

**MOBILE PHONE TRENDING TOPICS: BRAND
INFORMATION ADOPTION AMONG CHINA'S
GENERATION Z ON SINA WEIBO PLATFORM**

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2025

MOBILE PHONE TRENDING TOPICS: BRAND INFORMATION ADOPTION AMONG CHINA'S GENERATION Z ON SINA WEIBO PLATFORM

by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

September 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful for the support and guidance I have received throughout my doctoral journey, and I would like to extend my sincere thanks to several individuals who have made this achievement possible.

My supervisor, Dr. Lim Jing Yi, deserves my deepest gratitude for her unwavering support, insightful feedback, and expert guidance, which have been instrumental in shaping this thesis. Her commitment to excellence and encouragement inspired me to strive for the highest standards in my research.

I would also like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my parents. Their unconditional love and support have been the bedrock of my academic journey. My beloved wife has been a constant source of strength, whose patience, understanding, and emotional support have been crucial in helping me navigate this journey. I am truly blessed to have her by my side. My colleague, Yu Xiaohua has been indispensable. Her expertise in data analysis significantly contributed to the robustness of my quantitative research. Zhan Guofang and Siew Li Ling's meticulous proofreading greatly improved the clarity of my manuscript. Their dedication and support have been invaluable. My friends and classmates, Li Haibo and Zhu Canwei, provided essential assistance in data collection. Their willingness to collaborate and tireless efforts played a crucial role in the completion of this research.

This thesis is a culmination of the collective support, guidance, and encouragement I have received from all these remarkable individuals. I am deeply grateful to each one of you for being a part of this significant milestone in my life. Thank you for your invaluable contributions and unwavering support.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS

α	Cronbach's alpha
r	Fraction of responses
p	P-value
χ^2	Chi-square
β	Beta coefficient
Z	Z-score
c	Confidence level
r	Estimated proportion
n	Sample size
N	Total population size
x	Intermediate value
E	Margin of error

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGFI	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BIA	Brand Information Adoption
CB-SEM	Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modelling
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CITC	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
CMIN	Chi-square Minimum
CR	Composite Reliability
DF	Degrees of Freedom
EIAM	Extension Information Adoption Model
ES	Emotional Support
GFI	Goodness of Fit Index
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio
IAM	Information Adoption Model
IC	Information Credibility
IFI	Incremental Fit Index
IQ	Information Quality
IS	Informational Support
PIU	Perceived Information Usefulness
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	Structure Equation Modelling
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

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**TOPIK TRENDING TELEFON BIMBIT: PENERIMAAN MAKLUMAT
JENAMA DALAM KALANGAN GENERASI Z CHINA DI PLATFORM
SINA WEIBO**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyelidik mekanisme pengambilan maklumat jenama dalam kalangan Generasi Z di China dalam konteks topik trending jenama telefon bimbit di Sina Microblog, iaitu sebuah platform media sosial terkemuka di China. Berdasarkan Model Lanjutan Pengambilan Maklumat (Extension Information Adoption Model, EIAM), kajian ini meneroka bagaimana kegunaan maklumat yang dirasakan, yang dipengaruhi oleh kualiti maklumat, kredibiliti maklumat, serta sokongan maklumat dan emosi, mempengaruhi tingkah laku pengambilan maklumat jenama. Dalam kajian ini, reka bentuk kaedah campuran berturutan penjelasan digunakan dengan pengumpulan data melalui tinjauan berasaskan laman sesawang dan temu bual separa berstruktur. Pemodelan persamaan struktur serta analisis tematik telah digunakan dalam kajian ini bagi mentafsir data. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pengambilan maklumat jenama oleh Generasi Z sangat dipengaruhi oleh tahap kegunaan maklumat yang dirasakan, yang dipertingkatkan oleh sokongan kandungan dan kredibiliti sumber. Apabila tahap kegunaan maklumat yang dirasakan rendah, pengambilan maklumat berfungsi sebagai usaha membina pengetahuan. Manakala apabila tahap kegunaan maklumat tinggi, pengambilan maklumat menyokong keputusan pembelian serta cadangan kepada pihak lain. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada literatur dalam bidang pemasaran digital, sistem maklumat dalam talian dan tingkah laku pengguna, serta menawarkan implikasi strategik bagi penglibatan jenama dalam pasaran telefon bimbit China yang kompetitif.

**MOBILE PHONE TRENDING TOPICS: BRAND INFORMATION
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mechanisms of brand information adoption among China's Generation Z in the context of mobile phone brand trending topics on Sina Microblog, a prominent Chinese social media platform. Drawing on the Extension Information Adoption Model (EIAM), the research investigates how perceived information usefulness, shaped by information quality, information credibility and both informational and emotional support, influences behaviours of brand information adoption. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the study gathered data through a web-based survey and semi-structured interviews. Structural equation modelling and thematic analysis were used for data interpretation. Findings reveal that Generation Z's adoption of brand information is significantly influenced by perceived usefulness, which is enhanced by content support and source credibility. When perceived usefulness is low, adoption serves a knowledge-building purpose; when high, it facilitates immediate purchasing decisions and peer recommendations. These insights contribute to literature on digital marketing, online information systems, and consumer behaviour, offering strategic implications for brand engagement within China's competitive mobile phone market.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to providing a comprehensive introduction to the study's central theme. It introduces the investigation into brand information adoption among China's Generation Z on brand trending topics, setting the stage for understanding the interaction between China's Generation Z's brand information adoption and China mobile phone trending topics on Sina Microblog. This chapter defines the research problem, objectives, and questions, outlines the significance of the study, and presents the scope and structure of the research, thereby grounding the subsequent analysis in an academic framework.

