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# Relational Benefits and Visual Arts Outcomes via WeChat Business

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# **Keywords**

# WeChat, business, relational benefits, customer satisfaction, purchase intention, perceived risk

#### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand the effect of WeChat relational benefits on customer satisfaction and purchase intention. Due to the rapid development in the technological field, the use of WeChat has expanded drastically in recent years. In visual arts industry, WeChat business occupies a significant proportion of emerging industries. The recruited participants that were recruited via an online survey website were 335 (www.sojump.com). SPSS 22.0 statistical system was used to analyze the descriptive statistics, reliability, and validity. This study conceptualizes the positive relationship among relational benefits, customer satisfaction, and purchase intention of visual arts products. The findings indicated that WeChat users' relational benefits can be categorized into two distinct benefit types: confidence, and social benefits. The more relational benefits WeChat users perceived, the higher the level of satisfaction. In contrast, the positive influence of customer satisfaction on purchase intention is weaker in consumers with a higher level of perceived risk. The results of this study will help WeChat business to retain its customers, thus, gaining a long-term value for visual arts industry. Theoretical and managerial implication for WeChat business are provided.

#### I. Introduction

WeChat, also known as Weixin (微信) in China, was launched by China's largest listed internet company, Tencent, in 2011. Similar to Facebook, people can update their status with positing information and interact with others in WeChat Moments (Wang, Nie, Li, & Zhou, 2018). WeChat business is one of the gray-market trades that placed into circulation in one country, and then legally imported into another without the original manufacturer's authorization. Given the ongoing policy debate, Matsui (2014) investigated the economic effects of a product information service in gray markets when potential consumers in an importing country are segmented by their taste and thus need product information. Regarding to WeChat business, they use WeChat platform to supply visual arts products information from out side of China mainland. Because visual arts products information sufficiently prevails in overseas country, consumers in China mainland confront no uncertainly to purchase and consume the product. Pang (2018) indicated that WeChat use time exerts a positive effect on Chinese international students' social bonding integration, relationships, bridging and relationship. This implies that the increased SNS use could improve the degree of social integration, close and loose social ties. As Frenzen and Davis (1990) said, embedded market could be segmented two part: relatives and close friends; friends. Networks of relations that embed a market are likely to interconnect members of a demographic segment with other members of the same segment, due to the homophylic tendency for individuals to form relations with people like themselves.

WeChat business's biggest marketing feature is the use of relational benefits. In general, marketing scholars agree that the fundamental phenomenon to be explained, predicted, and controlled in the dynamics of the online social network is the exchange relationship (Heide & Wathne, 2006; Jung, Ineson, & Green, 2013; Yang, Chen, & Li, 2016). Constant comparative analysis, applied within a codebook framework, revealed online social networks provided relational marketing

opportunities and increased business value in UK (Jung et al., 2013). Heide and Wathne (2006) built on the general view of relationship parties and interactions to develop a conceptual framework of roles in marketing relationships. Their framework explicitly accounts for the associated roles (businessperson and friend) can coexist and that switching among them is both possible and likely. In Yang et al. (2016)'s study, they examined the effectiveness of the two relationship strategies using data from a field experiment through the WeChat platform by an apparel firm. Results from the field experiment suggest that development of friendships with new customers can help the strategy of developing business relationships.

The purpose of this article is to integrate the research streams on relational benefits and satisfaction in the development of a comprehensive model. Specifically, we propose and test a model in which satisfaction is perceived as mediating the relationship between the two benefits (confidence, social) and the one outcome variable of purchase intention. We also provide the moderating effect of customers' perceived risk between satisfaction and purchase intention. Then, we present our conceptual framework, discuss the implications, and suggest areas for further research.

### II. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

## 1. Relational Benefit

SNSs enable relationship visibility through profile images, relationship status postings, and status postings relating to one's partner (Shu, Hu, Zhang, Ma, & Chen, 2017). The relational benefits approach assumes that both parties in a relationhisp must benefit for it to continue in the long run. According to the research of Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler (2002), relational benefits include confidence benefits, which refer to perceptions of reduced anxiety and comfort in knowing what to expect in the service encounter; social benefits, which pertain to the emotional part of the relationship and are characterized by personal recognition of

customers by employees, the customer's own familiarity with employees, and the creation of friendships between customers and employees.

