

Wanghong and the Wanghong Economy in China: A Systematic Review from a Cross-cultural Perspective

Kaiyi Hu^{1,*}

¹Graduate School of Economics, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan

*Corresponding author

Abstract: *The Wanghong economy is deeply integrated into Chinese marketing, generating significant economic value as a prominent digital-era business model. Despite the abundant literature, there remains the absence of a systematic review that integrates current research findings and elucidates the differences between it and the well-known Western influencer marketing pattern. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing 106 studies from core Chinese journals. It provides an overview, identifies five key themes, then develops an integrative framework, and highlights differences between Chinese and Western pattern. Additionally, the study adopts a cross-cultural perspective, explaining these differences by incorporating regional economy, history, politics, and society.*

Keywords: *China, Cultural comparison, Influencer marketing, Systematic literature review, Wanghong*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the rise of social media influencers (SMIs) has had a significant impact on global marketing. These individuals, known for setting trends and engaging with a receptive audience on social media platforms, have paved the way for the adoption of influencer marketing (IM) as a strategic approach to enhancing brand presence on social media (Farivar et al., 2021; Jia & Bie, 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021). However, it is crucial to note that most research findings in this area have been derived from Western contexts, primarily based on the United States (Vrontis et al., 2021; Tanwar et al., 2022). In IM research, practical experiences and theoretical insights from Non-Western contexts, including China—a highly influential market, have often been underestimated. Many scholars have expressed concerns regarding this “West-centric” issue, as the existing marketing research primarily emphasizes the challenges of applying theoretical frameworks and conceptual categories developed in the West to other contexts (e.g., Ozlem Sandikci, 2022; Jafari et al., 2012; Karababa, 2012). Thus, conducting global consumer research outside the West has been deemed critical by many scholars and this research partially responds to this call.

China, with its vast number of internet users (10.51 billion in 2022, penetration rate=74.4%, data from China Internet Network Information Center), has emerged as an undeniable force in the digital marketing. In China, SMIs are commonly referred to as “Wanghong,” and the economic value generated by these individuals is known as the “Wanghong economy.” Over the past decade, the Wanghong economy has grown exponentially. However, Western researchers have encountered difficulties in comprehending the Wanghong economy within the familiar IM pattern. This challenge arises from several complex factors. Firstly, The Wanghong economy is considered a comprehensive business model that surpasses being just a marketing tool like IM. This distinction not only leads to varying viewpoints and perspectives but also results in the Wanghong economy encompassing more factors than IM. Moreover, the difference in the models referred to in practice deepens the difficulty of understanding. Chinese Wanghong have stronger ties to practices such as livestreaming technology and e-commerce, showcasing a more pronounced commercial nature. Furthermore, as Fitzgerald et al. (2022) point out, because of the entwined influences of technology, creativity, commercialization and politics, Chinese social media should be understood as embedded within and a product of the intersections of a unique environment of political, social, economic and technological forms. The unique environment in China exacerbates the difficulty of understanding[1-4].

Despite the significant impact and distinctiveness of the Wanghong economy in comparison to mainstream IM pattern, it has not received thorough examination. In comparison to the abundance of English-language reviews about IM (e.g., Vrontis, D et al,2020; Hudders, L., & Lou, C, 2022; De Veirman et al;2019; Sundermann G & Raabe T, 2019; Ye, G et al, 2021; Tanwar et al, 2022), Chinese

reviews about Wanghong are scarce even in China. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap.

2. Literature Review and definition comparison

The academic field has accumulated a considerable amount of research examining SMIs and IM, including reviews. For example, two reviews were dedicated to the identification of highly influential SMIs within social networks, which extensively examined and compared various models and algorithms that had been developed in prior studies (Khan et al., 2017; Bamakan, Nurgaliev, & Qu, 2019). De Veirman, Hudders, and Nelson (2019) conducted a comprehensive review focusing on IM specifically targeted at children, shedding light on the impact of IM on this demographic. A separate review delved into the tourism sector, specifically discussing the ethical utilization of influencers in this domain (Nafi & Ahmed, 2019). Furthermore, some comprehensive reviews have been conducted. Vrontis et al. (2021) summarized 68 publications through a systematic literature review. Hudders et al. (2021) provided insights on the strategic use of SMIs based on an analysis of 154 articles. Ye G et al. (2021) conducted a bibliometric analysis of 387 publications to provide a comprehensive summary.

