The effects of informational and transformational appeals on new product launch effectiveness in the high-tech consumer product industry and the role of social media platform credibility.

Student Name: Fengmin Xiao

Student Number: 613941

Supervisor: Dr. Serge Rijsdijk

Master Media Studies - Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between message appeals (categorized into informational and transformational appeals) and new product launch effectiveness (measured by purchase intention and the willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth behavior). In addition, this study also examines whether such an effect would change when the credibility of Chinese social media platforms, Weibo and Douyin, is incorporated into the model as a moderator. A 2x2 factorial between-subjects experiment is designed to examine this topic. A smartphone from Huawei is used as the product in the experiment as the study mainly focuses on the high-tech consumer products industry. The participants are Chinese native speakers who use Douyin and/or Weibo. Participants are reached via WeChat, one of the most used social media platforms in China, and they are randomly and evenly assigned to one of the four conditions. In total, 143 responses are considered valid and used in the analysis. Two-way MANOVA is adopted as the primary analysis tool in the study. The results show that using transformational appeal to launch a new high-tech consumer product has a more significant effect than using informational appeal, which indicates the purchase intention and willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth behavior is higher for messages with a transformational appeal than for messages with an informational appeal. The result also shows that consumers are more likely to have a higher level of purchase intention and willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth behaviors when consumers receive a message on a high credible platform. However, no significant interaction effect is found between message appeals and the credibility of social media platforms, meaning that the credibility of social media platforms does not moderate the effect of message appeals on purchase intention and electronic word-of-mouth. The results further show that participants do not significantly differ in their perception of credibility between Douyin and Weibo. This study brings theoretical and practical implications to researchers and practitioners on the topic of how different message appeals can influence the effectiveness of new product launch

and how the company can choose suitable social media platforms to release the message to improve people's acceptance of the new high-tech consumer product.

Preface

I still can't believe I am about to complete my master's degree. Taking a master's study was actually a tough decision for me initially. But today, I can happily say that I made the right decision!

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Serge Rijsdijk, who is knowledgeable, kind, and always willing to offer support to me. He always gives me precious feedback during the whole thesis production process. I am really grateful for his help and encouragement. Many thanks!

Meanwhile, I would like to thank my beloved parents for their continuous encouragement in my life. Whatever my decision, they have always supported me and brought me the strength to confront my fears.

I also want to thank my partner, Mr. Yan. Thanks for always believing in me and inspiring me to fulfill my goals. And thanks for giving me hugs and compliments whenever I felt down about myself; it really means a lot to me.

Over the last few months, I have met many lovely people in Rotterdam. Thank you all for joining this amazing year. Without you, this year could not be this fantastic. I hope you can shine brightly in your loved fields and enjoy your life.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

New product launch (NPL) has drawn the attention of many companies in recent years, as it is considered by entrepreneurs to be an essential driver of growth and a valuable source for companies to build competitive advantages in the market (Ho & Chen, 2007). A new product launch is a final step in the product innovation process. It is an expensive and complicated phase that aims to bring the outcome of research and development (R&D) to the market and commercialize the products (Roberts et al., 2017). The new product launch phase is, thus, often called the commercialization stage in the product development process as it is the stage of transforming R&D efforts into revenue (Benedetto, 2003). According to Buffoni et al. (2017), new product launch stimulates more than 25% of overall revenue in various industries. Many companies invest heavily in R&D to develop new technology. However, the majority of them neglect the importance of the stage that introduces the product to the market, potentially leading to low effectiveness and success of the new product. 40 to 90 percent of the new products from multiple industries failed to be introduced to the consumers, and 50 percent failed to meet the business target (Gourville, 2006; Buffoni et al., 2017). Therefore, new product launch is essential for companies to ensure product success in the long run.

How marketing supports new product launches has been studied extensively because it is committed to successfully increasing the chance of introducing the new product to the market and making the product profitable (Peres et al., 2010, as cited in López & Sicilia, 2013). Communication strategy is a critical component of marketing in the launching stage because companies that can successfully communicate their new products to the target audience may increase the probability of consumer acceptance and maximize the profits from the new products (Chen et al., 2007). Much literature has proven that the communication's form and content significantly impact new product launch effectiveness (e.g., Lee & Colarelli O'Connor, 2003; Chen et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2021). In order to have effective communication with the consumers, companies must select an appropriate type of message appeal, which is generally classified into informational (rational) and transformational (emotional) appeals (Puto & Wells, 1984; Zhang et al., 2014; Cadet et al., 2017). The importance of choosing the correct message appeal has also been studied extensively by

practitioners and scholars. The extant literature approves the importance of message appeal in supporting new product launch, as a proper message appeal can help brands deliver the information to consumers that highlight the unique features of the product, thus attracting people's attention and increasing their purchase intent (Cadet et al., 2017; Leonidou et al., 2009).

This research selects consumer electronics in the high-tech industry as the study material, such as smartphones, single-lens reflex cameras, and high-definition TVs. The high-tech consumer products industry is usually fast-paced, pricey, and risky. Most high-tech products are difficult to be introduced to the audience because they either have a high frequency of upgrading or have a complex way to use, and some products are even entering the market for the first time (Beard & Easingwood, 1996). According to Melgarejo and Malek (2008), technology firms spend more on R&D and much less on marketing compared with FMCG companies, who spend a large proportion of expenditures on launching the products with proper marketing strategies. In addition, many studies also indicate that the failures of more than one-third of the new tech products resulted from insufficient marketing support. In this case, high-tech companies will have a lower return on new products and suffer from the high cost of failed product introduction to the market (Yi & Su, 2014).

Besides the communication strategy, consumers' acceptance of a new product can also be influenced by the credibility of the information source (Li & Suh, 2015). Nowadays, people are used to acquiring information online, and their time spent on social media is increasing. The growing audiences of social media have altered the way companies interact with consumers, providing companies with great opportunities to communicate with consumers more effectively and increase revenue potentially (Jucaitytė & Maščinskienė, 2014). Social media has increasingly been considered an important information source as people spend more time online searching for information and discussing different topics (Westerman et al., 2014). Meanwhile, the credibility issue on social media platforms has become an important topic to study. Most of the related research is conducted on Facebook and Twitter with demographic groups from the US and Europe. For example, Moro et al. (2020) studied the cultural effects on consumer reaction to a new smartphone on Facebook.

However, less research has been conducted on social media platforms in China, such as Weibo and Douyin.

The research of Baum et al. (2019) demonstrated that introducing a new product with social media platforms positively affects consumers' attuite toward the product. However, the study did not include the credibility of the social media platforms in the experiment. Social media platform credibility is a critical factor to analyze in launching products. People would consider the information less credible if the information appeared on a low-trust platform, and research shows that individuals react less positively to information they do not trust, which may also affect people's purchasing behavior and the willingness to share the message in response to advertising information (Li & Suh, 2015). In line with this, Asri and Dwita (2021) also mention that the credibility of social media is positively related to people's behaviors, such as engaging in electronic word-of-mouth behaviors. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how the new product launch effectiveness would be affected when people receive the different types of message appeals on Chinese social media platforms.

This research helps marketers understand the effects of message appeals on new product launch effectiveness in the high-tech consumer product industry in the current business world and reveal the effects of social media platform credibility on new product launch effectiveness in China. This study aims to bring a new approach to high-tech consumer product companies in China to increase the rate of new product launch effectiveness by choosing suitable message appeal and social media platforms. In this research context, the research question of this study is formulated as follows:

What are the effects of informational and transformational appeals on new product launch effectiveness in the high-tech consumer product industry, and what is the role of social media platform credibility?

By answering this research question, companies and marketers can better understand how different message appeals affect new product launch effectiveness on various social media platforms in China, allowing them to select appropriate message appeals for launching a new product on the most suitable social media platform. It will also provide insight for

scholars to study further the effects of message appeals on new product launches in other countries/regions.