Confidence and social benefits in an exchange has been found to have a positive impact on satisfaction ratings in channel relationships between end consumers and service employees/firms (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). Lien and Cao (2014) suggested the positive direct-effect of psychological social motivation on attitudes reveals, providing more free entertainment applications enhances Chinese users' attitudes which in turn will strengthen positive WOM communications. In terms of information, WeChat is a convenient and good source of information and also offers timely information to users. Gwinner, Gremler, and Bitner (1998) indicated that confidence benefit is the most important to consumers across all categories of services. Here such social benefit was associated with personal recognition by employees, customer familiarity with employees, and the development of friendship. Satisfaction is related to the fulfillment of consumers' confidence and social needs, and the repeated fulfillment of these needs is likely to lead to bonds of and emotional kind that also constitute intention to purchase. According WeChat business in this paper, it is only suitable to study the effects of confidence and social benefits on customer satisfaction, so the treatment benefit from Gwinner et al. (1998) should be excluded.

We suggest that the same will hold true for interactions between WeChat merchant and shopper. This assertion is partially based on the notion that greater levels of confidence/social benefits in the interaction will result in lower anxiety concerning the transaction and thus greater satisfaction. A second rationale for a positive relationship between confidence/social benefits and satisfaction can be derived by examining the role expectations play in satisfaction judgments. The above discussion gives rise to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Confidence benefit is positively associated with customer satisfaction of visual arts products towards WeChat.

Hypothesis 2: Social benefit is positively associated

with customer satisfaction of visual arts products towards WeChat

# 2. Customer Satisfaction and Purchase Intention

Satisfaction is the consumer's fulfillment response, defined as the psychological state resulting when the emotion disconfirmed expectations are coupled with customers' prior feelings about the consumers experience (Hsu, Chang, & Chen, 2012). Customer satisfaction is a conformity concept including realizing desire, happiness, subject evaluation etc. (Kim & Jung, 2014). Purchase intention is the strength of a WeChat users' intentions to perform a specified purchasing behaviour via WeChat.

Empirical evidence has stated for a positive linkage between customer satisfaction and online purchase intention, Restated, Taiwan online customers who have received a satisfactory services are likely to reveal positive behaviour intention (Hsu et al., 2012), leading to increased online purchase intention. Nawi, Fong, and Tatnall (2014) described a study of internet apparel marketing by small businesses in Malaysia which can beneficially be included in postgraduate business courses for understanding the importance of measuring customer satisfaction at purchase. Koivumäki (2001) indicated a strong positive relationship between consumer satisfaction and the amount of purchase made in a web-based shopping environment. Kamal, Chu, and Pedram (2013) showed that social media usage was a significant predictor of attitudes toward social media advertising as well as customer satisfaction. Their results indicated that customer attitudes (e.g. satisfaction) was a significant predicator of social media users' intent to purchase products.

Hypothesis 3: Customer satisfaction is positively associated with purchase intention of visual arts products towards WeChat.

#### 3. Perceived Risk

As mentioned earlier, aside from customer satisfaction, perceived risk is generally considered to be composed of purchase intention. Risk is an important construct in the social sciences with a rich and varied history of research (Campbell & Goodstein, 2001). Risk attitude is a stable personality characteristic that is inherent in an individual, and may be the cause of differences in decisions to shop online (Wu & Chang, 2007). Kim (2005) indicated that customers usually perceive risk in the process of both purchase and consumption. Here we consider a portion of the research on perceived risk that is directly relevant to consumers' purchase intention. Wu and Chang (2007) found the direct and moderating influences of various degrees of risk on online buyers' behavior involving satisfaction and repurchase intention. Drawing on Martín and Camarero (2009), we postulate perceived risk to negatively influence online buying. A high level of perceived risk provides the customer with a repeated negative reinforcement, thus creating dissatisfaction -inducing emotional bonds.

In light of previous contributions and since we are not aware of any other study having tested the moderating hypotheses proposed by Currás-Pérez and Sánchez-García (2012), the present paper seeks to confirm if the proposed assumptions can be empirically corroborated, which led us to formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: Perceived risk negatively moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and purchase

intention of visual arts products in WeChat.

#### III. Research model and methodology

#### 1. Research Model

Figure 1 shows our hypothesized model, the left portion of which incorporates this direct influence of relational benefits on the customer satisfaction. The moderating influence of perceived risk on the positive relationship between customer satisfaction and purchase intention.

#### 2. Data Collection

A self-administered online questionnaire (www.sojump. com) was developed to examine the aforementioned hypotheses. We limited the answer period from They were provided with the survey link in WeChat where they completed the online questionnaire. 335 usable responses were employed in the data analysis after eliminating incomplete responses. Because WeChat is a global SNS, now people in many countries are using WeChat, therefore, current study is not limited to Chinese but worldwide population. The language of the questionnaire is also in both English and Chinese. The respondents were imagining their WeChat business friends while answering all questions from May 1st to 11th in 2019.

