

## ABSTRACT

LI, AILIN. Key Opinion Leaders on RED and Chinese Fashion Consumers: What is the Connection? (Under the direction of Dr. Yingjiao Xu).

With the exponential growth of online shopping in China, many social media platforms started to combine the engagement of a social network with the efficiency of e-commerce (Ecommerce guide, 2019). Being a platform for opinion sharing related to shopping, lifestyles, and traveling, RED has become a significant information source for consumers' purchase decision making. Following the huge crowd of potential customers, many fashion brands and retailers joined RED. Often, fashion brands partner with key opinion leaders (KOLs) on RED to raise awareness, attract new followers, and contribute to brand credibility. With their own community of followers, KOLs have a strong social power and their opinions and suggestions on social media carry a high degree of credibility and persuasiveness.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of RED KOLs on consumers from the perspectives of eWOM characteristics, KOL characteristics, RED posting characteristics, and consumer characteristics. Particularly, the first objective was to investigate the influence of argument quality, KOL's credibility, and blog design on consumers' information adoption of KOL's posted information on RED. The second objective was to explore the moderating effects of two posting characteristics, including information details and KOL popularity, on consumers' information adoption process. The third objective was to explore the moderating effect of individual differences, including age and fashion involvement, on consumers' information adoption process.

Data were collected from 349 consumers who have at least used RED in the past via an online survey and analyzed using linear regression as well as multi-group regression. Empirical results revealed that argument quality and blog design will positively influence Chinese

consumers' information adoption intention of KOL's posted information on RED, while source credibility has no significant influence on Chinese consumers' information adoption intention of KOL's posted information on RED. Additionally, KOL popularity, information details, fashion involvement and age were all found having moderating effects on consumers' information adoption process. Theoretical and managerial implications were discussed.

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Key Opinion Leaders on RED and Chinese Fashion Consumers: What is the Connection?

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Fang Li and Yang Li. Thank you for your unconditional love and support throughout my Ph.D. work.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background of the study**

Social media provides great opportunities for in-depth interpersonal communications among users (Thielst, 2007). This interactive and voluntary communication enables consumers to express personal opinions and interact with others via linking with others or making friends (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Because consumers tend to trust information more when it is recognized as interpersonal information from credible sources, social media platforms can be a significant information source for decision making (Mourali et al., 2005). From a marketers' perspective, the social media strategy could help marketers communicate and establish relationships with their potential and existing customers (Wang et al., 2016). Social media are widely used in the fashion market as a marketing tool. For instance, luxury brands such as Gucci utilize social media to build the interaction with their customers to increase customers' awareness, engagement, and involvement with the brands (Mohr, 2013).

With the exponential growth of online shopping in China, many social media platforms started to combine the engagement of a social network with the efficiency of e-commerce (Ecommerce guide, 2019). Most of foreign social networks like Google, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are blocked by the government in China. As a result, many Chinese social media platforms emerged in recent years (Tenba group, 2020) and have been heavily used by consumers as well as companies. For example, Sina Weibo, a Chinese version of Twitter, is one of the biggest social media sites in China. With a large and stable user base, an increasing number of companies are using influencer marketing on Weibo for brand awareness and engagement with consumers.

Another successful social media and e-commerce platform in China is an application named RED (also known as Xiaohongshu or Little Red Book). RED allows users to post and share product reviews and their daily outfits via short videos and photos. Not only does RED provide an

opportunity for those already “popular” individuals to cultivate a community of fans on the platform, it also allows the potential for average users of RED to emerge as influential opinion leaders via their posting activities on the platform. Being a platform for opinion sharing related to shopping, lifestyles, and traveling, RED has become a significant information source for consumers’ purchase decision making.

With the continuously changing nature of fashion products, consumers seek inspiration and recommendations on social media (including RED) to assist in their fashion purchase and consumption (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2018). While RED was only introduced in the year of 2013, the number of its active users has increased to over 100 million by the end of September 2020 (Qiangua, 2020). Following the huge crowd of potential customers, a large number of fashion brands and retailers joined RED, including global brands such as Zara and H&M and domestic brands such as Urban Revivo, just as examples. Fashion brands can create an official account to share their own contents and also their e-shop to allow consumers to purchase products directly from the RED application.