1.2 Research Background

1.2.1 Brand Trending Topics

With the prosperity of the digital age, Sina Microblog has become an integral part of China's digital ecosystem, harnessing the influence of trending topics to sculpt public discourse and serve as a pivotal platform for brand engagement (Filieri et al., 2021; Yang & Peng, 2022; Zhao et al., 2023). The introduction of hashtags on Sina Microblog in 2007, which enabled the formation of social media trending topics, transformed user interaction with content by facilitating real-time engagement and tracking (Jia & Han, 2020; Sun et al., 2022).

Microblog, as an essential social media platform, is widely engaged with by Generation Z globally (Guo et al., 2024; Singla et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2023). In China, Sina Weibo is one of the most popular microblogging platforms among Generation Z (He, 2020; Wang et al., 2022; Yang & Peng, 2022). Sina Microblog's

unique distribution of relationships and reliance on content dissemination through these networks have cultivated an environment rich with user-generated content (Coursaris, et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022). Users who actively produce content on Sina Weibo are referred to as content generators, a group that includes ordinary platform users, influencers, and brand accounts (Zhao et al., 2023).

Accordingly, active content generators stimulate multi-user feedback loops, thus enriching the overall user experience (Parker et al., 2016). This mechanism is particularly beneficial for Chinese domestic brands (Li & Yan, 2022). As of June 2021, Sina Microblog has 41.9 million active content generators, with a content generator-to-user ratio of 7.3% (Rickzhang, 2021). In particular, they actively generate content on brand trending topics (Bao, 2021; He et al., 2017; Jia & Han, 2020; Li & Yan, 2022).

In China, trending topics serve as a key channel for content generators to engage in online discussions on subjects of interest, primarily hosted on public social media platforms such as Sina Microblog (Li, 2023; Yin et al., 2023). For commercial purposes, Sina Microblog designates brand trending topics, comprising either sponsored or organic content tagged with brand names (e.g., #HuaweiMate60 or #XiaomiRedmi12), as dedicated discussion pages to facilitate online interactions between content creators and brands for promotional activities (Bao, 2021). In line with this, this study adopts Bao's (2021) definition of mobile phone brand trending topics, which are understood as hashtag-based campaigns and discussions initiated by mobile phone brands on Sina Microblog.

The increasing communicative value of brand trending topics highlights the significance of understanding how the content generators participating in these topics, as well as the quality of the content they produce, influence brand information adoption. At present, China mobile phone brands typically implement their digital marketing

strategies on Sina Microblog through the use of brand trending topics (Bao, 2021). As such, brand communication strategies often pivot around brand trending topics, which is underscored by the impressive \$537.6 million in advertising and marketing revenue generated in the third quarter of 2021 (Rickzhang, 2021). This remarkable market indicates the commercial potency of brand trending topics on brand communication.

This commercial impact is further reinforced by the surge in China's mobile internet users, which had exceeded 1.07 billion by June 2021 (CNNIC, 2020). Concurrently, this rapidly expanding digital population is dominated by Generation Z, who not only constitute a significant share of the mobile phone consumer market but also actively shape brand trending topics and engage in online discourse surrounding mobile phone brands (Pillay, 2021; Yunus & Rashid, 2016). For China's mobile phone brands, engaging with these digital natives' information demands through brand trending topics is therefore of practical significance.

Deeply integrated into this digital domain, China's Generation Z forms a vital target audience for mobile phone brands on Sina Microblog (Jiang & Sun, et al., 2023). Generation Z has been regarded as a 'mobile internet native' cohort (Lanier, 2017). Concurrently, their interactions with brands through trending topics are prolific, with over 85% of content from China mobile phone brands being linked to brand trending topics on Sina Microblog (Bao, 2021). Nowadays, trending topics have emerged as a potent tool for brands seeking to engage with target consumers in China, functioning as aggregators of shared interests and public discourse (Bao, 2021; Huang et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). For China mobile phone brands, brand trending topics offer a gateway to reach and influence the decision-making of China's Generation Z consumers, who are often active respondents in brand-related discussions on Sina Microblog (Bao, 2021; Li & Yan, 2022; Wang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023).

Following this, the growing popularity of China mobile phone brands among China's Generation Z further accentuates the need to understand their adoption process (Jin & von Zedtwitz, 2008; Wang, 2023).