This study will begin by explaining the fundamental concepts of new product launch effectiveness, message appeals, and social media platform credibility based on the existing literature. The methods, such as the sampling procedure and experimental design employed in this study, will then be presented. In the results chapter, the statistical findings will be discussed using numbers. Finally, there will be a discussion and conclusion chapter highlighting the implications, limitations, and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 2. Literature review and development of hypotheses

2.1 New product launch effectiveness

The reasons behind the success and failure of new products have aroused the interest of many researchers and practitioners since the late 1980s (Lee & Colarelli O'Connor, 2003). The innovation and development of new products can consume tremendous financial and managerial resources of a company (Ho & Chen, 2007). Many studies have explored a company's ability to innovate on products, while others have focused more on new product launch strategies. New product launch is a critical stage in translating research and development efforts into commercialization (Crawford & Di Benedetto, 2008), however, it is also the most expensive, but poorly managed, stage in the process (Chen et al., 2007).

An effective new product launch strategy provides a greater opportunity for the success of the new product and its long-term profitability (Di Benedetto, 1999). Academics have examined many factors that contribute to successful new product launches, such as communication strategies, which include all informational and attitudinal efforts to persuade consumers to adopt a new product, such as promoting product features and engaging in strong persuasion with different contents (Crawford & Di Benedetto, 2008). Communication strategy is an essential component of market communication that helps consumers to reduce uncertainty and anxiety about the new product, and therefore, it plays a crucial role in the consumer's purchase decision-making process (Lee & Colarelli O'Connor, 2003). Extant research also confirms that appropriate communication strategy and the success of new product launches are positively related (Chen et al., 2007). According to Griffin and Page (1993) and Baum et al. (2019), determining the success and effectiveness of new product launch is difficult. The success or the effectiveness of a new product launch has to be measured by various dimensions, such as market share, product perception, sales effects, purchase intention, customer acceptance, and more (Lee & Colarelli O'Connor, 2003; Chen et al., 2007; Baum et al., 2019; Griffin & Page, 1993). There is no conventional model for measuring a new product launch effectiveness. In this study, consumers' purchase intention

and willingness to engage in eWOM behaviors are used as the measurements of new product launch effectiveness. The reasons are explained in the following sections.

2.1.1 Purchase intention

Within the most commonly used measurements, the majority of scholars consider sales effects/volume to be one of the most important and used indicators (Chen et al., 2007; Salmen, 2021) in terms of measuring the effectiveness of new product launch. Meanwhile, purchase intention also has often been employed by many scholars and practitioners in the research as one of the major measurements to access product launch effectiveness because the effects of introducing a new product may not immediately result in higher sales volume, but consumers' purchase intention for this new product has been generated when they received the information about this new product (Baum et al., 2019).

Moreover, the extant literature on the topics of new product launch effectiveness, new product launch success, and new product launch performance has wildly adopted purchase intention as the measurement in their studies (Lee, 2014; Ho & Chen, 2007; Baum et al., 2019). In general, purchase intention refers to that a situation where consumers tend to purchase a particular product, and how people feel or how likely they are going to buy the product in the future, which will be potentially converted to sales volume (Rezvani et al., 2012). Furthermore, purchase intention is also often used as a predictor of the sales of a new product (Bird & Ehrenberg, 1966, as cited in Morwitz et al., 2007) because it is highly related to future sales (Morwitz, 2014). In addition, purchase intention can predict consumers' purchase behavior sufficiently (Li et al., 2022). Thus, purchase intention is used as one of the measurements for accessing the new product launch effectiveness in this study.

2.1.2 Electronic word-of-mouth

In marketing research, the importance of word-of-mouth has been recognized (Lee et al., 2008), and it is a well-known indicator of new product success (Marchand et al., 2017). Word-of-mouth refers to the process of transmitting information between individuals, and it has a significant impact on people's purchasing decisions. Positive word-of-mouth results in

potential product recommendations between individuals, which may lead to higher sales and product awareness shortly (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004, as cited in Baum et al., 2019). In line with this argument, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) also highlighted that word-of-mouth affects people's purchase decisions and positive word-of-mouth can potentially lead to the higher sale of the product.

Word-of-mouth is an effective marketing tool for companies since it can influence potential customers' purchasing decisions and increase their likelihood of purchasing the product (Jansen et al., 2009). In recent years, the word-of-mouth (WOM) phenomenon has evolved into many forms of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication (Lee et al., 2008). The Internet and social media have grown in popularity. Many new digital channels have emerged for people to transmit and exchange opinions (Marchand et al., 2017). Therefore, a significant amount of word-of-mouth communications takes place in the digital world in addition to traditional offline word-of-mouth. More and more companies tend to use social media platforms to launch new products and services as it can quickly spread the message of the new product to a large number of people online. At the same time, also have the potential to benefit from positive electronic word-of-mouth (Baum et al., 2019). This study focuses on exploring the new product launch effectiveness in the digital world; hence, electronic word-of-mouth is employed in the study in order to determine whether different advertising message appeals influence the new product launch effectiveness.

To conclude, an effective new product launch is important for companies to commercialize a product in order to increase the success rate of introducing a new product to the target consumers and enhance the chance of making profits. Purchase intention and the willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth behaviors are two key attributes that determine the effectiveness of a new product launch because they provide a high probability for the new products to achieve greater financial performance (Lee et al., 2008; Baum et al., 2019). Therefore, the effectiveness of new product launch is determined by the purchase intentions of consumers and their willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth.

2.2 Message appeals

Consumers' purchase intention and willingness to participate in electronic word-of-mouth are influenced by the form of message they receive from the advertisement. An advertisement message appeal highlights the product's features (Cadet et al., 2017). Message appeals refer to a persuasive argument that aims to attract target consumers' attention and potentially affect their purchase intention (Leonidou et al., 2009). In line with this, message appeal is a motivating power to arouse people's desire and action for purchasing while providing a new message of the advertised product to receivers (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007, as cited in Akbari, 2015). Moreover, according to Kim et al. (2020), message appeals highlight the values, features, and benefits of the product the company wants to express. Based on the previous arguments, it is evident that message appeals are regarded as an approach to delivering certain product information to consumers with the goal of increasing people's purchase intention. Generally, there are two main categories of message appeals. These are informational (rational) appeal and transformational (emotional) appeal (Puto & Wells, 1984; Zhang et al., 2014; Cadet et al., 2017). Both informational and transformational appeals are often used in advertisements for products and services (Zhang et al., 2014).

2.2.1 Informational appeal

The differences between informational appeal and transformational appeal are significant. The informational appeal is factually accurate, relevant, and meaningful explanations of the product information that are given in a logical, verifiable manner to attract potential buyers (Chen et al., 2007; Hadjimarcou, 2012; Cadet et al., 2017). Additionally, the message conveyed by the informational appeal is normally showing the values, performances, and quality of the product or service, meaning the functional attributes and benefits of the advertised products/service are often emphasized in rational appeals (Zhang et al., 2014). Informational appeal, in particular, can highlight the brand's benefits and values by offering objective information, allowing for cognitive processing (MacInnis et al., 2002). An informational message is considered as the degree focusing on rational purchase, built with facts and logical reasons of the advertised product (Akbari, 2015).

2.2.2 Transformational appeal

In contrast with the informational appeal, the transformational appeal must enrich, warm, excite, or enhance the experience of utilizing the product and service beyond what is acquired just from an objective description of the advertised product. It establishes a strong link between the experience of the advertisement and the experience of using the product, which makes people recall the product together with the experience of the advertisement (Puto & Wells,1984, as cited in Cadet et al., 2017). According to Akbari (2015), the transformational appeal aims typically to make consumers establish positive feelings about the advertised product/service while also building up a specific type of brand identity simultaneously. Establishing certain positive emotions with the product/service and the brand itself may result in favorable responses from consumers (Rietveld et al., 2020), and it also potentially motivates people to perform purchase behaviors because of the positive feelings that transformational appeal brings to them (Kim et al., 2020). To conclude, the transformational appeal is intended to create a positive connection between consumers and the advertised product/service.