Often, fashion brands partner with key opinion leaders (KOLs) on RED to raise awareness, attract new followers, and contribute to brand credibility (Lin et al., 2018). With their own community of followers, KOLs have a strong social power and their opinions and suggestions on social media carry a high degree of credibility and persuasiveness (Zou & Peng, 2019). KOL campaigns have become a very effective strategy in enhancing the reliability of brands and increasing consumers’ desire of the recommended products (Burns, 2021).

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) of KOLs has been a widely investigated topic in recent years. eWOM is defined as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). A considerable number of studies have

been conducted to investigate the influence of eWOM communication on consumers' purchase intention. Nunes et al. (2018) found that the information provided by digital opinion leaders can change the attitudes of followers and influence their intention to purchase the recommended products. In the context of Chinese social media platforms, Meng and Wei (2015) indicated that both KOLs characteristics and KOLs' recommendation characteristics had positive impact on consumers' purchase intention.

Elaboration likelihood model (ELM), a dual process theory of human information processing proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), is a commonly adopted theoretical foundation in eWOM communication studies (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). The ELM states that both information contents and context have impact on the receivers' perceptions of the information. Specifically, depending on the level of recipients' involvement, defined as the personal relevance of the issue to the recipient, persuasion of the communication can take in central vs peripheral routes. The central route occurs when recipients carefully consider the issues presented by the information, while the peripheral route occurs when recipients use simple decision rules to evaluate the message rather than analyzing its content (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). The ELM has been successfully used to explore the influence of online reviews, KOLs and recommendations on consumers attitudes and decision-making process, confirming the differential impacts of the central vs. peripheral routes (Lee et al., 2007; Zhu et al., 2014; Cheng & Ho, 2015; Aghakhani et al., 2020; Yang, 2020). Existing studies suggested that personality traits could influence consumers' information adoption process. Hu and Kim (2018) confirmed the moderating effect of the Big Five personality traits in the relationship between eWOM motivations and eWOM behavior, in that personality traits could strengthen or weaken the relationship between eWOM motivations and eWOM behavior. In the fashion context, research suggested that fashion involvement influences adoption of eWOM. Cheng and Fang (2015) found that readers' fashion involvement positively

related to their adoption of blog's recommendation. While in general fashion product is considered as high involvement product, consumers vary in their involvement level. According to ELM, depending on consumers involvement with the information related issue, different routes will be taken to process information. Therefore, it is expected high vs. low fashion involvement consumers may have different behaviors pertaining to the acceptance of KOLs' eWOM.

## **1.2. Purpose of the Study**

Intrigued by the growing popularity of the RED application in the Chinese market, this study aims to investigate how KOLs on the platform influence Chinese consumers' information adoption process regarding fashion products. Particularly, based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, this study investigates the influence of KOLs on consumers from the perspectives of eWOM characteristics, KOL characteristics, RED posting characteristics, and consumer characteristics.

Specifically, the objectives of this research are outlined as follows:

(1) To investigate the influence of argument quality, KOL's credibility, and blog design on consumers' information adoption of KOL's posted information on RED.

(2) To explore the moderating effects of two posting characteristics, including information details and KOL popularity, on consumers' information adoption process.

(3) To explore the moderating effect of individual differences, including age and fashion involvement, on consumers' information adoption process.

This research could make contributions to both academic and managerial knowledge related to how KOLs influence consumer behavior in the context of a Chinese social media platform-RED. From an academic perspective, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of how eWOM characteristics, KOL characteristics, and RED platform characteristics influence consumers' perceived information adoption of KOLs' eWOM on RED application by utilizing the ELM model.

This research also investigates how posting characteristics and individual differences impact consumers' behavior toward the information provided by the KOLs in the Chinese social media platform context.

In terms of managerial implications, the results of this study could provide an insight for online fashion brands/retailers on how to attract consumers to buy their products by cooperating with KOLs on RED. Social media platforms play an important role in marketing strategy of online retailers. It is essential for fashion retailers to gain a better understanding of KOLs' impact on consumers. Suggestions for online fashion retailers on how to cooperate with KOLs to promote their products are also discussed in this study.

### 1.3. Definition of Key Terms

The following table (Table 1) provides definitions of key terms that are applied throughout the dissertation.

**Table 1.** Definition of Key Terms

Opinion leaders (OL)	Opinion leaders can be defined as individuals who have a great amount of influence on the decision making of other people (Rogers & Cartano, 1962).
Key opinion leaders (KOLs)	Key opinion leaders (KOLs) are individuals who can influence other people's thoughts, attitudes, or behavior, leading them to perform in a certain way at a certain frequency with a large number of followers (Rogers. 1983).
Word of Mouth (WOM)	Word-of-mouth (WOM) refers to the informal communications about the property, usage, or performance of certain goods and services among consumers (Westbrook, 1987).