However, "Wanghong" and "SMIs", as well as "Wanghong economy" and "IM", are not equivalent concepts. Therefore, it is doubtful to transfer the knowledge of SMIs/IMs directly to Wanghong/Wanghong economy. Many scholars have precisely caught the differences and directly used the phonetic translation of "Wanghong" instead of the meaning translation to indicate the cultural, social, business, political, and other differences in the context (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2019; Gai et al., 2020; Han, 2021). Etymologically, "Wanghong" is an abbreviation of "Wangluo Hongren", which means a celebrity on the Internet. We compared the definition of Wanghong and SMIs from three aspects: popular reason, active channel, and influence outcome. Regarding the popular reason, English and Chinese scholars have the similar focus. SMIs/Wanghong attract followers by sharing creative content (Duffy, 2020; Yang et al., 2018), or exhibiting their personal lifestyles (Chae, 2018; Cocker et al., 2021). They are attractive, whether from physical (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Yuan & Xie, 2016) or personality perspectives, such as affinity/lovability (Torres et al., 2019). They may also have expertise in a certain field and be trustworthy as opinion leaders (López et al., 2022). However, the differences also exist. For active channels, the word "Wanghong" is translated into "gaining fame on the Internet" and does not emphasize the presence of social media. Many studies have indicated their connection to e-commerce platforms (e.g., Huang 2016; Tao & Zi, 2017). Moreover, subtle differences in influencing outcomes were revealed. The SMIs emphasizes the influence on a specific group of fans. However, Wanghong is a result- and mass-market-oriented concept. Previous studies have tended to place greater emphasis on factors such as social attention and the cultivation of a large fan base (Liang, 2016), as well as the capacity to generate discussion and create buzz (Shao & Zhang, 2016), rather than solely focusing on catering to the existing fan base.

The Association of National Advertiser (ANA) defines IM as the practice of identifying and engaging individuals who have the ability to influence brand preferences, purchasing decisions, and overall loyalty of a wider audience by leveraging their own opinions, beliefs, and marketing channels. In form, IM typically involves collaboration between brands and influencers, with the primary objective of influencing customers' perceptions of the brand (Brown & Hayes, 2008; Ki & Kim, 2019) and shaping their brand attitudes through endorsements (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). Actually, the underlying subject within the definition of IM typically pertains to the brand or company, and it has commonly been explicated as a "marketing tool/strategy" (e.g., Brown & Hayes, 2008; Argyris et al., 2020). However, the Wanghong economy in China differs significantly. In form, few definitions mention the brand, or the collaboration between brands and influencers. The Wanghong economy is often regarded as a comprehensive business model rather than a singular component of a company's marketing strategy (e.g., Liang, 2016; Shao & Zhang, 2016; Huang & Xia, 2016). The implicit subject can be attributed to either the Wanghong or the business model itself. Moreover, many scholars argue that the current goal of the Wanghong economy is primarily focused on "converting fans into cash" (Huang & Xia, 2016), overlooking long-term factors such as brand attitude and customer loyalty which are central in the IM pattern [5-8].

3. Methodology

Three major Chinese electronic databases, namely CNKI, WANFANG DATA, and CQVIP, were explored. A pilot search was conducted using the query strings "Wanghong" and "Wanghong economy" to broadly cover the topic. Titles, keywords, and abstracts of potentially relevant articles were scanned

to capture the essence and core of the articles. Each time an alternative keyword was found, relevant to the base query string, it was noted and included in the next search. Finally, based on this survey, a set of pertinent and frequently used keywords were identified: “Wanghong economy” OR “Wanghong” OR “Wanghong model” OR “EC Wanghong” OR “Wanghong marketing” OR “Wanghong livestream” OR “Wanghong livestream marketing” OR “web livestream” OR “live commerce of Wanghong”.

To ensure the quality of this review, we limited our research to four standards: (a) peer-reviewed academic journal articles, (b) core Chinese journals, and (c) marketing/consumer related study. Peer-reviewed journal articles are considered validated knowledge and occupy a leading position in terms of influence (Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016; Paul & Criado, 2020). In addition, review was restricted to articles published in core Chinese journals. Figure 1 shows the search process, and eventually, we selected 106 articles.

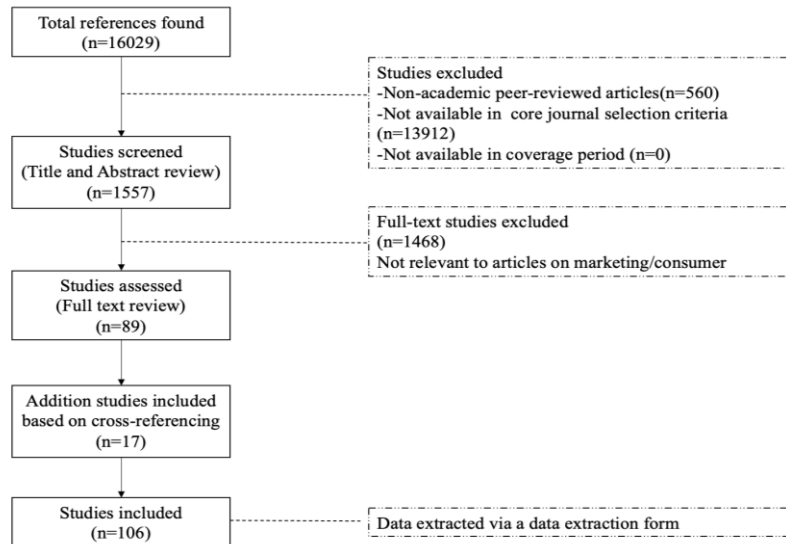


Figure 1: Filtering Process of Studies Included in the systematic review

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1. Year of publication

The earliest article we found in database was published in 2010 (not included in sample). The earliest study in our sample was conducted in 2016 (Figure 2). Five articles were published in 2017, eight in 2018, eleven in 2019, then the discussion of Wanghong economy reached a peak in 2020 and 2021. As our literature search was completed in May 2023, the data for that year is not yet complete.