2.2.3 The effectiveness of informational and transformational appeals in the high-tech consumer product industry

The main reason for focusing on the new product launch of high-tech consumer products in this study is because the nature of a high-tech consumer product is different from other common consumer goods in many ways. Firstly, there is a process for consumers to go through before they make the actual purchase. This process includes discovering the product in the market, developing an interest in it, evaluating its features, and selecting a specific product for final adoption (Dovleac, 2011). Thus, high-technology consumer products are in different natures compared to other products because high-technology consumer products are built on a considerable amount of technical know-how, which may result in a unique messaging processing procedure between customers' communications (Chen et al., 2007). It also requires consumers to spend more time and consideration when making purchase decisions (Akbari, 2015). The second aspect relates to the importance of delivering effective

messages to consumers during the launching process of a high-tech product. A survey conducted by Retrevo site, an online electronics marketplace, examined the consumers' purchase intention before, during, and after the launch of the Apple iPad in 2010. Only 3 percent of consumers indicated they would love to buy the iPad before the launch; the number increased to 9 percent during the launch and dropped to 5 after the launch. However, the number of consumers who said they would not buy kept increasing, and roughly 20 percent indicated they needed more information to make purchase decisions (Maisto, 2010). The result shows that companies need to design effective launching concepts and messages for launching their new high-tech consumer product because inappropriate launching messages may significantly influence people's purchase intention. Therefore, a new product launch of high-tech consumer products is of great importance for scholars and practitioners to study due to its unique product nature. Therefore, the focused industry in this study is the high-tech consumer product sector.

In terms of the effectiveness of informational and transformational appeals, the extant literature varies significantly based on the nature of the products/services and social norms (Akbari, 2015; Zanon & Teichmann, 2016). Zhang et al. (2014) argue that the impacts of informational and transformational appeals in advertising require more studies as it is still unclear which message appeal is more appropriate and effective for a particular product or service. However, several scholars have found significant differences for high-technology consumer products regarding the effectiveness of these two message appeals. Chen et al. (2007) discovered that using informational appeal rather than transformational appeal to launch a new high-technology consumer product is more effective. In line with this, Akbari (2015) also found that informational appeal tends to be more influential than transformational appeal when it comes to the laptop as a high-tech consumer product. These two studies contrast with Cadet et al. (2017), who indicated that advertisements with the transformational appeal are more likely to generate likes and attention than those with informational appeal. The different findings were due to the nature and context of the product as the study of Chen et al. (2007), and Akbari (2015) are focused on high-technology consumer products, while the study of Cadet et al. (2017) includes various industries rather than only high-tech products.

The findings from Chen et al. (2007) and Akbari (2015), which found that informational appeal is more effective than transformational appeal when launching a new high-tech consumer product, are valid in this study. The informational appeal has more significant sales effects than transformational appeal, according to Chen et al. (2007). Informational appeal tends to be more effective than transformational appeal in the high-tech industry because people might need more technical information to understand the product since many high-tech products are technically complicated with new features (Chen et al., 2007). Additionally, Akbari (2015) found that both message appeals positively impact purchase intention, with the informational appeal having a more significant effect on high-tech consumer products (laptops). This is because high-tech products are considered high-involvement products essential to customers. Customers usually need more time and information to understand the products before making purchase decisions (Akbari, 2015). As previously stated, the impacts of introducing new products may not instantly result in higher sales volume but may reflect in purchase intention (Baum et al., 2019). Thus, this study considers the informational appeal to have more significant effects on purchase intention. Furthermore, the extant literature indicated that purchase intention and eWOM behavior are positively related (Sulthana & Vasantha, 2019; Wang et al., 2012; Aslam et al., 2019). Therefore, based on the discussion above and the context of this study, the hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H1: Purchase intention will be higher for messages with an informational appeal than for messages with a transformational appeal.

H2: The level of electronic word-of-mouth behavior will be higher for messages with an informational appeal than for messages with a transformational appeal.

2.3 The role of credibility of social media platforms

Advertisements through mass media outlets such as television, newspapers, and radio have been used by most companies to communicate with people about new products and companies' information in the past (Roberts et al., 2017). However, the traditional communication channels, including television, mail, telemarketing, and door-to-door sales

calls, are likely to shrink due to the rapid adaptation of innovative digital media (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011). More and more brands proactively use social media platforms to communicate with existing consumers and potential consumers (Baum et al., 2019). Social media platforms stand out because of their unique characteristics, such as enormous information, speedy information transmission, and user interactions (Sun, 2021). According to Statista (2020), the number of social media users reached 3.78 billion in 2021 and is expected to reach more than 4.41 billion in 2025 worldwide. Given the large number of social media users, it is not surprising that many companies incorporate social media platforms as part of their communication strategies. Furthermore, employing social platforms as a communication strategy for new product launch has proven to be beneficial because it enhances the engagement with online users and stimulates electronic word-of-mouth behaviors, which potentially accelerates the dissemination of information about the new product (Baum et al., 2019). Thus, it is believed that social media has been playing an important role in introducing a new product.

2.3.1 Credibility of social media platforms based on user perception

The information spread much quicker and wilder because of the growing usage of social media. Valuable information can be disseminated via social media, however, a considerable amount of false information, such as unconfirmed rumors and fake news, has been transmitted simultaneously (Nadarevic et al., 2020). Traditional media channels were considered more credible compared to new digital channels, and people generally have lower trust in social media platforms, such as Facebook (Karlsen & Aalberg, 2021), because people can express themselves freely on social platforms, which might reduce the credibility of these platforms as there is little restriction imposed on the users when they (re)post any information (Sun, 2021). This may cause information credibility issues on social media platforms, potentially undermining the credibility and reputation of a particular platform in the long run. However, it is difficult to determine which platform appears more creditable than another as social media mediums may have different levels of credibility among individuals (Karlsen & Aalberg, 2021). Credibility is a complicated and multi-dimensional context. The sources,

mediums, receivers, and messages play important roles in determining the credibility of social media platforms (Vilčeková, 2015), and information on various platforms is evaluated using different medium credibility standards (Karlsen & Aalberg, 2021).

2.3.2 Moderating effect of perceived platform credibility

The credibility of social media can be broken down into two dimensions: medium credibility and message credibility. Medium credibility refers to an individual's perception of the credibility of the intermediary where the message is shown, and message credibility refers to the perceived credibility of the communicated message itself (Li & Suh, 2015). The credibility of intermediaries could influence how people perceive a message; in other words, individuals find information less credible when it appears on a low-trusted platform (Karlsen & Aalberg, 2021). The study of Karlsen and Aalberg (2021) found that people considered Facebook a low credible platform, negatively influencing their perceived trustworthiness of the information shown on it. Moreover, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) also emphasizes that the "central" and "peripheral" routes are the two main ways to impact recipients' perceptions of information credibility. A recipient with a higher ability to process the information will spend more time carefully evaluating the message content (the "central" route). In contrast, the recipient with a lower ability to process the information will spend more time evaluating the medium that delivers the message (the "peripheral" route) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The research conducted by Babić-Rosario et al. (2016) compared the sales of products across different platforms, including social media platforms, review platforms, and e-commerce platforms, and found that products with more informational characteristics on e-commerce platforms had higher sales than those on social media platforms. It was explained that the customers usually sought informational content when browsing e-commerce platforms and tended to believe the information given on it because of its professionalism. Much research also shows that the degree of perceived credibility and consumer behavior are positively correlated. Customers react less actively to the information they do not trust, which further affects their purchasing behavior and word-of-mouth behaviours (Li & Suh, 2015; Asri & Dwita, 2021). Thus, the formation of credibility

perception is potentially influenced by both the message itself and the medium/platforms where the message is presented.