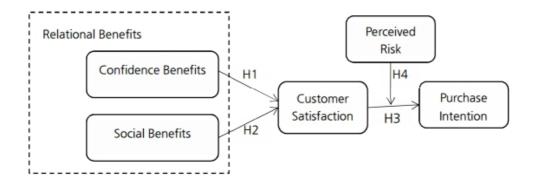


Figure 1. Hypothesized Model

#### 3. Measurement Instrument

The definition of relational benefit was provided to the survey participants at the beginning of the questionnaire. Specifically, relational benefits are defined as any marketer-generated, B2C relationship evaluation in social networking service, including confidence and social benefits. Measurement scales used in the current study were adopted from past studies, including relational benefits (Gwinner et al., 1998), customer satisfaction (Currás-Pérez & Sánchez-García, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002), perceived risk (Currás-Pérez & Sánchez-García, 2012), purchase intention of visual arts products (Hsu et al., 2012), and demographic measures that were developed. English scales were translated into Chinese, and both of two langue were used to be asked question. Each item was measured on a five-point Likert scale (i.e. 1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly).

# IV. Data Analysis and Results

## 1. Demographic Data

Table 1. A Summary of Demographic Statistics (N=335) Category Frequency(s) Percentage (%) 46 9 Males 157 Gender **Females** 178 53.1 173 516 Nο Married Yes 162 48.4 24.5 Below 20 82 20~29 38.5 129 Age 30~39 75 22.4 Above 40 49 14.6 High school 79 23.6 Education Undergraduate 231 69.0 Graduate 25 7.5 Below \$750 116 34.6 Monthly Income \$750~1500 108 32.2 Above \$1500 111 23.1

Descriptive statistics were conducted to examine respondents' demographic characteristics including gender, age, education, and monthly income. In terms of gender, 46.9% of the respondents were male and 53.1% female. More than half (51.6%) of the respondents were unmarried, and 48.4% were married. The largest proportion was 20~29 years old (38.5%), followed by Below 20 (24.5%), 30~39 (22.4%), Above 40 (14.6%) years old. This shows that most of the respondents were young, in fact, the most customers of WeChat shopper were young people. Respondents have high educational background, listed as follows: Undergraduate (69%), high school (23.6%), and graduate (7.5%). As for monthly (including family income allowance), 34.6% respondents reported a monthly personal income of below \$750, and 32.2% of respondents indicated a personal allowance of between \$750 and \$1500; in addition, 23.1% reported a monthly income of more than \$1500. Maybe it's because they're still young and the monthly income of the respondents is not high. Demographic information of the sample is presented in Table 1.

#### 2. Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was first conducted using AMOS 22.0 to test a measurement theory based on the overall model fit, construct reliability, and validity. Table 2 shows the results of absolute fit indices  $(X^2/d.f.=1.752; RMSEA = 0.047; RMR = 0.043)$  and the incremental it indices (CFI = 0.960; AGFI = 0.892; IFI = 0.960; TLI = 0.953) demonstrating a good model fit (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). Internal consistency was assessed by composite reliability (CR). All the CRs exceed the threshold value of 0.8 indicating good reliability. Convergent validity was accessed by factor loadings, average of variance extracted (AVE). (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The factor loadings ranged from 0.74 to 0.83 exceed 0.7 showing high convergent validity. AVE represents the mean variance extracted for the items loading on a construct. The AVE for each constrct exceeds 0.6 suggesting adequate convergence.

In discriminant validity, according to the suggestion of Fornell and Larcker (1981), the AVE of construct should be greater than the squared correlations between any two constructs. The outcomes indicate that the AVE values of all constructs (Table 3) exceed the squared correlations between any two constructs, which supports the discriminant validity. In sum, the measurement model in this study displays adequate model fit, good reliability, and sufficient convergent and discriminate validity.

# 3. Testing of Hypotheses

Table 4 presents some results of hypothesis. H1 and H2 predicts relational benefits with WeChat business person positively influence customer satisfaction with visual arts products in WeChat. There're significant positive effect of both confidence benefits ( $\beta$  = 0.446, p < 0.001) and social benefits ( $\beta$  = 0.418, p < 0.001) on the customer satisfaction. It means that WeChat users perceive higher relational benefits with WeChat business person, they will have more satisfaction with visual arts products which are provided in WeChat platform. In addition, the results

shows the effect of confidence benefits is bigger than social benefits one. Between relational benefits, confidence is more important for WeChat users when they do communication with WeChat business person. Suggesting that we need to consider about the confidence benefits items which the words of trust, correctly, less anxiety, high level ect. Although the social benefits influence less than confidence one, it also makes important role of relationship between WeChat users' relational benefits and their satisfaction with visual arts products. Thus, H1 and H2 are supported.