Generation Z actively shapes and steers the discourse around mobile phone brands, leveraging their innate understanding of digital trends and social media nuances (Ertz et al., 2022). Nonetheless, there remains a lack of evidence clarifying the specific ways in which users, especially those from Generation Z, internalise and adopt brand information through these trending topics' channels (Xin & Lim, 2023). Establishing a connection with China's Generation Z through brand trending topics on Sina Microblog can lead to significant business outcomes for brands, especially those aiming to expand their local market among this group (Cao, 2020; Zhong, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how this group adopts brand information through their engagement with brand trending topics.

In conclusion, as the mobile phone market continues to mature and intensify in competitiveness, the influence of brand trending topics on social media in shaping consumer preferences and actions becomes ever more critical (Song, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Comprehending the mechanisms of how information is adopted in this context offers invaluable insights of both academic and commercial significance (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Yan & Huang, 2014). In China, Generation Z's dynamic interaction with brand trending topics delineates a digital landscape where consumer engagement and brand communication converge with substantial impact. Thus, investigating China's Generation Z's brand information adoption through their engagement with brand trending topics is crucial for brands to refine their marketing strategies on Sina Microblog and enhance engagement in China's competitive mobile phone market.

1.2.2 China Mobile Phone Brands and China's Generation Z

The Chinese mobile phone market has experienced substantial growth, valued at an estimated \$35.971 billion in 2022 (Maximise Market Research, 2023). It is anticipated to expand at a compound annual growth rate of 13.3%, potentially reaching 86.212 billion US dollars by 2029 (Maximise Market Research, 2023). China mobile phone brands such as Huawei and Xiaomi, have effectively harnessed their extensive knowledge of the mobile phone industry to produce affordable, high-quality products, thus securing the interest and loyalty of China's Generation Z consumers (Wang, 2023). A notable transformation occurred in the late 1990s when the Chinese mobile phone market shifted from foreign brand dominance to the emergence and success of domestic manufacturers, such as Huawei (Fan, 2006). By 2004, these domestic brands had captured more than 40% of the market share in China (Jin & von Zedtwitz, 2008). The surge in domestic brands of mobile phones has intensified competition, leading to a significant reduction in mobile phone prices (Song, 2023). In early 2023, the market saw a decline in overall mobile phone sales, with sales of Apple phones, a foreign brand, outperforming those of China mobile phone brands (Ding, 2023). Overall, despite the vast size of the market, China mobile phone brands face challenges such as market saturation and the pandemic's impact.

Generation Z, born from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s (Dimock, 2019), stands at the forefront of the digital era and is a pivotal demographic in the consumer electronics market, with a particular impact on China mobile phone brands (Bao, 2021). These technologically adept young consumers are highly active on social media platforms such as Sina Microblog. They engage with mobile phone brands, significantly amplifying their visibility and popularity through brand-related discussions (Pillay, 2021; Yunus & Rashid, 2016). Notably, over 85% of microblogs

on Sina Microblog about China mobile phone brands are connected to brand trending topics (Bao, 2021). The popularity of employing brand trending topics to communicate with China's Generation Z reflects a targeted strategy to engage this key audience.

Generation Z's impact is not confined to consumerism but extends to social and brand identity. On social media platforms such as Sina Microblog, members of this generation spread brand information and seek validation for their choices from peers, influencing brand equity (He, 2017). This active engagement indicates Generation Z's crucial role in directing mobile phone brands' marketing strategies and competitive positioning in the digital marketplace. Even as the mobile phone market approaches saturation, leveraging brand trending topics remains an effective strategy for disseminating brand information among China's Generation Z. Their active participation highlights the necessity for brands to customise their online presence to align with the digital literacy and consumption habits of this group (Thangavel et al., 2022). As the mainstay of the current consumer market, Generation Z's tendency to obtain brand information through social media and engage in online commerce and governance is noteworthy (Puiu et al., 2022; Thangavel et al., 2022; Zheng, 2024).

The rising market influence of China's Generation Z highlights the significance of understanding how this group engages with China mobile phone brands and adopts brand information in online environments. Although they possess a strong familiarity with mobile internet and frequently participate in social media interactions, there is a notable lack of empirical evidence regarding how they adopt brand information through brand trending topics. Therefore, the intersection between China's Generation Z and mobile phone brand communication, particularly through brand trending topics on platforms such as Sina Microblog, represents a valuable and timely area for academic inquiry.

1.2.3 Brand Information Adoption Among China's Generation Z

The concept of brand information adoption is fundamentally associated with how consumers engage with and internalise information pertinent to brands. This process, initially proposed by Chaiken (1980) and further expounded by Davis (1989), entails an individual's recognition and acceptance of received information as meaningful and credible based on persuasiveness. The adoption of information, particularly concerning brand communication, significantly impacts customers' purchasing decisions (Li, 2019; Zhang & Stephanie, 2008). In the Information Adoption Model (IAM), Sussman and Siegal (2003) identify information quality, credibility, and perceived usefulness as pivotal constructs in information adoption. Building on IAM, Elwalda et al. (2021) proposed the Extension Information Adoption Model (EIAM), which extends the original Information Adoption Model by incorporating both informational and emotional support as additional determinants of information adoption.