To conclude, a customer tends to have stronger purchase intention and a higher level of electronic word-of-mouth behaviors when they receive a message on a platform that they believe to be credible. The effects of the message appeal on purchase intention and eWOM can potentially become stronger when people browse the message on the higher credible platform compared to a lower credible platform because the credibility of social media platforms is positively related to people's behaviors such as engaging in electronic word-of-mouth behaviours (Asri & Dwita, 2021) and purchase intention (Li & Suh, 2015). Based on the previous discussion, the following hypotheses were made to examine how social media credibility influences the effect of message appeal on consumers' purchase intention and eWOM behavior.

H3: The effect of informational appeal on purchase intention and the willingness to engage in eWOM behavior will be stronger when perceived social media credibility is higher than when it is low.

H4: The effect of transformational appeal on purchase intention and the willingness to engage in eWOM behavior will be stronger when perceived social media credibility is higher than when it is low.
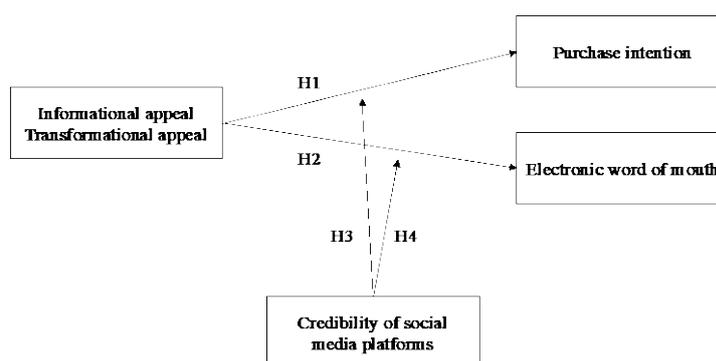
Figure 2.1. Research model

As shown in the Figure 2.1, the informational and transformational appeals are utilized to enhance the effectiveness of new product launch. In this process, social media platforms whose credibility is incorporated as the moderator in the model serve to affect the relationship

between the message appeals (informational and transformational appeals) and new product

launch effectiveness (measured by purchase intention and the willingness to engage in

eWOM behavior)

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

To answer the research question "what are the effects of informational and transformational appeals on new product launch effectiveness with moderating effect of social media platform credibility?" and to test the hypotheses, a survey experiment was used. According to Mutz (2011), experimental designs embedded within surveys are referred to as survey experiments, and they are "administered to a representative population sample." Additionally, it can determine the investigation objects according to the research needs, reduce unnecessary waste of resources, and lower the cost. Research in the social sciences has shown a rise in the use of experiments, and survey experiments have become one of the most effective approaches since they combine the causal power of experiments with the generalizability of population samples (Mullinix et al., 2015). Thus, this study uses a survey experiment to explore the effects of informational and transformational messages on new product launch effectiveness with the moderator of the credibility of Chinese social media platforms (Douyin and Weibo).

In order to conduct the survey experiment, a 2x2 factorial between-subject design was conducted for this study. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) has been developed for this survey experiment, and the survey experiment is available in both Chinese and English. Each of the three dimensions has three items. The participants were assigned randomly and evenly to one of the four conditions. They were able to see an image in the survey and were required to respond to a series of questions. The first part of the questions included nine items with three questions for measuring purchase intention, three for electronic word-of-mouth, and three for perceived credibility of social media platforms (Weibo and Douyin). The second part of the questions included three manipulation check questions for recognizing message appeals and one manipulation check question for recognizing platforms. Lastly, the participants were asked to answer five demographic questions: their ages, genders, if Chinese is their mother tongue, and if they are the users of Weibo and/or Douyin. An end-up "thank you for your participation" message

appeared when the participants finished the survey. An example of the complete survey can be found in the appendix.

3.2 Social media platform selection – Douyin and Weibo

Douyin (the Chinese version of Tiktok, officially called Douyin in China) and Weibo are chosen for this study because they are the most popular social platforms in China. Like Facebook and Twitter, Weibo is one of the most representative social media platforms in China, with significant influence among the Chinese people (Yuan & Gao, 2016). Weibo reached 573 million monthly active users in 2021 (Statista, 2021). Douyin is a short-form video platform that allows users to incorporate music and other elements into their videos, encouraging creativity and imagination (Ahlse et al., 2020), and Douyin has become one of the most popular social media platforms in China in recent years by reaching 600 million daily active users (Statista, 2021). Thus, it is believed that the majority of Chinese people know and/or use these two platforms frequently.

Additionally, both Weibo and Douyin suffer from fake news. Weibo announced that they have blocked over 10,000 accounts and removed more than 4,000 comments in which they post fake news about the Ukraine war (Lu, 2022). Same with Weibo, Douyin also faced a severe issue regarding fake news. According to Chinanew.com, Douyin blocked and removed around 24922 videos that contained false/fake information in 2020. It is evident that these two popular social media platforms all have trouble with information credibility issue as the fake/false information spread wildly and quickly. In this case, deciding which platform is more credible compared to another is complicated.

To measure the credibility of these two platforms, users' perceptions of Douyin and Weibo in terms of credibility are used in this study. People would subjectively consider their preferred media more credible (Carter et al.,1965; Rimmer & Weaver,1987). Given that Douyin and Weibo are the most popular and widely used social media platforms in China, there is a chance that people may judge the credibility of the two platforms based on their preferences, personal experiences, and understandings. In order to understand which platform

is more credible, it is essential to get people's perceptions of these two platforms in terms of credibility.

3.3 Experimental materials

The message appeals are designed using either informational or transformational content in the advertisement based on the theory of Wu and Wang (2011). The informational message includes content describing product functions, benefits, and values. The informational message is displayed as "HUAWEI Mate X2. Weight: approx. 295g; Interior screen: 8 inches; CPU: HUAWEI Kirin 9000; Camera:50 MP Ultra Vision". In contrast, the transformational message includes content that spreads a particular atmosphere, emotion and feeling (Wu and Wang, 2011). It is described as "A new classic enters the fold, revolutionizing design and experience. Imagine What Unfolds. Capture your loved moments with HUAWEI Mate X2". The messages are translated to Chinese accordingly in order to reduce the language barriers for the participants as the target group is Chinese native speakers.

The moderating variable is checked by displaying the transformational or informational contents with Douyin (the Chinese name for the TikTok platform) or Weibo interfaces. A smartphone from Huawei has been chosen as the product in the experimental study. The newly released smartphone is used as the product in this study as Huawei is one of the most famous phone brands in China. By using its phone, the experiment can provide a similar situation and background information about the product for participants. The stimulus materials are shown below where two languages (English and Chinese) are available.
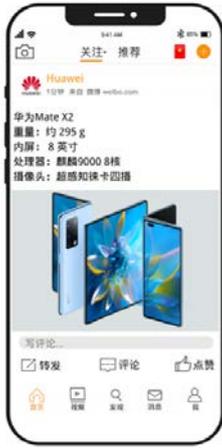
Figure 3.1. Informational appeal on Weibo

Figure 3.2. Informational appeal on Douyin
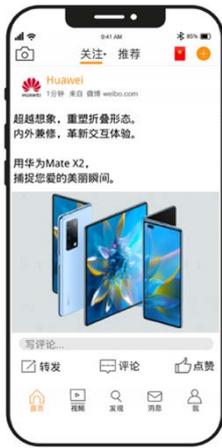
Figure 3.3. Transformational appeal on Weibo

Figure 3.4. Transformational appeal on Douyin

3.4 Pre-test procedure and result

The stimulus materials were pre-tested first. Sixteen participants were approached randomly via WeChat, one of the most popular Chinese social media platforms. People received the research information online and voluntarily took part in this experiment by clicking the Qualtrics link or scanning a QR code. There were 16 participants for the pre-test in total, and they were assigned to one of the four conditions randomly with the same probability via Qualtrics. Ten out of 16 responses finished the survey completely. The participants received the full questionnaire: experimental questions, manipulation check questions for message appeals, platform interface recognitions, and demographic questions.

