <p>Part 3-----</p> <p>Interviewer: In your view, what impact, if any, do these fan posts have on the brand's overall image? Please summarise in your own words.</p> <p>Participate 06: There is an effect, but the strength varies. I usually remember the celebrity more than the brand. If fan content is interesting and informative, I take a closer look and my impression of the brand improves for a while and I may follow or save it. If the quality is average or repetitive, I move on [113].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it make the brand appear more trustworthy, more fashionable, or more authentic, or conversely less authentic or overhyped? Which words would you use to describe the effect?</p> <p>Participate 06: It feels more like beautifying rather than being real. Fans are centred on the celebrity, so there is a built in filter and the effect is pushed to the positive. Words I would use are beautified, fan filter, biased, less authentic, over packaged. On the positive side it can feel more stylish and topical. When it floods my feed I get fatigue [114].</p> <p>Interviewer: Have these fan posts ever changed how you feel about a brand, for example liking it more, becoming indifferent or feeling averse? Please give an example.</p> <p>Participate 06: Yes, there are shifts. If fans act showy or out of line, my favourability towards the brand drops and can turn to aversion. If fans are measured and share useful information, my impression improves and I might add the brand to a shortlist.</p>	<p>[110] Fan edit reframes LV monogram; scarf versatility; shortlist brand</p> <p>[111] Post-view behaviour: save → search same item/price → check buyer photos/materials/care → wardrobe match → in-store feel</p> <p>[112] Affect = in-the-moment like; instant share; need-dependent afterwards</p> <p>[113] Effect varies; remember celebrity > brand; good content lifts briefly; repetitive → skip</p>
---	---

<p>For a non fan like me these shifts are mostly short term and the final decision still depends on the product and independent reviews.</p> <p>Part 4-----</p> <p>Interviewer: I will now show you a few example screenshots of common fan activities on social media. These are from public sources and have been anonymised and are provided only to aid understanding. Based on these images, would they influence your purchase intentions or subsequent behaviour?</p> <p>Participate 06: No. The comments look fake and clearly flooded by fans. I really dislike this kind of comment control. It squeezes out genuine reviews, lowers the brand's credibility for me and I do not feel like clicking in or learning more [116].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you then search for the brand or product? If yes, please say how you searched and what you found.</p> <p>Participate 06: No. The flooding puts me off and I lose interest in searching [117].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you discuss it with others, or look up additional reviews? If yes, on which platforms or through which channels?</p> <p>Participate 06: No. Unless I first come across independent reviews, I will not look for more [118].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it lead you to avoid the brand? If yes, please explain the reasons and context.</p> <p>Participate 06: I would not avoid the brand outright, but I would deliberately avoid items that are strongly tied to a particular celebrity. If an item goes viral because of a celebrity and sticks in my mind, and I do not like that celebrity's fanbase, I lose interest straight away and steer clear. To me, that kind of strong tie feels like signalling a fandom identity, and I do not want to be mistaken for part of it. So if fans really want their idol's endorsed brand to do well, there needs to be rational guidance to avoid tactics like flooding and comment control, otherwise it is easy to put off passers-by and even make them resent the brand. Frankly, I am not keen on the current fandom atmosphere in China [119].</p> <p>Part 5-----</p> <p>Interviewer: what effects do you think these fan activities have on the brand? Please share your</p>	<p>[114] Perception words: "beautified, fan filter, biased, less authentic, over-packaged"; positives = "stylish, topical"; flooding → fatigue</p> <p>[115] Fan conduct drives short-term shifts; showy/out-of-line → aversion; measured/useful → shortlist; final = product + independent reviews</p> <p>[116] Fake/flooded comments; dislike comment control; credibility ↓; won't click</p> <p>[117] Flooding suppresses search intent</p>
--	---

<p>views on both positive and negative aspects. Is there anything else you would like to add, such as thoughts, experiences, or examples?</p> <p>Participate 06: <i>There is a promotional effect, but it is quite random. What fans love, passers-by may not care about, so many times it barely makes a splash [120]. When the content is creative and the information is clear, it lowers the effort to understand and can occasionally nudge me towards a purchase, making the brand feel younger and more energetic [121]. But once there is comment control and flooding, over-beautifying or fan quarrels, it becomes off-putting, you cannot see genuine reviews and attention gets diverted [122]. I personally care more about design, quality and price; fan behaviour is mostly short-term buzz, and I skip it when it turns into noise. Good content adds points, poor tactics subtract them, and the impact on my purchase decision is limited [123].</i></p> <p>Part 6-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When choosing luxury fashion products, what factors do you usually consider? You may speak about design, craftsmanship and materials, price, brand reputation, availability, and channels, after sales service, others' reviews and assessments, and sustainability, and briefly indicate their order of importance and why.</p> <p>Participate 06: <i>I look at fit and design, quality, and price [124].</i></p> <p>Interviewer: Do you feel your preferences for certain brands come mainly from your own lifestyle and values, or are they influenced by others' commentary including fan communities? Which carries more weight for you and why? Please give an example if you can.</p> <p>Participate 06: <i>My preferences come mainly from my lifestyle and values. Unless it is a celebrity with a strong personal style who can make the brand feel fresh, like Ouyang Nana [125], I would not usually pay attention to a brand because of an endorser.</i></p> <p>Interviewer: If your favourite luxury brand released a new product and the endorser's fan community showed a polarised response with some strongly recommending it and others clearly opposing it, would this affect how you view the brand and what you choose to do? If you have not experienced this, please answer using a similar imagined situation and say what actions you might take, such as continuing to follow, searching for more information, waiting, or changing your purchase decision.</p>	<p>[118] No further discussion unless independent reviews appear first</p> <p>[119] Avoid strongly celebrity-tied items to dodge "fandom signalling"; prefer rational guidance; dislike current fandom atmosphere</p> <p>[120] Promotional effect exists but is random; fans' love ≠ passer-by interest</p> <p>[121] Creative + clear info lowers effort; can nudge purchase; brand feels younger/energetic</p> <p>[122] Comment control/flooding/over-beautifying/fan quarrels → off-putting; genuine reviews occluded; attention diverted</p> <p>[123] Fan buzz = short-term; I prioritise design/quality/price; limited purchase impact</p>
---	--

<p>Participate 06: Likes or boycotts by fans would not in themselves change my view. If my favourite brand released a new product and fans were both hyping it and resisting it, that would not sway my judgement. I care more about the design, workmanship and price. If they start arguing everywhere and controlling comments so that social media becomes noisy, I lose interest quickly, do not want to look further and do not want to place an order in that atmosphere. For me, fan emotions affect my mood and usage experience rather than my rational assessment. The noisier it gets, the more I avoid the topic, and I may even keep my distance from that item [126].</p>	<p>[124] Decision factors (order): fit & design; quality; price</p> <p>[125] Preferences mainly from lifestyle/values; exception = distinct-style celebrity can refresh brand</p> <p>[126] Fan likes/boycotts don't sway judgement; noisy quarrels + comment control hurt mood/usage; avoid topic/item</p>
--	--