**Table 1** (continued).

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)	Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication refers to any positive or negative statements made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004).
Argument quality	Argument quality refers to the persuasive strength of the message (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006).
Source credibility	Source credibility refers to the degree to which the information receiver perceives the source as being knowledgeable and being someone the consumer can gain expertise in terms of product knowledge (Ohanian, 1990).
Fashion involvement	Fashion involvement refers to the extent that consumers view the fashion activity as a meaningful and enchanting activity in their life (O'cass, 2004).
Information adoption	In this study, information adoption refers to consumer's intention to follow the KOLs' recommendation to purchase the fashion products.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this literature review is to lay a strong theoretical foundation for the investigation of the influence of argument quality, source credibility, and blog design on Chinese consumers' information adoption intention of fashion products in the context of a Chinese social media platform-RED. There are four main focuses of this literature review: social media platform-RED, key opinion leaders, electronic word of mouth, and elaboration likelihood model. After the literature review was completed, a conceptual framework was proposed.

### **2.1. Social Media Platform-RED**

Social media was defined as “those that facilitate online communication, networking, and/or collaboration” (Russo et al., 2008). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) provided a similarly brief definition of social media as, “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundation of web 2.0 and allow creation and exchange of user created contents”. There are ten different types of social media, including Media sharing, Wikis, Social Network Sites, Blog, Microblogs, Social commerce, Social gaming, Shared work space, Q&A websites, Forum and Review Website (Chui et al., 2012). Social media has been considered by millions of users as an essential part of their daily lives (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Social media provide a great opportunity for consumers to share and express their experience and comments in terms of products, service, and brands (Kozinets et al., 2010) and are deemed the best proper platform for eWOM communication (Kim et al., 2014; Knoll & Proksch, 2015). On social media, users could build their personal user profiles and share their personal information that are composed of personalized texts, pictures and videos. Users can establish and maintain their social network by the interaction with others on social media (Ali Taha et al., 2021). With the great interests of users, social media also provide opportunities for firms and retailers, such as enabling eWOM communication (Teng et al., 2014; Balal et al., 2020), improving brand awareness (de Vries,

Gensler & Leeftang, 2012; Monica & Balaş, 2014; Bilgin, 2018), sharing business information (Lu & Hsiao, 2010), and providing social support for consumers (Ballantine & Stephenson, 2011; Haslam et al., 2018).

Social media websites have changed the way people communicate with one another (Nambisan and Baron, 2007; Wang et al., 2012). Social media has been defined as Internet-based services which create an environment in which people can build their personal profiles and networks while at the same time allowing them to access others' personal profiles and networks (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Another definition was proffered by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as being a group of Internet-based applications which allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Whereas the first definition emphasizes the usage of social media, the second one looks at it using the outputs perspective. In addition to the term "social media websites," the expression "social networking sites" has also been used in order to refer to the same phenomenon by researchers.

Social media websites have become very popular in recent years. Millions of users have integrated these websites into their daily lives (Okazaki, 2009). According to the latest statistics from Alexa.com (2015), there are three primary social media websites (namely, Facebook.com, Youtube.com, and Twitter.com) in the "top ten most visited websites in the world" list. In fact, the users of these websites are not only from the same home country that the company is established in but also come from all around the world. For instance, almost 83% of daily active users of Facebook live outside the US and Canada (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). Due to the growing interest of Internet users, the number of social media websites is still increasing. The latest data shows 90 social media websites with more than one million registered users (Wikipedia, 2015). Moreover, these websites lead users to spend more time with them. Indeed, according to Nielsen's social media report (2012), people spend 20 percent of their online time on social media. In

particular, young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years old spend 21 hours per month on social media.

Social media encourages people to build and maintain their friend's network by means of social or professional interaction (Trusov et al., 2009). For this interaction to take place, all users have their own personal user profiles. These user profiles usually consist of personalized pictures, texts or videos that provide information to other users regarding the profile owner. People can acquire new friends by sending friend requests or "following" them. This is, in essence, how social media websites work for individuals. On the other hand, due to consumers' huge interest in this type of websites, marketers give great importance to them as well. For example, marketers can have official accounts on social media websites and interact with their current and potential customers through the facilities provided by these websites (Alboqami et al., 2015; Casteleyn et al., 2009; Weber, 2009). Furthermore, companies can introduce their products and services on their brand pages. In this sense, social media is popular among companies as well as individuals. The latest research shows that 77% of Fortune 500 companies use Twitter, 70% use Facebook, and 69% use YouTube actively (Barnes et al., 2013).