The stimulus materials were pre-tested before the experiments. The participants were approached randomly via WeChat, one of the most popular Chinese social media platforms. A total of 16 respondents participated in the pre-test and were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions with the same probability via Qualtrics. Ten of them finished the survey completely. The participants received the full questionnaire with manipulation check questions for message appeals and platform interface recognitions. Based on the results, all of them had recognized the platforms correctly from the interfaces given in the stimulus materials (*Cohen's Kappa* = 1, *p* < .002). As for recognizing the type of message appeals, there was also a significant difference between the informational message (*M* = 2.25, *SD* = .74) and transformational message (*M* = 3.56, *SD* = .58) with *t* (8) = (3.13), *p* = .014. The results mean that the platforms and message appeals were manipulated successfully, and participants correctly recognized both platforms and the types of message appeals presented in the stimulus materials.

3.5 Manipulation check procedure and result

In manipulation check for message types, participants were asked to answer three questions with a 5-point Likert scale, 1 indicates Strongly disagree, and 5 indicates Strongly agree. The survey items are adapted from Skupin (2017). The questions were, "As shown in the smartphone advertising image above, you can see a text with a message related to the advertisement. Please answer the following questions: "1. The text in the advertisement contains facts about the product. 2. The text in the advertisement contains technical information about the product. 3. The text in the advertisement spread a certain atmosphere and emotions.". An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the difference between informational message conditions and transformational message conditions. As shown in Table 3.1, the result shows that the difference between informational message (*M*=3.49, *SD*= .56) and transformational message (*M*= 3.02, *SD*= .60), *t* (141) = -4.87, *p* < .001, is significant. Specifically, the participants who received informational message appeals were more likely to recognize them correctly.

Table 3.1 Independent sample t-test for Message appeal of the manipulation check

Dependent variable	Predictors	*N*	*t-value*	*M*	*SD*	*p-value*
Message types	Informational	73	(4.87)	3.49	.56	.001
	Transformational	70		3.02	.60	

Another manipulation check was conducted to determine whether the participants could recognize the presented platform interfaces correctly. Participants were asked to answer the question, "Given the platform interface that has been shown in the image, which platform do you think it is? Choose one from the answers below: Weibo, WeChat, Xiaohongshu, Zhihu, Douyin, I don't know". The second manipulation check used inter-rater reliability to determine whether the participants could recognize the platform correctly from the presented interfaces. If the estimated kappa value is close to 0, the participants were considered to fail to recognize the platform or recognize the platform correctly by chance. The kappa value here is .28 (95% CI, .23 to .33, $p < .001$), which indicated a fair effect with statistical significance. Thus, the participants were believed to choose the right option and recognize the platform correctly.

Table 3.2 Estimated Cohen's Kappa Value for Platform Recognition

Variable	**Estimated kappa**	**95% CI**	*p-value*
Platform recognition	.28	.23, .33	< .001

3.6 Sampling method

The sample for this study is Chinese native speakers who use Douyin and/or Weibo, as the study aims to analyze the effects of informational and transformational messages on new product launch effectiveness with moderating effects of Chinese social media platforms' credibility.

Simple random sampling is used in this study because it ensures that participants have an equal probability of being selected to participate in the survey experiments, ensuring the sample is representative, accurate, and low-biased (Singh, 2003). To conclude, the target population is Chinese native speakers who use Douyin and/or Weibo. They were selected as the sample in this study because they frequently use at least one of these two platforms and have rich experience in witnessing how the platforms serve to connect organizations and consumers, exerting moderating effects in the process.

3.7 Procedure and data collection

The experimental survey was conducted with an online questionnaire tool Qualtrics. Participants were reached via WeChat, one of the most well-known social media platforms in China. WeChat (Weixin in Chinese) was launched in 2011 as a messaging app by Tencent and had been expanding steadily, surpassing one billion users in 2018. It was employed as the communication platform for distributing the survey experiments because it has the highest monthly active users in China, which reached roughly 1.27 billion users in quarter 4 of 2021 (Statista, 2022), which means it was possible that more responses could be generated in a shorter amount of period. The information about the survey experiment was announced in WeChat moments and WeChat group chats; author's friends also distributed it to their connections. People could use the link or QR code to access the online survey experiment. Participants were not reached on Weibo or Douyin in order to decrease bias.

The four conditions included one of the stimulus materials accordingly. All the surveys included a brief introduction of the survey's purpose, the contact information of the researcher, and consent forms of agreeing participate were included at the beginning of the surveys. By clicking "I agree," participants were able to continue the survey. However, the survey would automatically end if participants clicked "I disagree." Notably, only 4 out of 323 responses were not agreeing to participate.

3.8 Operationalization and measures

Message appeal is the independent variable categorized into informational and transformational appeal types. As previously stated, the dependent variable in this study is new product launch effectiveness, which has been broken down into purchase intention and electronic word-of-mouth behaviors. The credibility of social media platforms is considered the moderator in this study. The scales for measuring the different variables in this research are developed from previous research.

3.8.1 Dependent variable

To measure the dependent variables, purchase intention and the level of eWOM, the survey experiment has included scales to measure purchase intention and eWOM. The scale for purchase intention is adopted from Akbari (2015) and Chih et al. (2013). For example, "You will be likely to purchase this phone" was asked. The scales for electronic word-of-mouth are developed from Chih et al. (2013), Yan et al. (2014), and Brown et al. (2005). People were asked to answer questions such as "After browsing the information, you would like to share it with your contacts." The participants were required to answer three questions for purchase intention and three for electronic word-of-mouth on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

3.8.2 Independent variable

The independent variable in this study is two types of message appeals. Informational and transformational appeals are performed in the experiment using different contents developed based on their definitions.

3.6.3 Moderator

The moderating variable is the platforms' credibility. As mentioned previously, it is hard to determine which platform is more credible than another, and the perception of credibility levels of these two platforms need to be measured. Three scales are adapted from Chih et al. (2013) to measure the perceived platforms' credibility. The questions, such as

"Your overall believability of the information on this platform is high," were required to answer. The participants were asked to answer these three questions on a 5-point Likert scale that 1 indicates "strongly disagree" and 5 indicates "strongly agree."

3.9 Data processing and analysis

The data is collected with experiments in this study, and there is a possibility that the raw data would contain errors, omissions, and even inconsistencies (NIOS, n.d.). Thus, it is essential to clean the data first to ensure it is ready for further analysis. The independent variables in this study are message appeals (informational and transformational appeals), the dependent variables are purchase intention and the level of eWOM, and the moderator is the credibility of the social media platform (Douyin and Weibo in the study). For the manipulation check, the independent sample t-test is performed to compare the means of message appeals to check whether the participants can correctly recognize the type of message appeals. Cohen's kappa value is calculated to check whether the participants recognize the social media platform presented in the material correctly. The main analysis adopts two-way MANOVA to find out if there is a significant difference in new product launch effectiveness, consisting of purchase intention and electronic word-of-mouth behaviors given by different types of message appeals. The interaction with the credibility of social media platforms, Douyin and Weibo, will also be tested in the model. The results and relevant data are explained in the following chapter.

Chapter 4. Results

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the statistical results of the study. The sample description, reliability analysis of measurement items and the main analysis results of two-way ANOVA are included in this section.