<p>Transcript - Participant 07</p>	<p>Initial coding</p>
<p>The interview opened with the following Introduction (Opening Script) for Section 3.4.2 Semi-structured Narrative Interview.</p> <p>Part 1-----</p>	

<p>Interviewer: Could you describe a time on Douyin, Xiaohongshu or Weibo when you saw fans creating content and supporting or promoting a luxury brand or its celebrity endorser?</p> <p>Participate 07: I do not remember exactly which celebrity or brand, but I recall ad films and appearances at various events. On Xiaohongshu I often saw fan-shot clips, like footage outside pop-up stores and behind-the-scenes moments. When a brand holds an event and a celebrity shows up, fans package the material into posts or short videos. <i>As a passer-by, those compilations make me notice the brand, though I usually just look and move on</i> [127].</p> <p>Interviewer: What did you see and how was it presented?</p> <p>Participate 07: <i>Mainly on Xiaohongshu and Weibo, mostly photo and text posts, with some short videos and edits</i> [128].</p> <p>Interviewer: How did this content enter your feed? For example, via recommendations, trending topics, shares, search results or interactions from accounts you follow.</p> <p>Participate 07: <i>It mostly reaches me via the home feed or trending topics. On Weibo it often shows up on the trending list and through fan reshares. On Xiaohongshu the app keeps recommending similar posts based on what I open. For example, when I searched "Dior bag", the system surfaced event posts and same item content</i> [129]. <i>The fan behaviours I usually see include breaking down an idol's outfits with same item tags for reference, posting uniform supportive comments in the replies, and showing up outside events to cheer</i> [130].</p> <p>Interviewer: Earlier I showed examples of fan support or promotion on social media. Have you encountered similar content on the platforms you use?</p> <p>Participate 07: Yes, like the images. Fans hold lightboards to support outside malls or events, and some accounts break down airport or event looks and tag the brands. Sometimes the comments are filled with uniform support messages. <i>For me this helps me find same items quickly, but if it turns into flooding, I just skip it</i> [131].</p> <p>Part 2-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When you come across this fan content on social media, what is your immediate reaction? Please describe in your own words. It could be</p>	<p>[127] Fan-shot compilations at events/pop-ups → notice brand; quick glance then move on</p> <p>[128] Platforms & formats: Xiaohongshu/Weibo; photo+text; some short videos/edits</p> <p>[129] Entry paths: home feed, trending, reshares; search surfaces events/same-item posts</p> <p>[130] Typical fan behaviours: outfit breakdowns with same-item tags; uniform supportive comments; offline cheering</p> <p>[131] Utility vs overload: helps find same items fast; flooding → skip</p>
--	---

<p>curiosity, interest, feeling annoyed, feeling inspired, indifference, or anything else.</p> <p>Participate 07: Most of the time I feel put off. If I am not a fan of that celebrity, I do not want to see it. When I see fan flooding I tap not interested or just scroll, unless the visuals are unusually strong [132].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did this content change your view of the brand or its products? If so, please explain how, for example changes in perception, favourability, trust, or purchase intention.</p> <p>Participate 07: Sometimes it does have an effect. When the comments are packed with fans, I read it as a sales push rather than sharing, so my trust drops and I feel a bit annoyed by the product and stop looking into it [133].</p> <p>Interviewer: How long do these feelings typically last? During or after that time, do you talk about them with others, for example with friends, family or on social media?</p> <p>Participate 07: The feeling does not last long, usually just a day or two in the moment. I seldom bring it up myself, but people around me often react in a polarised way to endorsers, those who like them say they will buy to support, while those who dislike them question why the brand chose them and their goodwill towards the brand drops. When I see that kind of controversy I usually avoid it [134]. There was a period of controversy about Cai Xukun; I cannot remember the specific brand, but some fan behaviour really put off passers by. I found it annoying too, so my view of the brand went down as well, and I felt the brand had not been careful enough in choosing the endorser and had not guided fan sentiment in time [135].</p> <p>Part 3-----</p> <p>Interviewer: In your view, what impact, if any, do these fan posts have on the brand's overall image? Please summarise in your own words.</p> <p>Participate 07: I feel most of it is brand led. They want fans to drive buzz, lift exposure and signal a new endorser or campaign to boost sales. For non-fans the effect is uneven. Some feel bothered, others are indifferent, so it does not necessarily make them pay more attention [136].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it make the brand appear more trustworthy, more fashionable, or more authentic, or</p>	<p>[132] Immediate reaction: often put off; not a fan → tap 'not interested'/scroll; exception if visuals unusually strong</p> <p>[133] Perceived sales push lowers trust; stop exploring.</p> <p>[134] Short-lived affect (1–2 days); social polarisation around endorsers; avoid controversy</p> <p>[135] Case: Cai Xukun controversy → passers-by put off; brand seen as careless; perception down.</p> <p>[136] Brand-led strategy: use fans to drive buzz/exposure/sales; uneven effect on non-fans.</p>
---	---

<p>conversely less authentic or overhyped? Which words would you use to describe the effect?</p> <p>Participate 07: It reads as exaggerated and attention seeking. In moderation it can make the brand look trendier and more discussed [137]. When overdone it feels inauthentic and hyped and mostly preaches to the fanbase, with limited impact on passers-by [138]. Words I would use are exaggerated, deliberate, eye catching, overdone, less authentic.</p> <p>Interviewer: Have these fan posts ever changed how you feel about a brand, for example liking it more, becoming indifferent or feeling averse? Please give an example.</p> <p>Participate 07: It does not change much because of the content itself, but fan behaviour does drag down my perception of the brand. When I see some fans behaving excessively or out of control online, my favourability towards the brand associated with that endorser declines. I will not dismiss the brand outright; I will keep my distance and observe, but to some extent my overall impression has already worsened [139].</p> <p>Part 4-----</p> <p>Interviewer: I will now show you a few example screenshots of common fan activities on social media. These are from public sources and have been anonymised and are provided only to aid understanding. Based on these images, would they influence your purchase intentions or subsequent behaviour?</p> <p>Participate 07: Yes. Seeing posts like these can put me off buying because the flooding feels annoying. I do not look it up, but it does make the item stick in my mind, for example I remember that a certain celebrity wore or endorsed it [140].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you then search for the brand or product? If yes, please say how you searched and what you found.</p> <p>Participate 07: No. If I do not need it I do not search [141].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you discuss it with others, or look up additional reviews? If yes, on which platforms or through which channels?</p> <p>Participate 07: I might vent to friends briefly. I usually do not check extra reviews unless there is controversy, then I look for independent ones [142].</p>	<p>[137] In moderation → trendier/more discussed; descriptors: exaggerated, attention-seeking [138] Overdone → inauthentic/hyped; preaching to fanbase; limited passer-by impact.</p> <p>[139] Excessive/out-of-control fans drag down brand favourability; keep distance & observe</p> <p>[140] Example screenshots: flooding puts off buying; celebrity–item association sticks in memory</p>
--	---