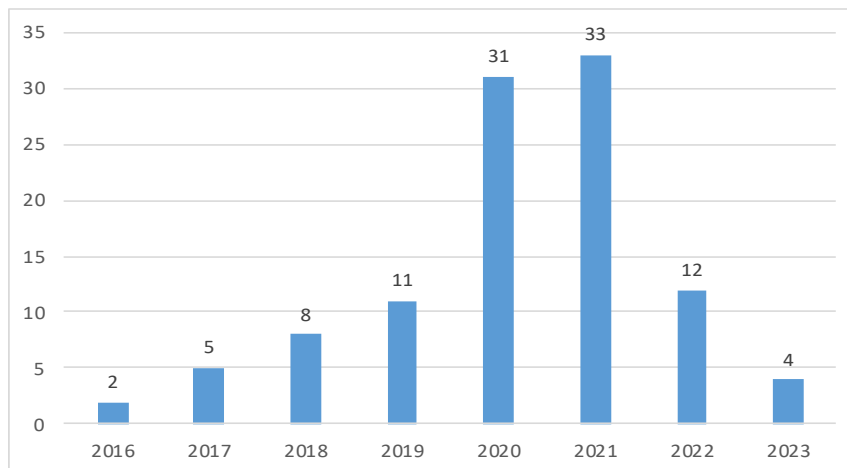


Figure 2: Year of publication

4.1.2. Type of research

We divided the sample into four types: narrative research, explanatory research, normative research and review (Table 1).

Table 1: Type of research

Type	Number	Share
Review	2	1.9%
Narrative research	5	4.7%
Explanatory research	96	90.6%
Hypothesis-making research	6	5.7%
Hypothesis-proving research	90	84.9%
Normative research	3	2.8%

In academic marketing, research on a new social phenomenon, such as Wanghong economy, often begins with narrative research. These studies gain attention for their timeliness and are often seen as social observations or business reports. As the current marketing paradigm relies on logical positivism, hypothesis construction and validation become crucial. Explanatory research can be categorized into hypothesis-making and hypothesis-proving research. Hypothesis-making research aims to develop new theories or hypotheses, while hypothesis-proving research tests and verifies relationships between antecedents and consequences. In our sample, explanatory research constituted the largest portion (90.6%), with hypothesis-proving research being the most common type (84.9%). However, there were limited contributions in hypothesis-making research (5.7%), indicating a lack of original conceptual contributions and a reliance on existing theories. Normative research, which assesses social phenomena against normative standards like morality, ethics, law, and social values, aims to promote better standards by changing behavior or practices. Only three had a research purpose dedicated to normative orientation throughout. Review research differs from studies on social phenomena as it focuses on examining the research itself. While our sample included two reviews by Jia & Bie (2021) and Liu & Luo (2021), these reviews were not comprehensive, leaving a research gap in the Chinese field[9-11].

4.1.3. Research method

We conducted a further analysis of the research methods and data types used in the empirical studies. 86.5% of empirical studies (n=96) relied on quantitative methods, while a purely qualitative research method was deployed by 8.3%. Approximately 5.2% of studies used mixed methods. In terms of data collection methods, most studies (78.0%) relied on questionnaire surveys, with campus investigations being the most common method. Five studies (Che et al., 2019; Xie et al., 2019; Tang, 2020; Liu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023) adopted an experimental research design, while two studies conducted consumer interviews (Han & Xu, 2020; Liu et al., 2020), and two study used web crawling to collect real Wanghong post data (Liu et al., 2020; Zhu & Gui, 2020). Additionally, two groups of studies directly obtained sales data from live streaming platforms for analysis (Wang et al., 2021; Zou et al., 2023).

4.1.4. Types of Wanghong

It is important to classify Wanghong as they may show different types of behavior, play a distinct role in marketing strategy, and influence consumer behavior in multiple ways. Although there are multiple ways to categorize them, such as by fan number, industry, and post content, the categorization used in this study should take into account both its effectiveness in distinguishing between Wanghongs and the overall research objectives (comparison with IM).

In English studies, SMIs are often considered as key opinion leaders. However, in China, many Wanghongs have stronger ties to e-commerce and may directly sell products to their fans, rather than simply recommending them. Therefore, we divided our sample into two main categories: Recommend type (offering opinions or information without selling products) and Sale type (promoting and directly selling products), along with others. The majority of the Wanghongs discussed in the sample belong to the Sale type (72.6%), while the Recommend type, which aligns more with the Western IM pattern, represents only 10.4%.