4.1 Sample description

In total, the experiments received 323 responses, and 109 were deleted as they did not complete the experimental survey accordingly. The participant whose mother tongue was not Chinese were removed as well because the target population of this study was Chinese native speakers. Additionally, to ensure the validity of the results, participants were asked to answer the question "do you use Weibo and/or Douyin?" as the criteria to filter the target population who use at least one of these two platforms. Based on the responses to this question, 27 participants indicated that they used neither of these two platforms, and 15 participants did not give their answers. To further clean the data, 15 participants who filled out the surveys in less than 60 seconds or more than 1000 seconds were deleted as there was a chance that they did not answer the surveys properly and correctly. Notably, 14 responses with the same answers for all questions or chose the answers frequently were also excluded from the analysis to reduce the risk of data pollution. As a result, a total of 143 responses were considered valid and had been brought into the data analysis after data cleaning. Table 4.1 displays the demographical frequency of the sample population (N=143).

Table 4.1. Demographical frequency of the sample population

Participant characteristics	Frequency in sample	Percentage in sample
Gender		
Male	32	22.38%
Female	109	76.2%
Prefer not to tell	2	1.40%
Age		

Below 18	2	1.40%
19 - 25	83	58.04%
26 - 35	47	32.87%
Above 36	4	2.80%
Not indicate	7	4.90%
Nationality		
Chinese	136	95.10%
Others	2	1.40%
Not indicate	5	3.50%
Mother tongue (Chinese)		
Yes	143	100%
No	0	0%
Platform use		
Only Weibo	15	10.49%
Only Douyin	52	36.36%
Both	76	53.15%

The participants who received the informational appeal and transformational appeal are 73 and 70 respectively. In terms of the platform, 72 participants received the message with the Douyin interface, while 71 participants received message appeals with the Weibo interface. The number of participants as per condition is shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Experimental conditions and the number of participants

		Message appeal	
		Informational appeal $N = 73$	Transformational appeal $N = 70$
	Douyin	Informational appeal on Douyin $N = 35$	Transformational appeal on Douyin $N = 37$
Platform	$N = 72$		
	Weibo	Informational appeal on Weibo	Transformational appeal on Weibo

4.2 Correlation and reliability analysis of measurement items

The correlation matrix between variables was shown in Table 4.3. The Pearson coefficients between purchase intention, electronic word-of-mouth, and perceived credibility indicated they were positively correlated. The p-values were below at .01 level, which means there were statistically significant associations. Moreover, the measurement items were tested with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity before conducting the factor analysis to ensure the data were appropriate for the analysis. As the results are shown in Table 4.4, KMO sampling adequacy is .794, and Bartlett's test is significant meaning the null hypothesis that the correlation is an identity matrix is rejected. Thus, the data met the standard for a factor analysis.

Table 4.3. Correlation table of variables

	Purchase intention	*E-word-of-mouth*	*Perceived credibility*
Purchase intention	1.000		
E-word-of-mouth	.575**	1.000	
Perceived credibility	.268**	.421**	1.000

Note: **. Correlation is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4.4. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.794
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	632.937
	df	36
	Sig.	$< .001$

Principal component analysis (PCA) and reliability analysis were conducted for each variable and their measurement items. The results indicated that three factors are retained

based on their eigenvalues above 1 (2.44, 2.14, 2.01, respectively) and the screen plot displayed a clear bend afterward. Orthogonal (varimax) rotation was used in the analysis and the factor loadings were shown in Table 4.5. The scale explained of 74.5% the variance in the variables. All items were positively related to the factors, and they were believed to be named correctly.

Purchase intention. This factor included three items that associated with how strong a participant's intention was to try and buy the product. *Purchase intention* has a good reliability, α = .77.

Electronic word-of-mouth. This factor was measured with three items, which were associated with participant's willingness to share the information and spread the good comments to other people. The reliability of *Electronic word-of-mouth* was also good, α = .78

Perceived platform credibility. Three items were included in this factor associating with how trustworthy and believable people think the platform is. The factor also a strong reliability, α = .90.

Table 4.5. Factor loadings and Cronbach's alphas of measurement items

Items	*Perceived platform credibility*	*Purchase intention*	*E-word-of-mouth*
Q8. This platform appears to be trustworthy.	.92		
Q7. Your overall believability of the information on this platform is high.	.91		
Q9. The platform represents an organization that will deliver on promises made.	.84		
Q1. You be likely to purchase this smartphone		.83	

Q2. You will try this smartphone if you have a chance	.83		
Q3. You would like to purchase this smartphone when you need.	.68		
Q5. After browsing the information, you would like to share it to your contacts.			.86
Q6. You would speak positively about this smartphone.			.80
Q4. If somebody asks you for advice on buying a smartphone, you will recommend this smartphone			.60
Cronbach's alpha	.90	.77	.78
Eigenvalue	2.44	2.14	2.01

Note: Items are translated from Chinese.

4.3 Main results of two-way MANOVA

The study performed a two-way multivariate analysis of variance to examine the effects of different message appeals on purchase intention and the level of electronic word-of-mouth with the interaction of perceived platform credibility. Before looking at the main results of the two-way MANOVA, the assumption of equal variance had been checked with Levene's test. It confirmed that the homogeneity of variance assumption has been met given the non-significant statistics $F_{PI}(3) = .917$, $p > .05$, $F_{EWOM}(3) = .920$, $p > .05$.

The results shown in Table 4.6 indicated that there was a significant difference in the mean values of purchase intention [$F(1, 139) = 7.134$, $p = .008$] and e-word-of-mouth [$F(1, 139) = 7.759$, $p = .006$] between message appeal types. The post hoc test showed the difference between informational appeal and transformational appeal was significant ($p < .05$). Based on the estimated marginal means, groups with transformational appeal had both higher levels of purchase intention ($M_{PI} = 3.380$) and e-word-of-mouth ($M_{EWOM} = 3.434$) than

the groups with informational appeal (M_{PI} = 3.043, M_{EWOM} = 3.072). As such, there was not enough evidence to support H1 and H2. The effects of manipulated credibility on purchase intention [F (1, 139) = 3.330, p = .07] and electronic-word-of-mouth [F (1, 139) = .249, p = .619] were non-significant. As for the interaction effect between two independent variables, there was also no significant effects on purchase intention [F (1, 139) = 1.001, p = .319] and electronic-word-of-mouth [F (1, 139) = .540, p = .464]. Therefore, H3 and H4 were not supported as well.

Table 4.6. Results of two-way MANOVA (N= 143)

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Observed Power
Message appeal	PI	4.050	1	4.050	7.134	.008	.756
	EWOM	4.648	1	4.648	7.759	.006	.790
Manipulated credibility of platform	PI	1.890	1	1.890	3.330	.070	.441
	EWOM	.149	1	.149	0.249	.619	.079
Message appeal * Manipulated credibility of platform	PI	.568	1	.568	1.001	.319	.169
	EWOM	.324	1	.324	.540	.464	.113
Error	PI	78.900	139	.568			
	EWOM	83.268	139	.599			
Total	PI	85.677	143				
	EWOM	88.493	143				

A possible reason for the non-significant interaction effect between message appeal and the manipulated credibility of social media platforms is that the participants did not rate the

credibility of Weibo and Douyin differently in the first place. An independent sample t-test was performed to verify this reason. As shown in Table 4.7, the p-value was larger than .05, indicating that the mean values of Weibo (M = 3.352, SD = .839) were not significantly different from the mean of Douyin (M = 3.171, SD = .905). The credibility between the two platforms did not differ. Therefore, the interaction effect between message appeal and manipulated credibility would also be non-significant.