EIAM provides a practical framework for measuring not only how individuals process brand information cognitively, but also how supportive constructs influence adoption among Generation Z, as the model considers not only objective cues of information quality and credibility, but also interpersonal cues including informational and emotional support. The adoption of brand information takes on additional nuances when considering China's Generation Z, a demographic segment identified as mobile internet natives (Lanier, 2017). This generation is typified by its readiness to seek and provide peer support in shaping brand perception, especially through platforms such as Sina Microblog, where brand trending topics can sway consumer behaviours (Bao, 2021; He, 2017). Current scholarly understanding underscores the importance of studying brand information adoption among Generation Z due to their distinctive

media consumption habits and their potential impact on the market, especially in sectors like mobile phone brands (Pillay, 2021; Yunus & Rashid, 2016).

In particular, empirical evidence has shown that China's Generation Z values active participation in brand discussions on social media, which is integral to their brand information adoption process (Wang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023). This demographic is also noted for its frequent replacement of mobile devices (Pillay, 2021; Yunus & Rashid, 2016). Notably, their engagement with brand trending topics' discussion is not confined to passive information reception. Rather, it represents a dynamic process of interaction, through which brand narratives are shaped and the market presence of mobile phone brands within this group is potentially redefined.

This engagement with trending topics extends beyond mere social interaction, playing a pivotal role in shaping the purchasing intentions of these young consumers (Cao, 2020; Erkan & Evans, 2016, 2018; He, 2020; Liu, 2020; Wu & Qu, 2021; Zhong, 2019). Such interactions facilitate effective communication with brands by encouraging consumer engagement on social media platforms (Yan & Huang, 2014). By exploring how China's mobile phone brands navigate brand information adoption through these brand trending topics, it becomes possible to understand how to effectively deliver messages to this vital consumer segment.

To encapsulate, brand information adoption among China's Generation Z is a complex interplay process, where the persuasive power of the content, the credibility of the information source, the informational and emotional support obtained from communication and the perception of useful information converge to influence consumer activities. Thus, understanding this process is both academically significant and essential for mobile phone brands aiming to optimise their marketing strategies to capture the attention and loyalty of Generation Z consumers in China.

1.3 Problem Statement

The theory of information adoption has been widely applied in studies on consumer online decision-making (Arora & Lata, 2020; Bao & Zhu 2023; Hsu, 2021). The literature underscores the significance of information adoption in Generation Z's online interactions with brands (Flecha-Ortiz et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Pillay, 2021; Sudirjo et al., 2023). However, the process through which they adopt brand information via brand trending topics remains insufficiently explored. Hence, there is a clear need for China mobile phone brands to understand how their key consumer groups are adopting brand information through brand trending topics on social media.

Brand trending topics on Sina Microblog represent a distinctive form of social media marketing in China, providing an open environment for online brand engagement among China's Generation Z. In these discussions, participants may be either familiar with each other or strangers (Guo et al., 2024; Li & Yan, 2022; Li et al., 2022; Xin & Lim, 2025; Yin et al., 2023). China's Generation Z places considerable value on receiving peer support through social media when engaging in brand-related discussions (Chen & Yang, 2023; Liu et al., 2023). Through commenting, sharing, and posting, they exchange views with other content generators on brand trending topics to obtain valuable brand information (Huang et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; Zheng, 2024). Prior studies indicate that accessing brand information through brand trending topics can facilitate consumption decisions among this group (Huang et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). Nevertheless, empirical evidence remains limited regarding how they adopt brand information from trending topics and their associated content generators.

Specifically, content generators provide useful information on brand trending topics, serving as key information sources for Generation Z to obtain the brand

information they need (Nafees et al., 2021; Pradhan et al., 2023; Tran & Matsui, 2023). However, it remains unclear how China's Generation Z engages with content generators on brand trending topics and adopts the information they provide about China mobile phone brands. Furthermore, in the course of their interaction with brand trending topics, how this group evaluates the China mobile phone brand information they received and the purposes for which they adopt such information require further clarification. Importantly, although China's Generation Z values peer support within brand trending topics, the supportive cues that facilitate their adoption of brand information have yet to be identified. The EIAM framework proposed by Elwalda et al. (2021) outlines the potential roles of information quality, information credibility, informational and emotional support, as well as perceived information usefulness in information adoption. Drawing on this conceptual framework offers valuable guidance for investigating how China's Generation Z adopts China mobile phone brand information through brand trending topics.

1.4 Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the brand information adoption of China's Generation Z regarding China's mobile phone brands on Sina Microblog's brand trending topics. Three questions were driving this research:

1. What behavioural patterns and cognitive strategies do China's Generation Z employ when engaging with China mobile phone brand trending topics on Sina Microblog?
2. How do information quality, credibility, informational and emotional supports influence China's Generation Z's perceived usefulness of China mobile phone brand information in Sina Microblog brand trending topics?