Furthermore, upon reviewing the literature, we found that "sale type" can be further divided into two subtypes: "Entrepreneur type" and "Wanghong+E-commerce+Live streaming type". The role played by Wanghong in the Entrepreneur type is more similar to that of entrepreneurs and brand ambassadors. They often attract fans by sharing their insights on fashion and dress-up and leverage their popularity on Taobao to become store owners and establish their own brands. Prior to 2018, most studies pointed to this business model. However, since 2019, the impact of this model has gradually declined. Many reasons

have been mentioned, among which the representative ones are: (1) the rise of “Wanghong+E-commerce+Live streaming” model, (2) most Entrepreneur Wanghong are incubated by MCNs in a highly homogeneous manner, and (3) personal brands are fragile, and fans are quickly attracted by new Wanghong.

In contrast to the Entrepreneur type who build their brands or stores, Wanghong in "Wanghong+E-commerce+Live streaming type" model acts as intermediaries between brands and consumers, resembling online salespeople. They earn consumers' trust and affection through their skills and characteristics, leading to the fan economy effect. Wanghong anchors assist consumers in product selection, recommendations, filtering, trying out, and offering comprehensive and professional product introductions. This helps consumers make informed decisions, save time, enhance consumption efficiency, and choose suitable products quickly. For brand, Wanghong anchors provide an improved channel to reach consumers, and some brands achieve rapid growth through their introduction and promotion. Currently, this model holds the most impact in practice and has become the primary focus of research. Figure 3 demonstrates that studies on live commerce have been ongoing since 2017, with increasing momentum after 2019, making it the mainstream practice in Wanghong research. By 2021, 93.9% of research on the Wanghong economy concentrated on the live streaming situation[12-15].

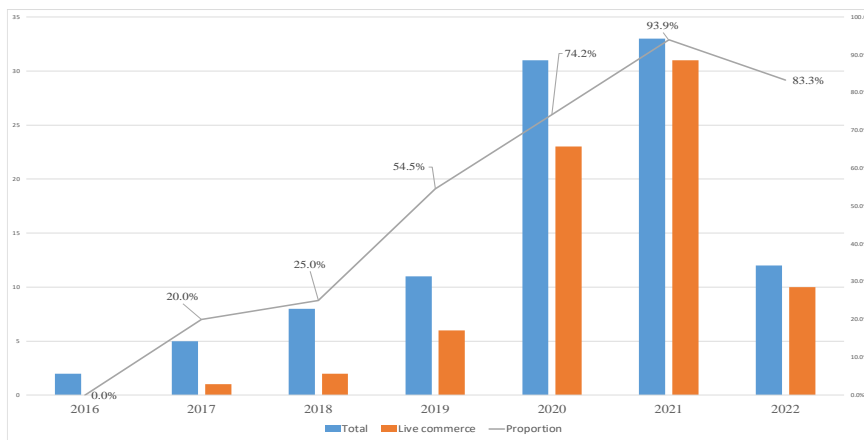


Figure 3: Proportion of research focus on live commerce situation.

4.1.5. Social media platform

Wanghong communicate with their fans and attract them through various platforms. However, their behavior and communication media are limited by the operating rules and features of the platform. As shown in Figure 4, considering the high proportion of live commerce research, it is not surprising to find that a live streaming SNS platform has been the most studied (53.8%). These live platforms are usually linked with EC apps (e.g., Taobao Live, Jingdong Live), and fans access the EC site directly through live streaming. Some researchers also focus on specific social media platforms, such as WeChat, Weibo, TikTok.

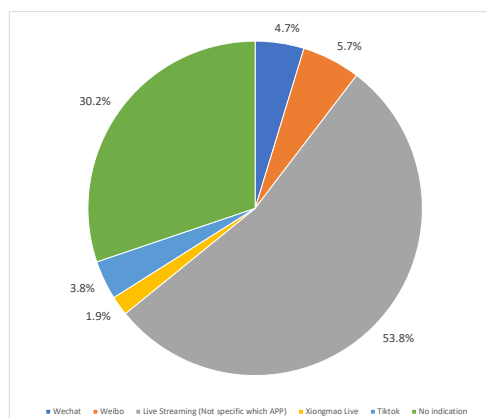


Figure 4: Social media platforms examined.

4.2. Thematic Analysis

4.2.1. The influence of Wanghong's personal factors on consumer outcomes and nature

The factors of Wanghong can be divided into two sub-categories: personal characteristics endowed by the role of Wanghong as human brands and technology characteristics endowed by the internet/technology.

For personal characteristics, in previous IM literature, the roles of SMIs in commercial activities have been explored. Samira Farivar et al.(2021)identified opinion leadership of influencers and parasocial relationship with influencers as two focal constructs affecting followers' purchase intention. This viewpoint effectively indicates the two roles that Wanghong assumes: opinion leaders and celebrity endorsers. Both streams of research have abundant literature and scholars have explored various related factors of these two roles (e.g., credibility, attractiveness, and expertise).Many of them adopting the Source Credibility Theory as a theoretical lens, the importance of which in the structure of IM influence has been emphasized in multiple reviews (e.g., De Veirman et al., 2019; Vrontis et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2021), and holds significant value in Chinese Wanghong research as well (e.g., Yang et al.,2018; Meng et al.,2020). Similarly, Chinese researchers also tend to utilize the opinion leader theory and celebrity endorsement theory to comprehend the essence of Wanghong. Additionally, Chinese scholars generally agree with the viewpoints of Western scholars regarding addressing potential differences among various types of SMIs/Wanghong (Al-Emadi and Yahia, 2020; Boerman, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2017).