Table 4.7 Independent sample t-test

Dependent variable	Predictors	N	t-value	M	SD	p
Platforms	Weibo	71		3.352	.839	
			(1.238)			.218
	Douyin	72		3.171	.905	

Additionally, following the method proposed by Jeong and Lee (2016), the survey questions regarding credibility were recoded into dichotomous dummy variables (low perceived credibility and high perceived credibility) to examine the main effects of credibility on the two dependent variables. The results showed in Table 4.8, there is a significant difference in the groups of perceived credibility in terms of the means of purchase intention [F (1, 139) = 5.427, p = .021] and electronic-word-of-mouth [F (1, 139) = 9.223, p = .003]. The post hoc test confirmed that the difference between groups was significant ($p < .05$). The estimated marginal mean showed that the group with high perceived credibility had both higher levels of purchase intention (M_{PI} = 3.451) and electronic word-of-mouth (M_{EWOM} = 3.438) than the groups with low perceived credibility (M_{PI} = 3.057, M_{EWOM} = 3.054). It could be concluded that there was a statistical difference in purchase intention and electronic word-of-mouth between high and low perceived credibility groups. The high perceived credibility group had higher levels in both variables. However, the interaction effect was non-significant [F_{PI} (1, 139) = .606, p = .438, F_{EWOM} (1, 139) = .002, p = .961].

Table 4.8 Results of two-way MANOVA (N= 143)

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Observed Power
Message appeal	PI	3.559	1	3.559	6.343	.013	.706
	EWOM	3.848	1	3.848	6.813	.010	.736
Perceived credibility	PI	3.045	1	3.045	5.427	.021	.638
	EWOM	5.210	1	5.210	9.223	.003	.855
Message appeal * Perceived credibility	PI	.340	1	.340	.606	.438	.121
	EWOM	.001	1	.001	.002	.961	.050
Error	PI	77.989	139	.561			
	EWOM	78.510	139	.565			
Total	PI	85.677	143				
	EWOM	88.493	143				

Chapter 5. Conclusion

This chapter first presents the theoretical discussion that combines the results of this study and the extant literature. Then, the practical implications address how can the findings of this study support manager in their practical works. Lastly, the limitations of this study and the suggestions for future research are included in the end.

The primary goal of this research was to explore the effects of message appeals on new product launch effectiveness measured by purchase intention and electronic word-of-mouth. Additionally, this study also examined whether such an effect would change when the credibility of Chinese social media platforms, Weibo and Douyin, was incorporated into the model as a moderator. A 2x2 factorial between-subjects experiment was designed to answer the research question. Participants were approached via WeChat, one of the most popular Chinese social media platforms, randomly and evenly assigned to one of four experimental conditions via Qualtrics. In the end, 143 responses were considered valid and were used in the analysis after data cleaning.

The study found that using informational appeal to launch a new high-tech consumer product, such as a smartphone, did not lead to a higher purchase intention and willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth behaviors than transformational appeal. In contrast, this study found transformational appeal more influential than an informational appeal on purchase intention and eWOM (new product launch effectiveness). The experiment results showed that when consumers received a transformational appeal or used a platform that they believed to be credible, they were more likely to have a higher level of purchase intention and willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth behaviors. There was no significant interaction effect found between message appeals and social media platform credibility. An independent sample t-test showed that participants did not see a significant difference in perceived credibility between the two social media platforms. Furthermore, the study found that there was a significant difference in the purchase intention and electronic word of mouth between high and low perceived credibility (recoded dummy variable). In short, transformational appeal and higher perceived platform credibility tend to be more influential when launching new high-tech consumer products in China; however, the credibility of the

two social media platforms, Douyin and Weibo, did not moderate the relationship between message appeals and new product launch effectiveness (measured by purchase intention and eWOM).

5.1 Theoretical implications

The result of this study is in line with the research of prior literature that message appeals have significant positive effects on customers' purchase intention (Akbari, 2015) and willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth behaviors (Skupin, 2017). In other words, this study found that transformational appeals appeared to have a larger impact on affecting new product launch effectiveness than informational appeals when introducing high-tech consumer products. Nevertheless, there were also scholars whose research found results that contrast with the findings of this study. For example, Chen et al. (2007) indicated that informational appeal was more effective in supporting new product launches than transformational appeals in the high-tech sector. The contradictory finding is most likely attributable to different research methodology. Chen et al. (2007) employed self-administrated questionnaires, and the sample population was the managers who worked in high-tech firms in the Taiwan region, while this study used an experimental design with a random sample of regular consumers in mainland China. Besides the methodology, the factors that defined the new product launch effectiveness were also different. The new product launch effectiveness was broken down into sales and communication effects in their study, while this research evaluated it through customers' purchase intention and the level of eWOM. Thus, the findings were likely to vary given the two studies' different measurements, research methodologies, and sample populations.

Furthermore, two additional demographical concerns in this study could potentially make transformational appeal perform better than informational appeal, which is related to gender and age. 72.6% of the participants was females, and 58% fell in the age group of 19-25. Companies often utilize demographic factors to implement communication strategies for the target market (Keshari & Jain, 2016). Fardi (2021) found a significant difference in consumer behavior of men and women when they receive a transformational appeal because

women tend to be more sensitive to emotional phenomena than men. In addition, Jovanović et al. (2017) found that transformational appeal is more effective for women than informational appeal, while informational appeal has a larger effect on men. Therefore, the result of this study showed that new product launch effectiveness was higher in transformational appeal condition than informational one might be influenced by the large proportion of the female population.

As for the influence of age, younger adults consider transformational appeals more convincing than informational appeals. According to McKay-Nesbitt et al. (2011), the youth can recall transformational framed appeals better than informational framed appeals compared to older adults. This argument might be used as one strong reason to support the study's finding that transformational appeal is more effective than informational appeal because the majority of the participants in this study were considered young adults, with which 58% of the participants were between the ages of 19 and 25, and 33% were aged from 26 to 35. This study further performed a two-way MANOVA using message appeal and gender/age as independent variables to verify their influences. However, no significant interaction was found in the effects of gender [F_{PI} (1, 137) = .084, p = .919, F_{EWOM} (1, 137) = 0.640, p = .529], and age [F_{PI} (1, 137) = .008, p = .992, F_{EWOM} (1, 137) = 2.119, p = .124]. It could be explained by the reason that the gender and age were not used as the criteria in the sampling procedure and the sample size varied too much between male and female groups and younger and older groups. Therefore, the studied population could not reflect the significant results.

In terms of the effects of credibility, this study found that participants' perceived credibility of social media platforms has a direct effect on their purchase intention and willingness to engage in eWOM. The extant literature supports the finding, which indicates that people react less positively to information they do not trust, affecting people's purchasing behavior and willingness to share the message (Li and Suh, 2015; Asri and Dwita, 2021). The results also showed that there were no significant differences between people's perceptions of credibility between Douyin and Weibo. This finding aligned with Karlsen and Aalberg (2021) that different social media mediums may have different levels of credibility among individuals. Contrary to the research expectations, there was no significant interaction effect

found between message appeals and the credibility of social media platforms, which means that the credibility of Douyin and Weibo did not moderate the effect of message appeals on new product launch effectiveness (measured by purchase intention and electronic word-of-mouth). This finding can be potentially explained that the sample size was not big enough, and the population's characteristics in this study were too unitary to yield a significant result.

5.2 Practical implications

According to the findings in this study, different types of message appeals can have different effects on people's acceptance of new high-tech consumer products. When introducing a new high-tech consumer product to the public, transformational appeals have been found to have a more significant impact on new product launch effectiveness (measured by purchase intention and willingness to engage in eWOM) than informational appeals. In this case, it is strongly suggested that companies should use transformational appeal rather than informational appeal to communicate the new product. People will feel a particular emotion and connect to the introduced product when the transformational appeal is used, improving the chance of them adopting the new product.