3. What is the relationship between perceived usefulness and brand information adoption on brand trending topics, and how does China's Generation Z adopt China mobile phone brand information through perceived usefulness?

1.5 Research Objectives

There are three Research Objectives aligned with the research questions that guide the current study:

1. To analyse the behavioural patterns and cognitive strategies that China's Generation Z employs when engaging with China mobile phone brand trending topics on Sina Microblog.
2. To examine how information quality, credibility, informational and emotional supports shape China's Generation Z's perceived usefulness of brand information in Sina Microblog brand trending topics.
3. To analyse the relationship between perceived usefulness and brand information adoption, exploring mediating mechanisms among China's Generation Z.

1.6 Research Significance

This research contributes to the theory of brand information adoption by revealing the adoption routes of China's Generation Z within brand trending topics on Sina Microblog, thus holding significant theoretical implications for the field of information systems research on social media platforms. By scrutinising the process of brand information adoption within the engagement of China mobile phone trending topics, the study delves into a nuanced understanding of perceived information usefulness, information quality, information credibility, and the roles of informational and emotional support among China's Generation Z's brand information adoption.

At its core, the investigation explores how these constructs influence Generation Z's brand information adoption of China mobile phone brands' message on Sina Microblog's brand trending topics. Given Generation Z's status as digital natives and their substantial influence on the Chinese mobile phone market, understanding their adoption of brand information is crucial for discerning market trends and devising effective consumer engagement strategies.

The theoretical enrichments extend to the exploration of brand information adoption among young consumers within a unique cultural and technological context, providing insights into how perceived information usefulness, information quality, information credibility, informational support, and emotional support collectively shape consumer activities related to brand information adoption.

Practically, the findings empower China's mobile phone brands to tailor their social media marketing strategies to Generation Z's values and behaviours, leveraging brand trending topics as strategic tools for meaningful engagement and market development. Therefore, by investigating China's Generation Z's brand information adoption through brand trending topics, the research bridges the gap between brand online information interaction and consumer actions, offering valuable insights for enhancing social media marketing and market development strategies in China's rapidly evolving mobile phone industry.

1.7 Research Limitation

Information adoption is the process by which an individual recognises the point of view in the information he or she receives and considers it meaningful for his or her ongoing activities (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). This concept describes how individuals process the information they receive before performing an activity (Elwalda et al.,

2021; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). As noted by Leong et al. (2022), brand information adoption is a crucial concept that influences purchase intention. This study's investigation into the adoption process provides brand managers and marketers with insights to better communicate with their consumers through brand trending topics in the digital era. However, several limitations should be acknowledged, as they may affect the interpretation and generalisability of the findings.

One of the potential limitations of this study is the demographic characteristics and number of respondents who participated in the survey, as it focuses on China's Generation Z. This demographic group consists of loyal users of China mobile phone brands and active respondents in brand trending topics on Sina Microblog. As a result, there may be a sampling bias, as the findings may not be fully generalisable to other age populations or consumer groups with different behavioural patterns and brand preferences. Nevertheless, this study effectively bridges the gap between current brand information adoption research and the lack of focus on this group, and the findings are important for understanding this group's adoption of China mobile phone brand information through brand trending topics.

This study's particular focus on China's Generation Z enables an in-depth exploration of this generation's behavioural patterns concerning brand trending topics, but it also limits the applicability of the findings to other age groups. China's Generation Z was selected as the target population given their position as digital natives and primary consumers of China's mobile phone brands and actively engage with brand trending topics. In contrast, including participants from different generations would dilute the focus on the adoption of brand information through brand trending topics. While the study relies on self-reported data from respondents within China's Generation Z, which may introduce recall bias or socially desirable responses,

the use of triangulation in both the research design and the cross-validation of qualitative and quantitative findings helped to mitigate the limitations of self-reported data and ensured the validity of the results within the context of this study.

Additionally, the focus of this study is on the brand information adoption of China mobile phone brands by China's Generation Z through China mobile phone trending topics. While the findings offer valuable insights into how this demographic engages with mobile phone brands through brand trending topics, it is important to acknowledge that different brands and product categories may exhibit unique patterns of brand information adoption, shaped by their specific market environments. The conclusions drawn from this study should be applied cautiously to other industries, regions, or brand types that may follow distinct adoption behaviours.

Moreover, brand trending topics encompass a variety of hashtags related to the brands. Generation Z's engagement with these topics includes the use of multiple hashtags, they can add several within a single post to participate in the brand-related discussions. In this study, respondents were deliberately selected from China's Generation Z users on Sina Microblog who had prior experience participating in discussions on brand trending topics concerning China mobile phone brands. While this purposive sampling approach carries potential risks of self-selection bias, as individuals with prior engagement in such discussions may hold stronger brand-related attitudes or behaviours than the broader Generation Z population, it was adopted to ensure that the participants possessed relevant experience in encountering brand information in authentic social media contexts. This study specifically investigates the adoption of brand information through brand trending topics as a whole, rather than focusing on any individual hashtag. Its findings offer critical insights into how China's Generation Z adopts brand information through brand trending topics, rather than

being limited to specific brand hashtags.