As to technology characteristics, while it is also an important theme in IM research, there are notable differences in the focus of discussions in China. Most of the research conducted in China tends to center around the concept of interactivity within the context of live broadcasting technology.With the rapid development of live broadcasting technology, Wanghong can interact with fans online in real time, involving a two-way communication, and magnifies other personal characteristics (e.g., attractiveness, expertise, innovation). High interactivity can decrease consumers' anxieties, reduce the perceived risk (Liu et al., 2020), and boost trust (Hu, 2020; Liu & Shi, 2020). Meanwhile, increasing cognition and emotional value experience (Wang et al., 2019) positively influences purchase intention (Guo & Li, 2018; Hu, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019), further increasing customers' willingness to co-create (Liu & Shi, 2020).

4.2.2. Content factor and consumer outcomes

Due to the significant commercial nature of Wanghongs, Western scholars need to avoid inherent assumptions about Western SMIs when interpreting Chinese scholars' descriptions of content. SMIs typically post more personalized, original content that reflects their own values, interests, and interesting life details. However, Chinese research often focuses on live-streaming e-commerce scenarios, where most studies discuss how e-commerce-oriented Wanghongs can improve their effectiveness. Scholars are presently considering two specific perspectives: content quality and content classification.

Content quality focuses on the appealing characteristics of the posted content and attempts to answer which characteristic makes the post more attractive. Scholars further divided content quality into three dimensions: content relevance (e.g., Lin & Qu, 2019; Yan et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2019), content credibility (e.g., Liu et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2018)), and content vividness (e.g., Liu et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2020; Zhu & Gui, 2020). Content relevance can be defined as the degree to which the posted content satisfies the requirements of both consumers and fans (Xia, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019). If the information provided by Wanghong is deficient or cannot meet consumers' needs, the transaction cost will increase because consumers are then compelled to search for information by themselves, thus diminishing both their cognitive and emotional attitude (Meng et al., 2020), and this could have a negative effect on their consumption experience and purchase intention (Dan & Wu, 2018; Meng et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). In addition, when content relevance is not remarkable, consumers question the ability and authenticity of Wanghongs, which could affect the trust relationship (Li & Ye, 2020; Liu et al., 2020). Credibility research is a crucial theme in English studies and is also an important factor here. In Wanghong economy, content credibility mainly depends on whether the information is easy to understand, reliable, objective, and professional (Hou & Gong, 2021). Content vividness is defined as the representational richness of a mediated environment, as defined by its formal features—the way in which an environment presents information and as perceived by consumers (Liao, 2021; Xu et al., 2020)—or the extent of details the posted content shows (Wang et al., 2021). Content vividness depends on the development of technology and media and can be linked to a broader discussion on virtual reality (VR).

Content classification focuses on how different types of information that stimulate distinct responses from fans. Zhu & Gui (2020) analyzed the content of 30 Weibo bloggers' posts and found that different types of information have a distinct impact on fan behavior. They summarized three specific matching patterns: attribute information—forwarding behavior, interactive information—comment behavior, and experience information-like behavior. In addition, Meng et al. (2020) divided the content into two types, informational content (e.g., brand, product, transaction method, price) and emotional content (e.g., brand personality, values, life story of Wanghong, talent), and confirmed that in a live streaming situation, informational content can evoke consumers' purchase behavior more than the emotional content [16].

4.2.3. Variables under "Wanghong + e-commerce + live streaming" model: support system and scene factors

As previously mentioned, Chinese scholars focus on the "Wanghong + e-commerce + live streaming" model, where Wanghong use live streaming technology to create a real-time, interactive, and entertaining online sales environment. They showcase products, answer customer queries, and communicate with them in real-time, similar to online sales representatives. This model introduces new variables, such as support systems and scene factors, which are rarely seen in mainstream SMIs/IM research. One of the reasons is that the Wanghong economy is commonly viewed as a comprehensive business model. In a live commerce situation, Wanghong are not the only source of influence. The impact of the support system factor includes product, price, brand, and background system. All these support system factors can contribute toward increasing user experience and influencing purchase intention because customers tend to evaluate purchase experience based on a comprehensive feeling. Many Chinese existing research discusses multiple these factors in one structural equation models simultaneously. For example, Lin & Qu (2019) examined the degree of influence on consumers' purchase intentions in the case of "Entrepreneur type" in the fashion industry, in which the order from high to low is: the attractiveness of the Wanghong, personalized services, promotional prices, and relevance of product information. Also, for Wanghong, the professionalism in product selection also indicates anchors' core competitiveness. For example, Li Jiaqi, considered the top Wanghong/live streamer, recommended a non-stick pan in a live broadcast show, but the pan proved to be of low quality, and this mistake was viewed by millions of fans in real time (Xia, 2020). As for price, Wanghong usually use low prices as competitive advantage, and a few studies discuss the price factor independently. It is usually listed as an environmental factor, and many studies have confirmed its positive effect on purchase intention (Lin & Qu, 2019; Liu et al., 2018). Currently, Wanghong broadcasters interact with fans through flexible pricing strategies. For example, they often encourage fans to repost information on Weibo or other SNS platforms to expand their social influence. Subsequently, fans with high participation will randomly receive a discount coupon. Additionally, the background system, encompassing the EC shop, platform, after-sale service, logistics, and regulatory system, was also reviewed.