<p>Interviewer: Did it lead you to avoid the brand? If yes, please explain the reasons and context.</p> <p>Participate 07: I would not avoid the brand outright. I would avoid items that are strongly tied to that celebrity. If the flooding continues or the comments look managed, I step back for a while and revisit later based on design and price [143].</p> <p>Part 5-----</p> <p>Interviewer: what effects do you think these fan activities have on the brand? Please share your views on both positive and negative aspects. Is there anything else you would like to add, such as thoughts, experiences, or examples?</p> <p>Participate 07: I find it hard to generalise. For me, good online presentations by fans should not be overly commercial; they should feel like genuine liking and first-hand sharing. Natural styling demonstrations, clear information and a moderate frequency will improve my impression of the brand [144]. By contrast, obvious flooding, uniform scripts and hard selling make me feel put off, seem inauthentic and lower my trust in the brand [145]. Overall, fan activity brings exposure, but for me it is more of a brief fluctuation in attention, and whether I buy still depends on design, quality and price [146].</p> <p>Part 6-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When choosing luxury fashion products, what factors do you usually consider? You may speak about design, craftsmanship and materials, price, brand reputation, availability, and channels, after sales service, others' reviews and assessments, and sustainability, and briefly indicate their order of importance and why.</p> <p>Participate 07: I focus on design and price. If it looks good, fits my style and the budget works, I look further [147].</p> <p>Interviewer: Do you feel your preferences for certain brands come mainly from your own lifestyle and values, or are they influenced by others' commentary including fan communities? Which carries more weight for you and why? Please give an example if you can.</p> <p>Participate 07: My preferences mainly come from my lifestyle and values. Fan comments have little impact. Sometimes a look gives me a new styling idea and I may borrow it, but that is inspiration rather than persuasion to follow or rethink a brand</p>	<p>[141] No search without need</p> <p>[142] Discussion/reviews: brief vent to friends; independent reviews only if controversy</p> <p>[143] Not brand-wide avoidance; avoid tightly celebrity-tied items; step back if flooding/managed comments.</p> <p>[144] What "good fan content" looks like: genuine liking; first-hand sharing; natural styling; clear info; moderate frequency</p> <p>[145] Negative cues: flooding, uniform scripts, hard selling → off-putting, inauthentic; trust ↓</p> <p>[146] Overall: fan exposure = brief attention fluctuation; purchase remains product-led</p>
---	--

<p>because of the endorser. Those ideas often come from fan posts online. Most of the time I stick to my own criteria.</p> <p>Interviewer: If your favourite luxury brand released a new product and the endorser's fan community showed a polarised response with some strongly recommending it and others clearly opposing it, would this affect how you view the brand and what you choose to do? If you have not experienced this, please answer using a similar imagined situation and say what actions you might take, such as continuing to follow, searching for more information, waiting, or changing your purchase decision.</p> <p>Participate 07: <i>When reactions polarise, I notice the noise, but it has little effect on my choices. I still focus on design, craftsmanship and price. If my feed is flooded I wait until the hype passes. From a brand perspective that tug of war is not ideal. Personally, if the whole internet turns toxic I feel annoyed and step away</i> [149], and I hope fandoms here can be more rational.</p>	<p>[147] Decision factors: design & price first; fit style and budget → look further.</p> <p>[148] Preference source: lifestyle/values lead; fan comments minor; inspiration not persuasion</p> <p>[149] Polarised fan reactions: notice noise; little effect on choices; wait out hype; step away if toxic</p>
---	---

<p>Transcript - Participant 08</p> <p>The interview opened with the following Introduction (Opening Script) for Section 3.4.2 Semi-structured Narrative Interview.</p> <p>Part 1-----</p> <p>Interviewer: Could you describe a time on Douyin, Xiaohongshu or Weibo when you saw fans creating content and supporting or promoting a luxury brand or its celebrity endorser?</p> <p>Participate 08: <i>I came across content on Douyin, Xiaohongshu and Weibo when Dylan Wang was</i></p>	<p>Initial coding</p>
---	-----------------------

<p>announced as LV's China ambassador. Fans hired seven boats in Victoria Harbour to cheer him on, edited the footage into videos and pushed it onto the trending lists. Comments were full of pride and support. Some fans also filmed him picking up a pair of shoes in an LV store, and that pair was later said to have sold out. It showed me how strong fan mobilisation can be for brand reach, and it is hard for passers-by not to notice [150].</p>	<p>[150] Victoria Harbour boat support (LV/Dylan Wang)</p>
<p>Interviewer: What did you see and how was it presented?</p>	
<p>Participate 08: On Douyin it was mainly videos; on Weibo and Xiaohongshu it showed up as photo-and-text posts and hashtag challenges. I am more drawn to videos. <i>Fan edits often look better and get more likes than official clips, which makes me more likely to feel "nudged"</i> [151].</p>	
<p>Interviewer: How did this content enter your feed? For example, via recommendations, trending topics, shares, search results or interactions from accounts you follow.</p>	<p>[151] Fan Edits > Official Clips (Nudge)</p>
<p>Participate 08: <i>It entered via trending topics, and friends also shared it with me. After I opened a few posts, the algorithm kept recommending more on my home feed</i> [152].</p>	
<p>Interviewer: Earlier I showed examples of fan support or promotion on social media. Have you encountered similar content on the platforms you use?</p>	<p>[152] Trending + Friend Shares → Algo Loop</p>
<p>Participate 08: Yes, I often see similar things. <i>Fans compile outfit roundups for the endorser, tag brands and "same items", and attach buying info and hashtags. These compilations make product details easier to find and reinforce brand recall</i> [153].</p>	
<p>Part 2-----</p>	
<p>Interviewer: When you come across this fan content on social media, what is your immediate reaction? Please describe in your own words. It could be curiosity, interest, feeling annoyed, feeling inspired, indifference, or anything else.</p>	<p>[153] Same-Item Compilations Lower Effort & Reinforce Recall</p>
<p>Participate 08: <i>Curiosity comes first. I wonder why fans work so hard to promote their idol with no payment, purely out of affection. It feels highly organised and, in a way, quite selfless</i> [154].</p>	
<p>Interviewer: Did this content change your view of the brand or its products? If so, please explain how,</p>	