Brand trending topics are prevalent across today's social media platforms, and this study specifically focuses on Sina Microblog in China. In essence, brand trending topics on Sina Microblog hold significant representativeness in China, given the diversity of social media platforms. The findings of this study are particularly useful for brands seeking to leverage brand trending topics on Sina Microblog rather than other social media platforms, for their brand marketing efforts.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides the crucial research background for this study by providing vital information about brand trending topics, China mobile phone brands, and China's Generation Z. In particular, it briefly reviews the development of brand information adoption and summarises its significance for China's Generation Z and China mobile phone brands. This chapter also presents the three objectives of this study, along with the corresponding research questions that guide the entire study, as well as the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

With the growth of mobile internet users, brand trending topics on social media have been widely studied in digital marketing and brand communication (Gogia & Nanda, 2020; Li & Wu, 2018; Zhao et al., 2023). Brand information adoption is a key concept that describes how individuals receive and act on brand messages, which is critical for understanding consumer branding engagement on social media (Hsu, 2021; Leong et al., 2022; Na et al., 2023; Pillay, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to explore brand information adoption through brand trending topics. This chapter reviews essential literature on China's Generation Z and China mobile phone brands related to brand trending topics, with special emphasis on the fact that the brand trending topics of interest for this study are from Sina Microblog. It also provides a detailed discussion of the conceptual framework of the Extension Information Adoption Model (EIAM) adopted in this study.

2.2 Brand Information Adoption

The historical development of brand information adoption can be traced back to the formative work on the Technology Acceptance Model by Davis (1989), which introduced perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as pivotal determinants of technology adoption. This seminal work laid the groundwork for subsequent models of information adoption that delve into the cognitive processes underlying technology utilisation and knowledge transfer (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). In line with this, information adoption theory has now been extensively applied to studies of purchase intention, particularly in contexts of e-commerce platforms, electronic word-of-mouth

communication, and brand dissemination through social media (Bao & Zhu, 2023; Cao, 2020; Cheung et al., 2008; Gao & Tavoni, 2024; He, 2020; Wu & Qu, 2021; Xu et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2016). However, there is limited evidence examining the adoption process itself.

The routes of information adoption were inspired by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which outlines how individuals process and interpret information, affecting their information adoption. This model distinguishes between central and peripheral routes to brand information adoption (Petty et al., 1983). When individuals engage less deeply with information, they rely on peripheral cues such as information credibility to gauge usefulness. Conversely, when engagement is higher, they prioritise information quality. In trending topics, the routes of brand information adoption may follow a central route, represented by information quality, or a peripheral route, represented by information credibility. Despite both constructs playing pivotal roles in the persuasion and adoption of brand information, they have yet to be explored within the context of brand trending topics.

Sussman and Siegal (2003) developed the Information Adoption Model (IAM), focusing on the impact of argument quality and source credibility on information adoption within computer-mediated environments of organisational email. In the context of Sina Microblog, argument quality reflects the clarity and persuasiveness of content shared within trending topics, while source credibility reflects users' perceptions of content generators' trustworthiness. Building on this, the IAM has been instrumental in dissecting the nuances of brand information adoption, particularly in how consumers engage with and perceive electronic word-of-mouth (Erkan & Evans, 2016). The IAM's application is further expanded by incorporating social support theory, characterised by informational and emotional support (Tajvidi et al., 2020). This

integrated approach, manifested as the Extension Information Adoption Model (EIAM), is defined as an extended model based on the dual-route framework of information adoption (Elwalda et al., 2021). In comparison with IAM, the EIAM provides a more nuanced understanding of consumer behaviours in digital marketplaces, especially with social commerce of brand messages.

Notably, a myriad of studies have applied these theories to brand information contexts. Erkan and Evans (2016) explored the influence of electronic word-of-mouth on consumers' purchase intentions using the IAM. They emphasised the importance of information quality and credibility in determining information usefulness (Erkan & Evans, 2018). Relevant studies demonstrate that electronic word-of-mouth in online communities influences consumers' adoption of brand information for purchase decisions (Hsu, 2021). Indeed, existing literature emphasises the critical influence of source credibility and social influence on users' attitudes towards perceived information usefulness, reinforcing the profound impact these constructs have on the persuasive power of brand messages (Erkan & Evans, 2018; Gunawan & Huarng, 2015; Hsu, 2021). However, substantial evidence remains lacking regarding the process of brand information adoption itself, particularly within the context of brand trending topics.

The practical applications of brand information adoption are extensive. It helps brands craft messages that resonate both logically and emotionally with consumers, thereby enhancing the spread and acceptance of marketing communications through social networks (Dancer et al., 2014; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Park, 2020). Research on brand information adoption also explores how social interactions influence purchase decisions in online community settings and provides insights into leveraging social networks to enhance the credibility and attractiveness of brand offerings (Angst & Agarwal, 2009; Arora & Lata, 2020; Bao & Zhu, 2023; Cheung et al., 2008; Puiu et al.,

2022). As a novel channel for online interaction between brands and consumers, brand trending topics make it important to explore the influence of supportive cues on brand information adoption in a social media platform such as Sina Microblog.