Scholars who focus on scene factors believe that live commerce can stimulate consumers' consumption behavior because it constructs a consumption scene characterized by entertainment, community, and interaction (Shen & Zhao, 2018). There are various scene stimuli that can promote consumers' willingness to consume in this scene, especially irrational consumption (e.g., impulsive buying, herd buying). The scene factors discussed include scene interaction, social presence, eWOM, incentive rule, and time pressure. Fan et al. (2020) believe that scene interaction is the most important feature of live streaming. Here, we must distinguish scene interactivity from Wanghongs' interactivity discussed earlier. As described, Wanghongs' interactivity is the willingness and ability of Wanghong to build interrelations with fans, and it is a personal characteristic. However, scene interactivity is not a personal characteristic, but a scene characteristic that is produced by live broadcast technology and marked by simultaneity, decentralization, and responsiveness (Che et al., 2019; Dan & Wu, 2018). In addition, scene interaction exists not only between SMIs and consumers but also among consumer community. Social presence refers to the feeling of being there with a "real" person and is a crucial component of interactions that take place in VR (Oh et al., 2018) and is also a crucial factor in live commerce (Fan et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2019). In a live commerce context, consumers are no longer considered as individuals who are isolated from others and make their own decisions but are placed in a shopping scenario where others are virtually present. Many studies have proved that social presence can positively influence rational buying behavior through trust and perceived risk (e.g., Ji & Zhuo, 2020; Zhou et al., 2020), also lead to herd buying (Xie et al., 2019). Time pressure refers to the anxiety and oppression that decision makers experience when they are close to a deadline (Shen & Zhao, 2018), and it is widely used as a sales strategy in a live commerce situation (e.g., earlier 100 discounts or spike). Under the impact of time pressure, consumers' ability to search for information diminishes, and they are more likely to make impulse purchases (Shen & Zhao, 2018; Weng et al., 2020)

4.2.4. Psychological factors and consumer outcomes

Many studies focused on consumers' internal psychological variables, including cognition and affective factors. Cognition factors consist of information and perceptions that are found through a combination of experiences with attitude objects. The most discussed cognition factors are perceived value (e.g., Chen et al., 2020; Lin & Qu, 2019; Liu et al., 2020) and perceived risk (e.g., Gu & Li, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Tian & Tian, 2020). Subsequently, two variables, namely perceived usefulness (e.g., Weng et al., 2020; Zhu & Huang, 2020) and perceived ease of use (e.g., Gu & Li, 2020; Wang et al., 2021) are derived from the TAM (technology acceptance model). The TAM was proposed by Davis (1989), which further advanced perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as the two main factors when users accept new technologies. Scholars have proved that in the context of live commerce, whether consumers can obtain the required information (perceived usefulness) and consider the functions provided by the live broadcast as simple and easy to learn, or if the operation is convenient (perceived ease of use) affects consumers' usage attitude (Gu & Li, 2020). In addition, some scholars developed the TAM and included perceived entertainment as the third cognition factor (Wang et al., 2021). Affective factors comprise an individual's feelings or emotions regarding the attitude object. In our sample, trust was the most frequently studied psychological variable (e.g., Liu et al., 2020; Liu & Shi, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019). Trust can play an important role in both impulsive and purposeful purchasing (Liu et al., 2020), and it can also affect some long-term behavior, such as repeat purchases (Lin & Qu, 2019). Other traditional psychological factors in consumer research have also been discussed, including satisfaction, identity and pleasure.

4.2.5. Consumer response

Although some scholars have studied the impact of Wanghong on the willingness to co-create (e.g., Wang et al., 2019; Zhu & Gui, 2020), brand attitude (e.g., Che et al., 2019), and advertising avoidance (Huang et al., 2020), most of the research focuses on short-term purchase intention and buying behavior.