People's purchase intentions and willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth were positively influenced by social media platform credibility when the message was displayed on a social media platform that people trust. To launch the new product, brands could consider utilizing social media platforms with higher levels of credibility. Moreover, this research used a smartphone (one of the high-tech consumer products) as the experimental product. Therefore, it would be more beneficial for high-tech consumer products companies to consider using transformational appeals to communicate the new product to consumers. As this study solely focused on high-tech consumer products sector, the findings and suggestions should be more relevant to marketers who work in that industry.

5.3 Limitations of this research

Various research design and methodology characteristics that may influence the results and interpretations of the findings are referred to as research limitations (Price & Murnan,

2004). There are two critical limitations categories to consider in this study: methodological and researcher perspectives. The first part comes from the standpoint of potential methodological limitations. Only 143 valid respondents were studied in this survey experiment research, with approximately 35 people in each condition. Statistical tests usually expect a bigger sample size. Therefore, the sample population in this study might be judged slightly insufficient for meaningful findings as the limited sample size may not be big enough to represent other groups of individuals, and the statistical power was lower than 0.8. Thus, the results cannot be considered generalizable (USC, 2022).

While survey experiments provide many advantages, it also has some disadvantages that must be addressed. Traditional offline and lab experiments allow the researcher to monitor participants in experiments and ensure high-quality data (Schnabel, 2021). Furthermore, although survey experiments may be able to measure what respondents are willing to say or do, this does not guarantee that people would actually say or do it, as it is difficult to provide participants with realistic settings in which to test their actions. In this study, almost half of the participants did not complete the surveys and were considered invalid responses. This could potentially be assumed that many participants did not engage in the survey experiment in a suitable manner. As a result, the quality of the collected responses may not be rated good enough. A smartphone from Huawei was selected as the new product in the experiment. As Huawei is a well-known brand in China, it is possible that it would influence people's purchase intention and willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth based on their previous perception of the brand Huawei.

The second main limitation category came from the researcher's side. As mentioned in the previous chapter, 72.6 percent of the total sample size were women in this research. The gender issue may also play a significant role in the data collection. The experiment was conducted with online surveys. Researchers have found that men are more likely to respond to online surveys than women if they receive a reminder and the survey is short and precise (Saleh & Bista, 2017; Smith, 2008). In this study, however, most of the responses came from women instead of men. This could be explained by the researcher randomly recruiting people on WeChat, and a large percentage of the researcher's WeChat connections are females. The researcher's friends also sent the experimental survey link and QR code via WeChat;

however, most of the distributions were made by female friends. In addition, the age issue in the analyzed samples should be taken into account in this study frame. According to the data from the results chapter, 58 percent of the participants were between the ages of 19 and 25. This might be due to the researcher being between in this age frame. Based on the gender and age characteristics of this population, it is evident that the studied sample population could not be regarded as a generic representation of all demographic groups for this kind of research. The findings of this study may not be representative of other gender and age groups. Therefore, the results and conclusions from this study should not be applied beyond this limited studied population.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

The recommendations for future research can be broken down into several dimensions. Expanding the number of participants and broadening the gender/age groups of the sample population are highly suggested in order to improve the generalization and validity of the study. In this study, the credibility of social media platforms was found to play a positive effect in affecting people's purchase intentions and electronic word-of-mouth behaviors when the messages were displayed on a perceived credible platform; however, the perceived platform's credibility was not found to have moderating effects in this study. It might be due to the sample population's bias related to age and gender concerns. Thus, to investigate if social media platforms' credibility plays any different roles in introducing a new high-tech consumer product to the public, a larger sample size in the relevant research might produce a different result than the findings of this study. In addition to this, a more diverse sample population might also influence the results of the effectiveness of these two message appeals as gender and age groups are too homogeneous in this study. In future research, considering age, gender, or even educational level as criteria for filtering the population might be meaningful for this research topic.

Second, a high-tech consumer product without indicating a brand name is advised in the future study. It may decrease the likelihood that participants would choose answers based on their prior knowledge and experiences with the brand. Additionally, this study only

investigated new product launch effectiveness with high-tech consumer products; it would be interesting to examine the effects of introducing daily necessity products to the public with informational and transformational appeals. The nature of introducing high-tech consumer products and daily necessities products to the public is significantly distinct because the prices and required prior knowledge of these two product categories vary greatly. For example, in a study by Akbari (2015), the impacts of message appeals on purchase intention with sunscreen products were also explored, and it was discovered that transformational appeal is more influential with sunscreen. Therefore, there is a strong potential that different results will be found in the research uses different products.

Thirdly, this research solely looked at how communication strategies affect the effectiveness of new product launches. However, while launching a new product, there are more strategies to be considered. It would be interesting to investigate how other strategies, including communication strategy, contribute to the effectiveness of new product launches. In addition, this thesis employs purchase intention and electronic word-of-mouth behaviors as indicators to quantify the effectiveness of new product launch, which would be more meaningful in future studies if more variables could be used to measure the new product launch effectiveness. The variables can consider, for example, advertising attitude, market share, product perception, sales effects, and customer acceptance (Akbari, 2015; Lee & Colarelli O'Connor, 2003; Chen et al., 2007; Griffin & Page, 1993). Furthermore, although the survey experiment is suitable for this study due to the nature and context of this research, survey experiments may lower the data quality. Therefore, a more varied experimental design might be undertaken to investigate this research topic better.

Lastly, this study was conducted by targeting Chinese consumers, while the social media platforms that have been used outside of China are different. It would be interesting to conduct research on this topic in other countries or regions with other social media platforms to see whether other factors would influence the effects of informational and transformational appeals on new product launch effectiveness. For example, the United States is a country that has a different cultural background and uses social media platforms; more importantly, many high-tech firms in the U.S launch new products on a frequent basis. The high-tech industry's retail revenue reached 487 billion dollars in 2021 (Anandwala, 2021). It is crucial for high-

tech firms in the U.S to increase the new product launch effectiveness in order to be profitable and dominant in this prosperous industry. Therefore, conducting a similar research in the U.S might have different findings and may also find suitable recommendations to help marketers in the American high-tech firms to launch new products successfully.

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Appendix – Survey questions

Introduction

Dear participant,

Thank you for your time. This survey is being undertaken as part of my master's thesis at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am investigating on "the effects of advertising messages on the effectiveness of new product launch" topic. This survey should take between 3 and 5 minutes to complete. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point for any reason during participating in this survey. Your data will be collected for the use of research only.

By clicking the "I Agree" button below, you are indicating that you agree to participate in the study.

Please contact me at 613941fx@student.eur.nl if you have any questions.

Experimental questions:

Please look at the following picture carefully, and answer the questions:

Purchase intention:

1. You be likely to purchase this smartphone.

2. You will try this smartphone if you have a chance.

3. You would like to purchase this smartphone when you need.

EWOM:

4. After browsing the information, you would like to share it to your contacts.

5. You would speak positively about this smartphone.

6. If somebody asks you for advice on buying a smartphone, you will recommend this smartphone.

Perceived platform credibility:

7. This platform appears to be trustworthy.

8. Your overall believability of the information on this platform is high.

9. The platform represents an organization that will deliver on promises made.

Manipulation check:

Message appeals

As shown in the smartphone advertising image above, you can see a text with a message related to the advertisement. Please answer the following questions:

1. The text in the advertisement contains facts of the product.

2. The text in the advertisement contains technical information about the product.

3. The text in the advertisement spread a certain atmosphere and emotions.

Platform recognition

Given the platform interface that have been shown in the image, which platform do you think it is? Choose one from the answers below:

Weibo, WeChat, Xiaohongshu, Zhihu, Douyin, I don't know.

Demographical questions:

1. How old are you?

2. What is your gender?

3. What is your nationality?

4. Is your mother language Chinese?

5. Do you use Weibo and/or Douyin in your daily life?

End-of-the survey message:

Your response has been received, thank you for your participation!