H3 predicts customer satisfaction with also positively influence purchase behavior of visual arts products in WeChat platform and H4 predicts that perceived risk negatively moderate the positive effect of customers satisfaction and purchase behavior. As H3 predicts, customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.659$ , p < 0.001) positively influence visual arts purchase behavior in WeChat. This WeChat users have more finding suggests that satisfaction with visual arts products providing by WeChat business person, it has more possible intention with purchase. In the regarding of H4, the result of this calculation process shows that the moderating effect of perceived risk is significant (t = 16.125, p < 0.001). In other words, the coefficient of the perceived risk representing the interaction between customer satisfaction and purchase intention is negative and significant (Low-risk  $\beta = 0.659$ , High-risk  $\beta = 0.335$ ) (Table 5). Suggesting that customers' perceived risk reduce the positive effect of satisfaction on the purchase intention of visual arts products in WeChat. Therefore, H3 and H4 are both supported.

To facilitate interpretation, these relationships were again plotted with perceived risk and customer satisfaction taking values of low and high. Please refer to Figure 2. As the figure shows, customer satisfaction has a weaker positive relationship with the purchase intention of visual arts products providing by WeChat which have high risk (dashed line) customer perceived. When WeChat users perceive high risk, they will occasionally not take the initiative to purchase even if they have a good attitude towards products from WeChat business.

Table 2. The Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Construct		Scales	Standard Loading	<i>t</i> -value	AVE	CR
	Confidence Benefits	I feel I can trust the visual arts products provider in WeChat	0.80	_	0.61	0.84
Relational Benefits		I have more confidence the service will be performed correctly in WeChat	0.83	13.30***		
		I have less anxiety when I buy the visual arts products in WeChat	0.76	12.83***		
		I get the provider's high level of visual arts products in WeChat	0.74	13.40***		
	Social Benefits	I am familiar with WeChat business person who perform the service	0.78	_	0.61	0.82
		I have developed a friendship with WeChat business person	0.76	13.27***		
		WeChat business person know my name	0.79	12.72***		
		I enjoy certain social aspects of the relationship	0.79	13.31***		
Customer Satisfaction		In general, the visual arts products provided by WeChat business person meets my expectations		_		
		On the whole, I am satisfied with the visual arts products delivered by WeChat business person	0.83	13.63***	٥، ٥٦	0.89
		Overall, my positive experiences outweigh my negative experiences in WeChat	0.82	13.39***	0.65	
		I am always delighted with the visual arts products from WeChat	0.81	12.94***		
		think I did the right thing when I decided ouse WeChat shopping process 0.76 11.92***				
		I think the purchase of visual arts products from WeChat business may be a mistake	0.80	_		
Perceived Risk		I think that purchasing visual arts products from WeChat business may cause me trouble	0.83	13.62***		
		erceived Risk  I think I'm taking some kind of risk when purchasing visual arts products from WeChat business		12.65***	0.65	0.88
		I think it's easy to get tricked with WeChat business	0.81	12.93***		
		I think I'll suffer financial losses with WeChat business 0.79 12.61***		12.61***		
Purchase Intention		It is likely that I will consider with WeChat business	0.81	_		
		Given the chance, I intend to buy visual arts products from WeChat business	0.82	12.63***		
		Intention Given the chance, I predict that I should connect with WeChat business in the near future		12.15***	0.66	0.82
		I will continue to purchase products from WeChat business	0.82	12.44***		

*Notes:* p\*\*\* < .001

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	Confidence Benefits	Social Benefits	Customer Satisfaction	Perceived Risk	Purchase Intention
Confidence Benefits	0.614ª				
Social Benefits	0.407 <sup>b</sup>	0.609ª			
Customer Satisfaction	.378 <sup>b</sup>	0.425 <sup>b</sup>	0.647°		
Perceived Risk	0.054 <sup>b</sup>	-0.05 <sup>b</sup>	-0.004 <sup>b</sup>	0.647ª	
Purchase Intention	0.387 <sup>b</sup>	0.485 <sup>b</sup>	0.411 <sup>b</sup>	-0.076 <sup>b</sup>	0.66ª