Both rational and irrational buying behaviors coexist in Wanghong economy. Although consumer purchasing behavior is a complex process and the distinction between rational and irrational consumption is often unclear, specific stimuli can indeed trigger specific consumer behavior through specific psychological mechanisms. Previous consumer research has shown that irrational purchases, such as impulse buying, activate consumer emotions and involve less cognitive decision-making processes (Weinberg & Gottwald, 1982). Research on Wanghong also supports this assertion. Cognitive factors often act as mediating variables for rational purchases, while irrational consumption is often associated with emotional factors. Liu et al. (2020) found that irrational buying behavior is mainly related to the psychological factors of arouse and perceived entertainment, while rational buying behavior is influenced by trust. However, compared to rational consumer behavior, the stimulation of irrational consumer behavior by the Wanghong economy is the concern of practitioners/researchers. This is because part of the allure of the Wanghong economy lies in its fan-based consumption.

Some scholars have paid attention to two specific irrational buying behaviors: impulsive buying (e.g., Gong et al., 2019; Shen & Zhao, 2018) and herd buying (e.g., Xie et al., 2021). Gong et al. (2019) proved that the positive effect of atmospheric cues on impulsive purchase is mediated by consumer affect flow. In this process, time pressure plays the role of positive moderators, and the moderation tendency of customers acts as a negative one. Moreover, herd buying is proved to be affected by social presence mediated by arousal (Xie et al., 2019) or trust (Xie et al., 2021). The moderator function of the strength of the fan-SMIs relationship has also been proved (Xie et al., 2021).

4.3. Integrative framework

Based on the identified themes, this study proposes an integrated framework (Figure 5) of Wanghong economy by adopting the SOR Framework (Stimulus, Organism, and Response), which is a theoretical framework used in psychology and consumer behavior to understand the process of how individuals respond to stimuli in their environment. The model proposes that external stimuli, internal factors, and individual characteristics collectively influence an individual's behavioral response (Albert Mehrabian & James A. Russel, 1974).

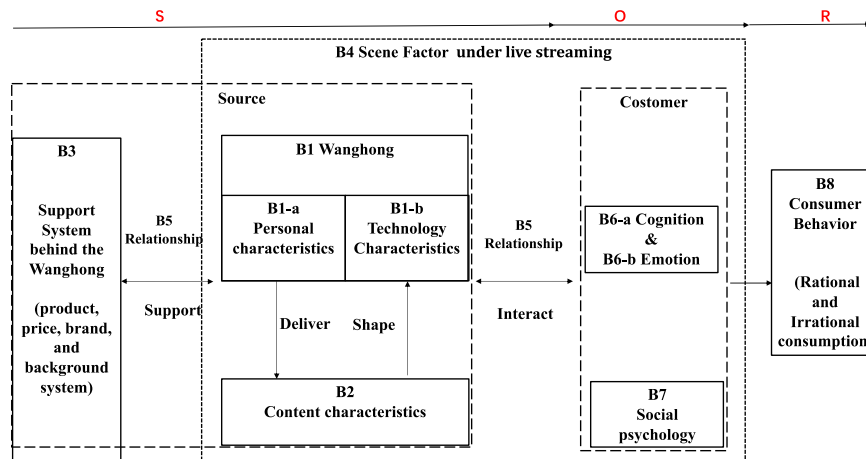


Figure 5: Integrated framework of Wanghong research.

In the current English-language IM research, there already exist two comprehensive frameworks that depict the mechanisms of influence. One is proposed by Vrontis et al. (2021) through a systematic literature review of 68 English articles, and the other is derived from the analysis of 50 English articles by Bandinee Pradhan et al. (2023). Both frameworks effectively describe the key mechanisms and factors in the field of IM. However, we believe that this framework can better fit and capture the understanding of the Wanghong economy within the Chinese business environment. Our adjustments mainly lie in the following aspects.

1) We expanded the scope of "Source" In previous frameworks, the source mainly referred to the SMIs themselves. However, in the context of the Wanghong economy, which is viewed as a comprehensive business model, the stimuli perceived by customers come not only from the Wanghong but also from the support systems behind them. We specifically emphasize the support systems behind the Wanghong and consider them as part of the stimuli sources at the same level as the Wanghong themselves, rather than as moderating factors as in Vrontis et al. (2021).

2) We specifically emphasize the technological characteristics, which were not considered as a part of the stimuli sources in the previous frameworks. The reason for this adjustment is that Chinese articles pay more attention to interactivity under live streaming. Under the dominant "Wanghong + e-commerce + live streaming" model, Wanghong in China prefer using live streaming technology to communicate with their fans, and real-time and two-way interactivity are the distinguishing features of this communication method.

3) We highlight the scene factors under live streaming. This adjustment is made because many current discussions are based on the context of live commerce. In this situation, customers' purchase intentions are influenced by Wanghongs' ability to create a shopping scene filled with stimuli, such as scene interactivity, social presence, and time pressure.

4) In terms of customer behavioral outcomes, we emphasize two types of purchases, whereas the IM frameworks focus more on attitudes. The reason for this adjustment is that in both practice and research, the study of Chinese Wanghongs primarily revolves around purchasing. One reason is the core issue of the Wanghong economy as a business model: "how to make a profit." Another reason is the short-term orientation in practice, where the application of e-commerce live streaming is often used to disseminate discount information and formulate various rules to promote short-term purchasing behavior, especially impulsive and herd mentality consumption, while neglecting long-term strategic indicators.