<p>for example changes in perception, favourability, trust, or purchase intention.</p> <p>Participate 08: A little. Fan edits put the product on my radar and prompt a search; without them I probably would not look. If the endorser is someone I like and has good public appeal, my favourability and purchase intent go up; if the fanbase feels annoying, I just scroll past [155]. When I assess a brand, I look first at how well the endorser fits me, then at the overall fan climate and whether it might put passers-by off [156].</p> <p>Interviewer: How long do these feelings typically last? During or after that time, do you talk about them with others, for example with friends, family or on social media?</p> <p>Participate 08: Roughly a week. I share it with friends and sometimes leave short comments under posts or videos; once the buzz fades, so does the feeling [157].</p> <p>Part 3-----</p> <p>Interviewer: In your view, what impact, if any, do these fan posts have on the brand’s overall image? Please summarise in your own words.</p> <p>Participate 08: It tends to reinforce the brand. High frequency fan posts make it easy to encounter the brand again and again, so it sticks more, which is positive. But when it turns into arguments or claims like “only our idol suits this brand”, it becomes off putting and I just scroll on [158].</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it make the brand appear more trustworthy, more fashionable, or more authentic, or conversely less authentic or overhyped? Which words would you use to describe the effect?</p> <p>Participate 08: It can feel exaggerated at times. With the idol halo, fans may hype the brand a lot and then go quiet once the endorsement ends, which makes it feel less authentic. Brands need to guide and manage fan interactions better. For me the upside is a trendier, more talked about image; the downside is over packaging, a heavy filter and lower authenticity [159].</p> <p>Interviewer: Have these fan posts ever changed how you feel about a brand, for example liking it more, becoming indifferent or feeling averse? Please give an example.</p>	<p>[154] Curiosity About Unpaid Fan Labour</p> <p>[155] Endorser Liking ↑ Favourability/Intent; Annoying Fandom → Scroll</p> <p>[156] Assess Order: Endorser Fit → Fan Climate</p> <p>[157] Duration ≈ One Week + Light Sharing</p> <p>[158] Frequency Reinforces Brand; Idol-Only Claims Off-Putting</p>
--	---

<p>Participate 08: It does influence me. Comments that are sincere, specific and informative are persuasive, so I pay more attention to the brand and the endorser and sometimes I am emotionally nudged into buying [160]. I am somewhat susceptible to that, though in the long run I still come back to the product itself.</p> <p>Part 4-----</p> <p>Interviewer: I will now show you a few example screenshots of common fan activities on social media. These are from public sources and have been anonymised and are provided only to aid understanding. Based on these images, would they influence your purchase intentions or subsequent behaviour?</p> <p>Participate 08: It may prompt me to look up the product. I can feel a spike of intent, but I usually save it first and check size, materials, price range and real buyer photos. If the comments look like astroturfing I treat them as background noise and switch to neutral reviews and try-on videos [161]. If I am choosing in that category I will try it in store or keep it on a wishlist for a while. If the budget does not work or care is fussy, I will not buy no matter the hype.</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you then search for the brand or product? If yes, please say how you searched and what you found.</p> <p>Participate 08: Yes. I search on Xiaohongshu using “brand name plus product name or code” to find third-party reviews and try-ons, then check the official site for details and stock and sometimes ask a nearby store about availability. I also scan price keywords for reference, including second-hand or end-of-season info [162]. Good styling makes me more eager to try.</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you discuss it with others, or look up additional reviews? If yes, on which platforms or through which channels?</p> <p>Participate 08: I share the video with friends and ask how it looks in real life and whether it suits my style. Mainly on Xiaohongshu and Douyin, and I also skim a few neutral reviewer accounts and real buyer feedback.</p> <p>Interviewer: Did it lead you to avoid the brand? If yes, please explain the reasons and context.</p> <p>Participate 08: It does not make me stop using the brand. I focus on the product. If I like the endorser</p>	<p>[159] Idol Halo → Trendier Image; Over-Packaging → Authenticity ↓</p> <p>[160] Sincere/Specific/Informative Persuades</p> <p>[161] Save-Not-Buy + Specs/Neutral Review Gate</p> <p>[162] Search Workflow (XHS Brand+Code → Official → Store/Stock → Price Keywords)</p>
--	--

<p>and the fan atmosphere, I am more open; if not, I do not boycott, I just avoid items that are tightly tied to that celebrity. When I see flooding or comment management I step back, and revisit later based on design and price [164]. If the brand mishandles a public issue, I keep my distance for a time [165].</p> <p>Part 5-----</p> <p>Interviewer: what effects do you think these fan activities have on the brand? Please share your views on both positive and negative aspects. Is there anything else you would like to add, such as thoughts, experiences, or examples?</p> <p>Participate 08: I think fan activities bring both positive and negative effects to brands. On the positive side, they amplify reach and exposure, so more people quickly learn that a celebrity has become an endorser; high-quality fan creations can also lower the effort to understand, making the brand feel younger and more energetic [166]. On the negative side, relentless flooding and comment control tend to provoke backlash, and when a fanbase has poor public goodwill, that sentiment spills over to the brand, eroding trust and crowding out discussion of the product itself [167].</p> <p>Participate 08: One experience comes to mind. During an endorsement period, fans began frequent infighting and mass posting over a controversy. Public opinion quickly spread from the individual to the brand, passers-by grew less favourable, and the brand was drawn into the storm. From my point of view the endorser wasn't the core issue, but the fans' excessive behaviour made the brand an unwitting collateral party, and the partnership was questioned [168].</p> <p>Participate 08: So, the value of fan activity depends on content quality and pacing. Sincere posts with clear information and moderate frequency add points; homogenised content, over-mobilisation and polarised emotions subtract them [169]. For a non-fan like me, these effects are mostly short-term shifts in attention and impression; whether I buy still comes down to design, craftsmanship, price and independent reviews [170].</p> <p>Part 6-----</p> <p>Interviewer: When choosing luxury fashion products, what factors do you usually consider? You may speak about design, craftsmanship and materials, price, brand reputation, availability, and channels, after sales service, others' reviews and assessments, and</p>	<p>[163] Social Proof via Friends' Real-Life Check</p> <p>[164] Non-Boycott; Avoid Idol-Tied Items; Flooding/Control → Step Back</p> <p>[165] Brand Mishandles Public Issue → Distance</p> <p>[166] Amplifier Effect (Reach/Exposure; Younger/Energetic)</p> <p>[167] Flooding/Comment Control Backlash; Goodwill Spillover</p>
---	---