Notes: <sup>a</sup>AVE of each variable, <sup>b</sup>Square of correlation coefficient between latent variables

Table 4. The Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses Path		Standardized Coefficient	S.E.	<i>t</i> -value	Contrast
H1	Confidence benefits → Satisfaction	.446***	.039	10.305	Accepted
H2	Social Benefits → Satisfaction	.418***	.037	9.666	Accepted
H3	Satisfaction → Purchase Intention	.659***	.049	15.997	Accepted

*Notes: p*\*\*\* ⟨ .001

Table 5. Path Coefficients and the Moderation Effect

Hypotheses Path		Perceived Risk (β)		Difference	<i>t</i> -value	Contrast	
		Low	High	Difference	t value	Contrast	
H4	Satisfaction → Purchase Intention	.659	.335	.324	16.125***	Accepted	

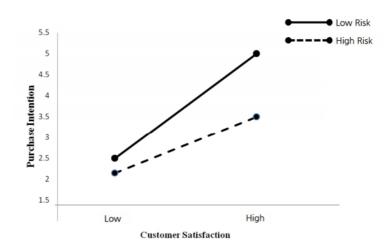


Figure 2. Moderating the Effect of Perceived Risk on the Relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Purchase Intention

#### V. Conclusion and Implication

The results of this study elucidate some important issues concerning the impact of WeChat relational benefits (Confidence benefits; Social benefits) on customer satisfaction and purchase intention which is moderated by perceived risk in WeChat that have no been addressed by previous studies. This paper proposed a model that strives for a understanding of WeChat relationship success between customers and WeChat business person. The answer is not straightforward, since some studies show that relationship business can be successful for visual arts industries (Wu & Chang, 2007), and others indicate that relational benefits help to increase sales purchases in social e-commerce (Grayson, 2007). Thus, combining insights from this stream study may lead managers to build both relationships simultaneously. Consistent with our hypotheses, we have the following findings.

First, this study uncovers the influence of customers' relational benefits with WeChat business person on visual arts business outcomes in WeChat platform. Confidence benefits and social benefits can increase customers satisfaction, which is consistent with the extant research findings (Gwinner et al., 1998; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Sung & Kim, 2017). In addition, respondents care more about confidence benefits, which is playing a greater role in customer satisfaction than social benefits, potentially leading visual arts marketer to pay for wasted time through less profitable campaigns. Our study highlights the importance of social networks in building relationships between WeChat business person and consumers. We show that WeChat friends exist in the setting of social networks, which extend the findings of Yang et al. (2016). Our findings help marketers clarify how new social networking relationships with customers can be effectively leveraged.

Second, customers satisfaction of visual arts products provided in WeChat that can increase purchase intention, which is consistent with the study (Currás-Pérez & Sánchez-García, 2012; Hsu et al., 2012; Koivumäki, 2001; Nawi et al., 2014). That is, WeChat users with

perceived satisfaction with visual arts products from WeChat business person will tend to make a purchase decision. The results suggest that visual arts marketers should consider focusing more of their energy on providing customers satisfaction. Managerially, our findings on positive effects of the customers satisfaction of visual arts products provided by WeChat business suggest that when using social networking platforms, marketers should be sure to provide information update, especially satisfactory visual arts related information updates. This explains that why WeChat business person continuously update product related information and repost customers satisfaction feedback on news feeds.

Third, we cannot forget perceived risk, which stays as a never-ending feeling in the behavioral intent of users unless addressed appropriately. Perceived risk has a negative significant moderating effect on the positive relationship between customers satisfaction and purchase intention, which is consistent with the research (Campbell & Goodstein, 2001). High-risk perceptions weaken relationships between customers satisfaction and purchase intention but users' decisions are generally based on the perceived gains rather than losses. Therefore, WeChat business person must highlight the potential benefits of WeChat platform to mitigate risk perceptions. In addition, marketers need to take initiatives to reduce users' concerns by updating e-tax filing systems' security and assuring users the privacy and security of their personal information. Moreover, policymakers may offer incentives to online tax filers, such as tax rebates upon changes in tax policies.

Finally, some methodological limitations and future research opportunities should be highlighted. This study examines only the presence/absence differences in relational benefits but not the categories of relationship benefits. In WeChat business, marketers might transfer service relationships into friendships, or develop existing WeChat friends as potential business partners. Future research could explore whether the effects of the two types of WeChat users are the same. Moreover, we relied upon only the data of WeChat, an emerging social e-commerce platform, to test our hypotheses. Future

investigation of whether business relationships and friendships work together in similar social e-commerce platforms in other countries would be useful.

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