5) We have omitted certain important aspects in IM research that are not significant in the Chinese context. For example, sponsorship disclosure is a crucial topic in Western research, where scholars discuss the influence of followers' persuasive knowledge after viewing sponsorship disclosures on their subsequent reactions to sponsored posts. However, in China, the commercial motivations behind Wanghongs seem to be a consensus, particularly in money-driven live streaming models. Additionally, there are many discussions in IM research regarding specific platforms, but most Chinese Wanghongs are platform cross-users, so it is not presented as a primary factor.

5. Conclusions

This study presents a systematic review of 106 research articles on the Wanghong economy published from 2016 to May 2023, providing an overview of the current status and panorama of Wanghong economy research in China. From a cultural comparative perspective, this research compares findings from Chinese studies with English literature on SMIs/IM, revealing both commonalities and differences in the structure and characteristics of Chinese Wanghong and SMIs (individual traits + technological traits). In terms of individual traits, the roles played by Wanghong and those mentioned in SMIs literature (such as opinion leaders, celebrity endorsers, or amplifiers) are distinct. Most influential Wanghong, especially those operating in the prevailing "Wanghong+E-commerce+Live streaming" model, also assume the role of sales channels, which poses a challenge to IM theories originating from the West. In terms of technological traits, Chinese research on the Wanghong economy places greater emphasis on the integration of live streaming technology, enabling Wanghong to possess stronger real-time interactive capabilities. In the overall comparison between the Wanghong economy and IM, although both ultimately aim for economic value, the perspective of the Wanghong economy revolves around Wanghong as the core, developing a comprehensive business model centered around Wanghong, rather than being a mere part of brand marketing strategies as in the case of IM. Furthermore, this study summarizes five major themes identified in the literature on the Wanghong economy and proposes a comprehensive framework that better facilitates understanding of the overall landscape of the Wanghong economy in China.

Finally, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small, as we only included 106 peer-reviewed journal articles. Secondly, we only included peer-reviewed journal articles and excluded other types of publications such as books, conference articles, and theses due to quality concerns. This may have limited the scope of our analysis. Despite these limitations, we believe that our study provides valuable insights into the development of Wanghong research in China.

References

- [1] Al-Emadi, F. A., & Ben Yahia, I. (2020). Ordinary celebrities related criteria to harvest fame and influence on social media. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 14(2), 195–213.
- [2] Argyris, Y. A., Wang, Z., Kim, Y., & Yin, Z. (2020). The effects of visual congruence on increasing consumers' brand engagement: An empirical investigation of influencer marketing on Instagram using deep-learning algorithms for automatic image classification. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 112, 106443.
- [3] Bamakan, S. M. H., Nurgaliev, I., & Qu, Q. (2019). Opinion leader detection: A methodological review. *Expert Systems with Applications*, 115, 200-222. 9
- [4] Boerman, S. C. (2020). The effects of the standardized Instagram disclosure for micro-and meso-influencers. *Computers in human behavior*, 103, 199-207.
- [5] Brown, D., & Hayes, N. (2008). *Influencer Marketing* (0ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780080557700>
- [6] Chae, J. (2018). Explaining Females' Envy toward Social Media Influencers. *Media Psychology*, 21(2), 246–262.
- [7] Che, S.-Y., Guang-Hua, S., & Lin, Z.-N. (2019). Study on the Influence of Type of Fit between Brand and Blogger on Brand Attitude. *Soft Science*, 33(5), 135–139.
- [8] Chen, H., Zhang, Y., & Guo, W. (2020). A Study on the Impact of Influencers on Fans' Purchase Intention in Live Broadcasting Platform. *China Business and Market*, 34(10), 28–37.
- [9] Christofi, M., Leonidou, E., & Vrontis, D. (2017). Marketing research on mergers and acquisitions: a systematic review and future directions. *International Marketing Review*, 34(5).
- [10] Cocker, H., Mardon, R., & Daunt, K. L. (2021). Social media influencers and transgressive celebrity endorsement in consumption community contexts. *European Journal of Marketing*, 55(7), 1841–1872.
- [11] Cunningham, S., Craig, D., & Lv, J. (2019). China's livestreaming industry: Platforms, politics, and precarity. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22(6), 719–736.
- [12] Dan, M., & Wu, F. (2018). An Empirical Study on the Influence of Live Commerce Marketing on Purchase Intention. *Management Observer*, 0(36), 41–44.
- [13] Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, and User Acceptance of Information Technology. *MIS Quarterly*, 13(3).
- [14] De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5), 798–828.

- [15] De Veirman, M., Hudders, L., & Nelson, M. R. (2019). *What is influencer marketing and how does it target children? A review and direction for future research. Frontiers in psychology, 10*, 2685.
- [16] Duffy, B. E. (2020). *Social Media Influencers. In K. Ross, I. Bachmann, V. Cardo, S. Moorti, & M. Scarcelli (Eds.), The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication (1st ed., pp. 1–4). Wiley.*