<p>sustainability, and briefly indicate their order of importance and why.</p> <p>Participate 08: I mostly look at design, price, and what other people say. The design has to fit my style, still look good after the buzz, and be easy to mix and match. The price needs to fit my budget and feel fair next to similar pieces. For reviews I check real buyer photos and neutral testers so I don't get burned. I also notice build and materials, comfort and durability, how easy it is to get, where to buy, aftercare and cleaning costs, and a bit of sustainability. Rough order for me is design and price first, then reviews, then build and comfort, then availability and after sales [171]. The first two decide if I even want it, the rest decide if it's worth it and will last.</p> <p>Interviewer: Do you feel your preferences for certain brands come mainly from your own lifestyle and values, or are they influenced by others' commentary including fan communities? Which carries more weight for you and why? Please give an example if you can.</p> <p>Participate 08: Mostly my lifestyle and values. Other people's comments are just a sense check. For example, I like simple, wearable stuff, so even if something is trending I skip it if the cut looks fussy or impractical. On the flip side, if fans or creators post clear try on videos, sizing tips, and honest pros and cons, that's useful and can nudge me to try or buy [172].</p> <p>Interviewer: If your favourite luxury brand released a new product and the endorser's fan community showed a polarised response with some strongly recommending it and others clearly opposing it, would this affect how you view the brand and what you choose to do? If you have not experienced this, please answer using a similar imagined situation and say what actions you might take, such as continuing to follow, searching for more information, waiting, or changing your purchase decision.</p> <p>Participate 08: Polarised fan reactions make me notice, but they don't decide for me. I give myself a cool off. I save it instead of buying, then I check neutral reviews and real buyer pics, try it in store if I can, and compare it with same price options. If the drama is about values or a real quality issue, I drop it. If it's just fandom noise or comment control, I mute it and go back to product, price, and fit. In the end I either keep an eye on it and wait for a promo, pick a quieter version, or move on to something else.</p>	<p>[168] Fan Infighting Storm → Collateral Brand</p> <p>[169] Quality & Pacing Rule the Effect</p> <p>[170] Non-Fan Anchor: Design/Craft/Price/Independent Reviews</p> <p>[171] Choice Factors Order (Design/Price → Reviews → Build/Comfort → Availability/After Sales)</p>
--	--

	<p>[172] Lifestyle/Values Lead; Comments = Sense Check</p> <p>[173] Polarisation Protocol: Cool-Off → Neutral Reviews/In-Store Try/Compare; Values/Quality → Drop; Noise → Mute</p>
--	---

Appendix 3.3: Coding Audit Trail (Interviews): Initial Codes → Small Codes → Sub-themes → Themes

Table A: Initial Code → Small Code → Sub-theme → Theme Mapping (Complete List)

No.	Initial code	Small code	Sub-theme	Theme
1	Non-fan Self-Identification	— (Context marker)	—	—
2	Trending Virality & Algorithmic Push	Engagement→Algo Push Loop	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
3	Fan 'Same-Item' Lists Lowered Effort	Same-Item Toolkits	Sub-theme A: Same-Item & How-To	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
4	Price Check & Wishlisting	Price & Availability Cues	Sub-theme A: Same-Item & How-To	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
5	Endorser Halo on Brand Youthfulness	Good-Fit Halo	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser–Brand Fit
6	Effort Reduction via Fan Toolkits	Same-Item Toolkits	Sub-theme A: Same-Item & How-To	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
7	Over-Marketing Scepticism	Astroturfing Signals	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Scepticism

8	Curiosity as Primary Affect	Heat-Triggered Peek	Sub-theme A: Initial Affect & Curiosity	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
9	Independent-Review Verification	Independent Reviews First	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
10	Conditional Endorser-Led Favourability	Good-Fit Halo	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit
11	Short-Lived Effects	Short-Window Lift (3–14 days)	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
12	Light Social Sharing	Share→Recommend→Reshare Cycle	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
13	Authenticity Heuristic: Real Outfits/Reviews	Verifiability Evidence	Sub-theme A: Truth Heuristics	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
14	Authentic UGC Try-It Nudge	Peer Presence Cue	Sub-theme A: Initial Affect & Curiosity	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
15	Feed Flooding → Aesthetic Fatigue	Aesthetic Fatigue	Sub-theme C: Emotional Backfire	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
16	Price & Endorser Fit as Consideration Gate	Budget Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
17	Independent-Review Verification	Independent Reviews First	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
18	Wait-It-Out Strategy (No Boycott)	Wait-and-See / Avoid for Now	Sub-theme D: Delay & Switch	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
19	Fan-Amplifier under Authenticity Gatekeeping	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
20	Quality/Comfort/Materials as Final Gate	Quality Red-Flags	Sub-theme C: Value & Quality Kill-Switches	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
21	Values Fit	Value Misalignment	Sub-theme C: Value & Quality Kill-Switches	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
22	Polarisation Triggers Caution	Wait-and-See / Avoid for Now	Sub-theme D: Delay & Switch	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
23	Douyin Platform Exposure Spike	Celebrity@FW Salience	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
24	Non-fan with Event-Driven Attention	Event-Spike Salience	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
25	Algorithmic Reinforcement via Follows	Engagement→Algo Push Loop	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
26	Fan Toolkit Recognition	Same-Item Toolkits	Sub-theme A: Same-Item & How-To	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
27	Indifference Baseline; Looks-Good Nudge	Heat-Triggered Peek	Sub-theme A: Initial Affect & Curiosity	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof

28	Endorsement Concretised Brand Image	Persona-to-Brand Meaning	Sub-theme A: Endorser as Meaning Maker	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit
29	Short-Lived Visibility Amplifier	Short-Window Lift (3–14 days)	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
30	Short-Term Talkability, Limited Choice Impact	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
31	Authenticity Heuristic: Informative = Trustworthy	Verifiability Evidence	Sub-theme A: Truth Heuristics	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
32	Exemplar Reframing (Burberry Younger/Wearable)	Persona-to-Brand Meaning	Sub-theme A: Endorser as Meaning Maker	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit
33	Cross-Source Convergence (Fans + Creators)	Cross-Platform Triangulation	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
34	Need/Budget Gatekeeping	Budget Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
35	Limited Search/Discussion Unless Controversy	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
36	Flooding/Inauthenticity → Downgrade	Fatigue → Backlash	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
37	Informational Social Proof (Non-decisive)	Topicality as Worthiness	Sub-theme B: Social Proof Amplifiers	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
38	Values Triggered Avoidance	Value Misalignment	Sub-theme C: Value & Quality Kill-Switches	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
39	Product-Led Final Decision	Quality Red-Flags	Sub-theme C: Value & Quality Kill-Switches	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
40	Trending + Algorithm Push Exposure	Engagement→Algo Push Loop	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
41	Fan Toolkits Lower Effort	Same-Item Toolkits	Sub-theme A: Same-Item & How-To	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
42	Perceived Comment Control → Wait-and-See	Astroturfing Signals	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
43	Algorithmic Personalisation → Mild Attention	Engagement→Algo Push Loop	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
44	Endorser Reframing (Younger/Everyday)	Persona-to-Brand Meaning	Sub-theme A: Endorser as Meaning Maker	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit
45	Reduced Psychological Distance	Relatable Proximity	Sub-theme C: Distance vs. Relatability	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit
46	Short-Lived Uplift Window	Short-Window Lift (3–14 days)	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
47	Social Sharing Trigger	Share→Recommend→Reshare Cycle	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces

48	Visibility/Talkability ↑, Product Judgement Stable	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
49	Fashionability Lift, Authenticity Not Guaranteed	Fashionability Amplified	Sub-theme B: Social Proof Amplifiers	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
50	Aspirational Polish → Distance	Over-Polished Distance	Sub-theme C: Distance vs. Relatability	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser–Brand Fit
51	Endorser–Brand Misfit → Favourability Drop	Misfit Drag	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser–Brand Fit
52	Independent-Review Gatekeeping	Independent-Review Pass	Sub-theme B: Credibility Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
53	Mere-Exposure Top-of-Mind	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
54	Consideration Info Pack	Searchable Structuring	Sub-theme B: Packaged & Retrievable Info	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
55	Seek Objective Sources (Forums/Buyer Feedback)	Independent Reviews First	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
56	Product-Led; Values/Quality as Hard Gate	Quality Red-Flags	Sub-theme C: Value & Quality Kill-Switches	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
57	Endorser Vibe Transfer (Short Recall Lift)	Good-Fit Halo	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser–Brand Fit
58	Comment Control/Pile-ons → Trust Drop + Wait	Astroturfing Signals	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
59	Reliability Filter vs Agenda-Driven	Authority & Convergence	Sub-theme A: Truth Heuristics	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
60	Consensus Heuristic Overrides Liking	Authority & Convergence	Sub-theme A: Truth Heuristics	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
61	Try-ons + Long-Term Feedback Are Useful	UGC Reality Check	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
62	Polarisation Read as Idol-Centred	De-Fandom Framing	Sub-theme C: De-Fandom Moves	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
63	Final Anchor: Product Merit + Independent Reviews + Budget	Independent-Review Pass	Sub-theme B: Credibility Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
64	Event Spike → Brand Salience	Event-Spike Salience	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
65	XHS Fan-Posted Formats (Photo+Text+Short Video)	Searchable Structuring	Sub-theme B: Packaged & Retrievable Info	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
66	Algorithmic Reinforcement after Light Interest	Engagement→Algo Push Loop	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
67	Look Deconstruction + Same-Item Links Drive Attention	Same-Item Toolkits	Sub-theme A: Same-Item & How-To	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction

68	Coordinated Fan Actions Crowd Out Authentic Comments	Astroturfing Signals	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
69	Endorser Affinity Gate	Need-Fit Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
70	Visual Salience Threshold	Heat-Triggered Peek	Sub-theme A: Initial Affect & Curiosity	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
71	Endorser-Brand Fit Impacts Favourability; Product Fit Overrides	Fit Transfer	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit
72	Short-Lived Attitude Shift + Offline Dilution	Short-Window Lift (3-14 days)	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
73	Peer Discussion (Selective)	Share→Recommend→Reshare Cycle	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
74	Informative + In-Context UGC Boosts Relatability	Relatable Proximity	Sub-theme C: Distance vs. Relatability	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit
75	Over-Marketing Triggers Reactance	Reactance to Hype	Sub-theme C: Emotional Backfire	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
76	Aesthetic Fatigue from Saturation	Aesthetic Fatigue	Sub-theme C: Emotional Backfire	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
77	Endorser-Induced Short Lift in Purchase Interest	Curiosity Peek	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
78	Fan Posts Package Info → Seeing→ Considering	Save & Compare Ready	Sub-theme B: Packaged & Retrievable Info	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
79	Social Sharing + Independent Review Seeking	Independent Reviews First	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
80	Everyday-Use Reality Check + Price Shock Cool Intent	Value Misalignment	Sub-theme C: Value & Quality Kill-Switches	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
81	Substance over Slogans; Attention ≠ Purchase	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
82	Design/Quality Priority + Wait Strategy for Value	Wait-and-See / Avoid for Now	Sub-theme D: Delay & Switch	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
83	Lifestyle-Led Criteria; Fans' Comments as Reference Only	Need-Fit Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
84	Polarisation / One-Sided Fan Support → Wait-and-Verify	Wait-and-See / Avoid for Now	Sub-theme D: Delay & Switch	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
85	Passive notice & mild interest; celebrity-led glance	Curiosity Peek	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
86	Platforms & formats: XHS/Douyin; photo+text; some short video	Searchable Structuring	Sub-theme B: Packaged & Retrievable Info	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
87	Algorithmic push after light interaction	Engagement→Algo Push Loop	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces

88	Non-fan rarely tracks typical fan behaviours; occasional same-item seen	— (Context marker)	—	—
89	Immediate reaction = curiosity; "salesy" → skip	Heat-Triggered Peek	Sub-theme A: Initial Affect & Curiosity	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
90	Small, short-term lift; memory/favourability ↑; product-led	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
91	Affect window ≈ 2 weeks; light sharing; fades with buzz	Short-Window Lift (3–14 days)	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
92	Fan posts as an "amplifier"	Share→Recommend→Reshare Cycle	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
93	Varied/genuine/informative → trust, fashionability, authenticity ↑	Verifiability Evidence	Sub-theme A: Truth Heuristics	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
94	Comment-management/flooding/uniform wording → inauthenticity & fatigue	Astroturfing Signals	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
95	Negative transfer: Balenciaga chunky platforms → intent ↓	Context-Mismatch Aversion	Sub-theme D: Identity & Context Pressures	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
96	Social-pressure misfit (male endorser + fangirl-praise) → wouldn't buy	Copycat Anxiety	Sub-theme D: Identity & Context Pressures	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
97	No search without need; flooding triggers avoidance	Wait-and-See / Avoid for Now	Sub-theme D: Delay & Switch	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
98	Talk focuses on fan behaviour, not product reviews	De-Fandom Framing	Sub-theme C: De-Fandom Moves	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
99	Not enough to boycott; wait & reassess on design/price	Wait-and-See / Avoid for Now	Sub-theme D: Delay & Switch	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
100	Positive spillover case (Wang Yibo) → attention & memorability ↑	Good-Fit Halo	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser–Brand Fit
101	Extreme fan noise eclipses brand → goodwill & intent ↓	Risk-Aversion Trigger	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
102	Decision weights: Design > Brand reputation > Price	Need–Fit Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
103	Preferences: lifestyle/values lead; comments = reference	Need–Fit Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
104	Polarisation read as idol-centred; return to product merit	De-Fandom Framing	Sub-theme C: De-Fandom Moves	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
105	"Same-item" curation; info-dense; save for later	Save & Compare Ready	Sub-theme B: Packaged & Retrievable Info	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
106	Platforms & formats: Weibo/XHS; photo+text easier to save	Save & Compare Ready	Sub-theme B: Packaged & Retrievable Info	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
107	Entry paths: home feed, topics, trending, shares	Multi-Surface Entry Points	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces

108	Boycott/comment swarming after name error → trust ↓	Risk-Aversion Trigger	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
109	Non-fan scroll; distinct style is exception	Heat-Triggered Peek	Sub-theme A: Initial Affect & Curiosity	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
110	Fan edit reframes LV monogram; scarf versatility; shortlist	Persona-to-Brand Meaning	Sub-theme A: Endorser as Meaning Maker	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser–Brand Fit
111	Post-view: save → search → check buyer photos/materials/care	Searchable Structuring	Sub-theme B: Packaged & Retrievable Info	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
112	In-the-moment like; instant share; then need-dependent	Share→Recommend→Reshare Cycle	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
113	Effect varies; remember celebrity > brand; repetitive → skip	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
114	Beautified/fan filter; flooding → fatigue	Aesthetic Fatigue	Sub-theme C: Emotional Backfire	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
115	Fan conduct drives short-term shifts; final = product + independent reviews	Independent-Review Pass	Sub-theme B: Credibility Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
116	Fake/flooded comments; won't click	Astroturfing Signals	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
117	Flooding suppresses search intent	Memory-Stay, Purchase-Avoid	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
118	No further discussion unless independent reviews appear first	Independent Reviews First	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
119	Avoid strongly celebrity-tied items (avoid fandom signalling)	Fandom-Tag Avoidance	Sub-theme C: De-Fandom Moves	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
120	Promotional effect random; fans' love ≠ passer-by interest	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
121	Creative + clear info lowers effort; can nudge purchase	Save & Compare Ready	Sub-theme B: Packaged & Retrievable Info	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
122	Control/flooding/over-beautifying/quarrels → off-putting	Fatigue → Backlash	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
123	Fan buzz short-term; prioritise design/quality/price	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
124	Decision factors order: fit & design; quality; price	Need–Fit Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
125	Lifestyle/values lead; distinct-style celebrity can refresh	Need–Fit Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
126	Likes/boycotts don't sway; noisy quarrels → avoid item	Wait-and-See / Avoid for Now	Sub-theme D: Delay & Switch	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
127	Fan-shot compilations at events/pop-ups → notice brand	Eventful Story Nodes	Sub-theme A: Endorser as Meaning Maker	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser–Brand Fit

128	Platforms & formats: XHS/Weibo; photo+text; some videos	Searchable Structuring	Sub-theme B: Packaged & Retrievable Info	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
129	Entry paths: home feed/trending/reshares; search surfaces events/same-item	Multi-Surface Entry Points	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
130	Outfit breakdowns; same-item tags; uniform support; offline cheering	Same-Item Toolkits	Sub-theme A: Same-Item & How-To	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
131	Helps find same items; flooding → skip	Same-Item Toolkits	Sub-theme A: Same-Item & How-To	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
132	Often put off; not a fan → 'not interested' unless visuals strong	Reactance to Hype	Sub-theme C: Emotional Backfire	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
133	Perceived sales push lowers trust; stop exploring	Astroturfing Signals	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
134	Controversy around endorsers → I avoid	Wait-and-See / Avoid for Now	Sub-theme D: Delay & Switch	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
135	Brand not careful choosing endorser; did not guide fan sentiment	Misfit Drag	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit
136	Brand-led strategy: use fans to drive buzz; uneven on non-fans	Trending × Friend Amplification	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
137	In moderation → trendier/more discussed	Fashionability Amplified	Sub-theme B: Social Proof Amplifiers	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
138	Overdone → inauthentic/hyped; limited passer-by impact	Reactance to Hype	Sub-theme C: Emotional Backfire	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
139	Excessive/out-of-control fans drag down brand favourability	Risk-Aversion Trigger	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
140	Flooding puts off buying; celebrity-item association sticks	Memory-Stay, Purchase-Avoid	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
141	No search without need	Need-Fit Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
142	Brief vent; independent reviews only if controversy	Independent Reviews First	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
143	Avoid tightly celebrity-tied items; step back if flooding/managed	Fandom-Tag Avoidance	Sub-theme C: De-Fandom Moves	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
144	'Good fan content' = genuine + first-hand + clear info + moderate freq	Verifiability Evidence	Sub-theme A: Truth Heuristics	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
145	Negative cues: flooding/uniform scripts/hard selling → trust ↓	Astroturfing Signals	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
146	Exposure = brief attention fluctuation; purchase product-led	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
147	Decision factors: design & price first	Budget Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey

148	Preference source: lifestyle/values lead; fan comments minor	Need-Fit Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
149	Polarised reactions: wait out hype; step away if toxic	Wait-and-See / Avoid for Now	Sub-theme D: Delay & Switch	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
150	Victoria Harbour boat support (LV/Dylan Wang)	Event-Spike Salience	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
151	Fan Edits > Official Clips (Nudge)	Heat-Triggered Peek	Sub-theme A: Initial Affect & Curiosity	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
152	Trending + Friend Shares → Algo Loop	Trending × Friend Amplification	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
153	Same-Item Compilations Lower Effort & Reinforce Recall	Same-Item Toolkits	Sub-theme A: Same-Item & How-To	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
154	Curiosity About Unpaid Fan Labour	Heat-Triggered Peek	Sub-theme A: Initial Affect & Curiosity	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
155	Endorser Liking ↑ Favourability/Intent; Annoying Fandom → Scroll	Good-Fit Halo	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit
156	Assess Order: Endorser Fit → Fan Climate	Fit Transfer	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit
157	Duration ≈ One Week + Light Sharing	Short-Window Lift (3–14 days)	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
158	Frequency Reinforces Brand; Idol-Only Claims Off-Putting	Copycat Anxiety	Sub-theme D: Identity & Context Pressures	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
159	Idol Halo → Trendier Image; Over-Packaging → Authenticity ↓	Fashionability Amplified	Sub-theme B: Social Proof Amplifiers	Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof
160	Sincere/Specific/Informative Persuades	Verifiability Evidence	Sub-theme A: Truth Heuristics	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
161	Save-Not-Buy + Specs/Neutral Review Gate	Memory-Stay, Purchase-Avoid	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
162	Search Workflow: XHS brand+code → official → store/stock → price keywords	Cross-Platform Triangulation	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
163	Social Proof via Friends' Real-Life Check	UGC Reality Check	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction
164	Non-Boycott; Avoid Idol-Tied Items; Flooding/Control → Step Back	Fandom-Tag Avoidance	Sub-theme C: De-Fandom Moves	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
165	Brand Mishandles Public Issue → Distance	Risk-Aversion Trigger	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
166	Amplifier Effect (Reach/Exposure; Younger/Energetic)	Trending × Friend Amplification	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces
167	Flooding/Comment Control Backlash; Goodwill Spillover	Fatigue → Backlash	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism

168	Fan Infighting Storm → Collateral Brand	Risk-Aversion Trigger	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism
169	Quality & Pacing Rule the Effect	Quality Red-Flags	Sub-theme C: Value & Quality Kill-Switches	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
170	Non-Fan Anchor: Design/Craft/Price/Independent Reviews	Independent-Review Pass	Sub-theme B: Credibility Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
171	Choice Factors Order (Design/Price → Reviews → Build/Comfort → Availability/After Sales)	Need-Fit Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
172	Lifestyle/Values Lead; Comments = Sense Check	Need-Fit Gate	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey
173	Polarisation Protocol: Cool-Off → Neutral Reviews/In-Store Try/Compare; Values/Quality → Drop; Noise → Mute	Wait-and-See / Avoid for Now	Sub-theme D: Delay & Switch	Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey

Table B: Grouped Summary by Small Code within Sub-themes/Themes (IDs & Counts)

Theme	Sub-theme	Small code	Count	IDs
Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Celebrity@FW Salience	1	[23]
Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Engagement→Algo Push Loop	6	[2, 25, 40, 43, 66, 87]
Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces	Sub-theme A: Event & Algorithmic Peaks	Event-Spike Salience	3	[24, 64, 150]
Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Multi-Surface Entry Points	2	[107, 129]
Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Share→Recommend→Reshare Cycle	5	[12, 47, 73, 92, 112]
Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces	Sub-theme B: Entry Points & Reinforcement	Trending × Friend Amplification	3	[136, 152, 166]
Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Curiosity Peek	2	[77, 85]
Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Memory-Stay, Purchase-Avoid	3	[117, 140, 161]
Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Short-Window Lift (3–14 days)	6	[11, 29, 46, 72, 91, 157]
Theme 1: Algorithmic Reach & Trending Surfaces	Sub-theme C: Mere Exposure Effects	Top-of-Mind, Non-Conversion	11	[19, 30, 35, 48, 53, 81, 90, 113, 120, 123, 146]
Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction	Sub-theme A: Same-Item & How-To	Price & Availability Cues	1	[4]
Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction	Sub-theme A: Same-Item & How-To	Same-Item Toolkits	8	[3, 6, 26, 41, 67, 130, 131, 153]
Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction	Sub-theme B: Packaged & Retrievable Info	Save & Compare Ready	4	[78, 105, 106, 121]
Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction	Sub-theme B: Packaged & Retrievable Info	Searchable Structuring	5	[54, 65, 86, 111, 128]
Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Cross-Platform Triangulation	2	[33, 162]
Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	Independent Reviews First	6	[9, 17, 55, 79, 118, 142]

Theme 2: Instrumental Cues & Effort Reduction	Sub-theme C: Verification Paths	UGC Reality Check	2	[61, 163]
Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof	Sub-theme A: Initial Affect & Curiosity	Heat-Triggered Peek	7	[8, 27, 70, 89, 109, 151, 154]
Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof	Sub-theme A: Initial Affect & Curiosity	Peer Presence Cue	1	[14]
Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof	Sub-theme B: Social Proof Amplifiers	Fashionability Amplified	3	[49, 137, 159]
Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof	Sub-theme B: Social Proof Amplifiers	Topicality as Worthiness	1	[37]
Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof	Sub-theme C: Emotional Backfire	Aesthetic Fatigue	3	[15, 76, 114]
Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof	Sub-theme C: Emotional Backfire	Reactance to Hype	3	[75, 132, 138]
Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof	Sub-theme D: Identity & Context Pressures	Context-Mismatch Aversion	1	[95]
Theme 3: Affective Atmosphere & Social Proof	Sub-theme D: Identity & Context Pressures	Copycat Anxiety	2	[96, 158]
Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit	Sub-theme A: Endorser as Meaning Maker	Eventful Story Nodes	1	[127]
Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit	Sub-theme A: Endorser as Meaning Maker	Persona-to-Brand Meaning	4	[28, 32, 44, 110]
Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Fit Transfer	2	[71, 156]
Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Good-Fit Halo	5	[5, 10, 57, 100, 155]
Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit	Sub-theme B: Fit Transfer	Misfit Drag	2	[51, 135]
Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit	Sub-theme C: Distance vs. Relatability	Over-Polished Distance	1	[50]
Theme 4: Narrative Co-construction & Endorser-Brand Fit	Sub-theme C: Distance vs. Relatability	Relatable Proximity	2	[45, 74]
Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism	Sub-theme A: Truth Heuristics	Authority & Convergence	2	[59, 60]
Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism	Sub-theme A: Truth Heuristics	Verifiability Evidence	5	[13, 31, 93, 144, 160]
Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Astrourfing Signals	8	[7, 42, 58, 68, 94, 116, 133, 145]
Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Fatigue → Backlash	3	[36, 122, 167]
Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism	Sub-theme B: Operational Red Flags	Risk-Aversion Trigger	5	[101, 108, 139, 165, 168]
Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism	Sub-theme C: De-Fandom Moves	De-Fandom Framing	3	[62, 98, 104]
Theme 5: Authenticity Gatekeeping & Skepticism	Sub-theme C: De-Fandom Moves	Fandom-Tag Avoidance	3	[119, 143, 164]
Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Budget Gate	3	[16, 34, 147]

Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey	Sub-theme A: Consideration Gates	Need-Fit Gate	10	[69, 83, 102, 103, 124, 125, 141, 148, 171, 172]
Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey	Sub-theme B: Credibility Gates	Independent-Review Pass	4	[52, 63, 115, 170]
Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey	Sub-theme C: Value & Quality Kill-Switches	Quality Red-Flags	4	[20, 39, 56, 169]
Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey	Sub-theme C: Value & Quality Kill-Switches	Value Misalignment	3	[21, 38, 80]
Theme 6: Outcome Gates along the Customer Journey	Sub-theme D: Delay & Switch	Wait-and-See / Avoid for Now	10	[18, 22, 82, 84, 97, 99, 126, 134, 149, 173]
—	—	— (Context marker)	2	[1, 88]

APPENDIX 4: GENERATIVE AI MAPPING

Gen Ai Tool	Interaction Type	Prompt Used	Generated Output	Use In Work	Date
ChatGPT (OpenAI)	Translate the interview contents of all interviews from Chinese to English.	Translate the following Chinese interview record accurately and without any errors into British English. Retain the meaning, the name of the speaker and the codes in the parentheses. Do not add any content or change the meaning.	8 English interview transcript (see Appendix 3.2 interview)	All translations have been checked against the audio and the original text (see Appendix 3.2)	2025/08/15