On the one hand, digital marketing strategies benefit from brand information research, which offers methods for optimising digital marketing campaigns by focusing on credible, useful, and socially supported information (Dancer et al., 2014; Filieri, 2015; Nafees et al., 2021). On the other hand, brand information adoption provides a robust framework for studying how electronic word-of-mouth influences consumer behaviours, emphasising both message content and the social context in which messages are received (Dancer et al., 2014; Erkan & Evans, 2016, 2018; Leong et al., 2022; Park, 2020). In essence, this comprehensive approach is crucial for analysing how brand information is adopted across various social media platforms (Jiang et al., 2023; Na et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2014).

The EIAM posits that social support, particularly within mobile and instant messaging communication contexts, exerts a substantial influence on consumers' information adoption process (Elwalda et al., 2021). The transformative power of social ties and networks in brand-related communications highlights the critical role of social contexts in amplifying the effectiveness of marketing strategies. This is particularly relevant in an era where digital interactions are prevalent, and consumers among Generation Z are influenced not just by the content but also by the context of the information they received (Tajvidi et al., 2020; Wang, 2023). While the IAM effectively accounts for argument quality and source credibility, it does not fully explain the role of social interaction in online brand discourse, especially within user-driven platforms like Sina Microblog. The EIAM extends this by incorporating informational and emotional support, which benefits the understanding of the distinctive process through

which this group adopts brand information.

In general, the significance of brand information adoption extends far beyond the mere dissemination of brand-related content. It critically shapes consumer behaviours and attitudes, ultimately affecting decision-making and purchase intentions. The investigation of the information adoption process is thus theoretically necessary.

2.2.1 Development of Key Constructs in Brand Information Adoption

The existing literature underscores a strong correlation between brand information adoption and individuals' reception of brand-related messages, which significantly influences their subsequent decision-making processes (Li, 2019; Zhang & Stephanie, 2008). Notably, perceived information usefulness stands out as a critical determinant directly affecting brand information adoption (Elwalda et al., 2021). When individuals perceive received information as relevant to their ongoing tasks or activities, the perceived usefulness of the information is enhanced (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Simultaneously, information that enhances individual performance, productivity, and efficiency in various activities also significantly contributes to the perceived usefulness of information (Davis, 1989).

Additionally, constructs such as information quality, information credibility, informational support, and emotional support play multifaceted roles in shaping brand information adoption (Elwalda et al., 2021). Information quality encompasses aspects such as comprehensiveness, completeness, and accuracy (Citrin, 2001; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Wixom & Todd, 2005). Information credibility depends on the trustworthiness, professionalism, and knowledgeability of the information source (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Chaiken, 1980; Lee et al., 2021; Wu & Shaffer, 1987). Information quality and information credibility are important cues for information adoption, influencing the process through perceived information usefulness (Cheung et

al., 2009; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). The influence of these two constructs towards perceived information usefulness is valid in brand information adoption (Elwalda et al., 2021).

In addition, when brands interact with their consumers on social media to promote brand co-creation, informational and emotional support play a crucial role (Tajvidi et al., 2020). These two constructs are integral to the process of brand information adoption (Elwalda et al., 2021). Specifically, informational and emotional support refer to resources individuals obtain from social networks that help them in acquiring information to solve problems or feel encouraged or recognised by others, thereby fostering a sense of belonging to the community (Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983). When others provide information that helps individuals address their challenges, individuals may experience informational support from their social networks. This support can manifest as opinions, suggestions, or comments (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Krause & Markides, 1990; Liang et al., 2011). Meanwhile, when information provided by others elicits positive emotions such as approval, encouragement, or agreement, individuals may experience emotional support from their social networks (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Krause & Markides, 1990; Liang et al., 2011).

The literature review indicates that brand information adoption holds significant importance for social media users in acquiring brand information to inform their purchase decisions for ongoing practices (Gao & Tavoni, 2024; Khoa, 2021; Zhu et al., 2016). The process of brand information adoption is directly influenced by perceived information usefulness, which is of paramount value when individuals, as brand audiences, acquire and adopt brand information through online communication (Elwalda et al., 2021). Similarly, information quality and information credibility shape

individuals' perceptions of the usefulness of brand information from social media, facilitating its adoption (Alshikhi & Abdullah, 2018; Dancer et al., 2014; Nafees et al., 2021).

As social media users and consumers, individuals reinforce positive perceptions of brands through interactions with other content generators on social media. They utilise informational support and emotional support, which leads to more positive interactions and discussions about the brands (Tajvidi et al., 2020). For instance, informational support may include user-generated product reviews or technical specifications posted under brand trending topics, whereas emotional support includes affirming comments such as praise or empathy shared in response to others' experiences (Guo & Chen, 2022; He, 2017; Li & Yan, 2022; Zhao et al., 2022).

Through constructs of information quality, information credibility, informational support, and emotional support, social media users as brand consumers adopt brand information and take subsequent actions when they perceive information as useful (Elwalda et al., 2021; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Table 2.1 offers a comprehensive synthesis of seminal works in the field to further enrich the discussion of the significance of brand information adoption.

Table 2.1 Literature resources of brand information adoption

Constructs	Literature	Summary
Brand Information adoption (BIA)	Watts & Zhang (2008)	Information adoption refers to the process by which individuals acquire information and accept the presented information as meaningful for their ongoing activities.
	Li (2019)	Brand information adoption is related to an individual's cognition and understanding of the brand, which refers to the process by which an individual accepts brand information to buy branded products.
	Bao (2021)	Mobile phone brand information adoption on Sina Microblog correlates with its brand trending topics.
	Peng et al. (2019); Zhong (2019)	Information quality and information credibility of a brand have an impact on its brand information adoption.
	Liu (2020); Cao (2020)	The perceived information usefulness of a brand has an impact on its brand information adoption.

	He (2020)	Information quality and information credibility of a brand correlate with perceived information usefulness, which influences brand information adoption.
	Cao (2020)	Information credibility influences perceived information usefulness; brand information adoption correlates with these two constructs, respectively.
Perceived Information usefulness (PIU)	Sussman & Siegal (2003)	The extent to which people believe the information contained within a message is useful for their current task.
	Davis (1989)	Perceived information usefulness can be determined by the dimensions of quickness, performance, productivity, effectiveness, easiness, and usefulness of the information.
Information quality (IQ)	Petty et al. (1981)	The persuasiveness of the arguments contained in the information.
	Elwalda et al. (2021)	The extent to which arguments entrenched in an informational message derived from online communication are persuasive.
	Bailey & Pearson (1983)	The completeness, consistency, and accuracy of the information.
	Wixom & Todd (2005)	Information quality includes precision, reliability, format, volume, accuracy, currency, and completeness. The last three dimensions have been widely approved.
	Citrin (2001)	Four dimensions determine information quality: clarity, relevance, accuracy, and timeliness. Scholars widely acknowledged that the last three are valid.
Information credibility (IC)	Chaiken (1980)	A message recipient's perception of the credibility of a message source, reflecting nothing about the message itself.
	Elwalda et al. (2021)	The believability, competence and trustworthiness of the information source derived from online communication.
	Wu & Shaffer (1987)	Information credibility can be determined by five dimensions: credibility, reliability, trustworthiness, expertise, and knowledgeability.
	Bhattacharjee & Sanford (2006)	Information credibility can be determined by four dimensions: knowledge, trustworthiness, credibility, and expertise.
	Lee et al. (2021)	In social media trending topics, information credibility can be determined by an additional dimension: the scalability of trending topics' hashtags.
Informational support (IS)	Cobb (1976)	Informational support is defined as the information leading someone to believe that he is recognised as a member of a network of mutual obligations.
	Cohen & Hoberman (1983)	Informational support refers to the resources exchanged with other individuals over one's social ties that can help resolve current problems.
	Tajvidi et al. (2020)	In online communication of social media, informational support significantly influences consumers' engagement with brands.
	Liang et al. (2011)	Informational support provides information in the form of advice, instruction or recommendation.

	Krause & Markides (1990)	Informational support can be determined by eight dimensions: suggestion, answer, assistance, understanding, clarifying, comment on how, check back, and information.
Emotional support (ES)	Cobb (1976)	Emotional support is defined as the information contained in messages that leads people to believe that they are cared for, loved, and esteemed as members of their community.
	Cohen & Hoberman (1983)	Emotional support refers to the resources exchanged with other individuals over one's social ties that can lead to positive feelings of encouragement, acknowledgement or closeness.
	Tajvidi et al. (2020)	In online communication on social media, emotional support effectively affects consumers' engagement with brands.
	Liang et al. (2011)	Emotional support offers encouragement such as emotional concerns, intimacy or acceptance.
	Krause & Markides (1990)	Emotional support includes eleven dimensions: accompany, help, comfort, ease, listening, feeling similar, feeling close, encouragement, interest, concern, and promise.

2.3 China's Generation Z

Generation Z has gained substantial traction in both sociological and marketing discussions (Chen & Yang, 2023; Kaplan, 2020; Thangavel et al., 2022). This generation refers to the cohort born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s (Lanier, 2017). This group is distinctively marked by its profound integration with digital technology, having grown up in the era of smartphones, social media, and instantaneous digital communication (Liu et al., 2023; Pillay, 2021; Pradhan et al., 2023; Puiu et al., 2022; Tandoc et al., 2019; Zheng, 2024). In China, Generation Z represents a rapidly growing segment of the population that is exerting a significant influence over the evolving consumer market and digital culture (Chen & Yang, 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Zheng, 2024). Considering this generation's active presence on Chinese social media and substantial consumption potential, exploring their information adoption holds significant practical value for brands seeking to cater to their informational needs through brand trending topics.

Defining Generation Z, particularly within the Chinese context, involves