In terms of the function of connecting people, social media websites look similar at first glance; nevertheless, they have specific characteristic features (Erkan, 2015). For example, the top three most visited social media websites including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter (Alexa.com, 2015) differentiate from each other greatly. Some researchers categorize these websites as networking sites (Facebook), video-sharing sites (YouTube), and microblogs (Twitter) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Facebook is a tremendous milestone in the evolution of social media, even though there were other websites before the creation of Facebook that served the same purpose (e.g., MySpace). Facebook has brought a new perspective to the medium through its interaction-based structure (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012). People use Facebook 'to stay

connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them' (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). Facebook was founded in 2004 and today has 968 million daily active users on average for June 2015; it has 1.49 billion monthly active users as of June 30, 2015 (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). It is obviously one of the leading social media websites that bring billions of people together.

YouTube, on the other hand, is a leading social networking website for posting, watching, and sharing videos (Liu-Thompkins and Rogerson, 2012). Recent data show that YouTube has more than 1 billion users with 300 hours of video being uploaded to YouTube every minute (YouTube Statistics, 2015). Besides uploading videos, YouTube also allows users to set up personal profiles, subscribe to others' "channels," and to post, view, like/dislike and comment just as other social media websites do (Smith et al., 2012). Users can be both individuals and companies and are able to create their own channels on YouTube. In addition to videos for fun, users can also create brand-related videos; the "unboxing" of recent products, footages from company-based events, or amateur commercials are some examples of the types of videos being uploaded (Pace, 2008; Smith et al., 2012). These brand-related videos created by consumers can quickly spread through the Internet and reach other consumers. According to Ertimur and Gilly (2012), these consumer-generated videos stimulate more engagement than marketer-generated videos. Any positive or negative information could influence thousands or even millions of peoples' views about the company or products referenced in their videos.

Twitter is another type of social media website called microblog. It allows users to read and share short texts, pictures, videos, or web links (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011) and has become very popular amongst Internet users. According to the latest statistics, Twitter has 316 million monthly active users with 500 million tweets being sent every day (Twitter, 2015). Twitter has gained great interests from people from across the whole society. In addition, celebrities use Twitter to stay

connected with their followers, or fans. One of the distinctive features of Twitter is that users are only able to post within the 140 character-limit. Character limitation makes sharing content easier and quicker in Twitter. Users can also share their ideas by simply “retweeting” others’ tweets. The main features of the contents of microblogs are being short, instantaneous, and requiring subscriptions to receive new posts (Jansen et al., 2009), just as it is in Twitter. Due to their consisting of short messages, tweets are not only easy to write but also easy to read. This convenience allows people to reach more opinions made by customers regarding brands, products, and services that they are interested in buying. Based on an analysis of 26 million tweets, Bazaarvoice (2012) found that the number of tweets containing brand names has increased by 113% from 2011 to 2012, while the overall number of tweets have increased by 143%. These results demonstrate that eWOM conversations have an important place on Twitter.

In China, social media applications are an even more integral part of everyday life than anywhere else in the world. As Google, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter are all blocked by China’s firewalls, a large number of domestic social media alternatives emerge to satisfy the need for online platforms and social networks (SEO Agency China, 2020). The Chinese tech giant Tencent with its products, WeChat and QQ, has almost the same revenue and number of monthly active users as Facebook – the largest social network in the world, made 70.7 billion USD in 2019 (Tenba group, 2020).

Chinese culture is very different from Western culture. Chinese consumers display different behaviors in the marketplace comparing to their western counterparts. For instance, compared with millennials in the Western countries, Chinese millennials rely more heavily on the Internet for socialization and entertainment as most of them do not have any siblings (Wang, 2017). According to Weibo (2017), millennials represent approximately 66.8% of all users in China and their behavior on social media sites already highlights some differences to Western consumers. For instance,

Weibo users are more likely to post positive messages than Twitter users (Gao et al., 2012). Furthermore, while only 41.8% of US millennials create original content on their social media accounts, 76.6% of Chinese millennials would like to create and share their own content on social media (eMarketer, 2017). This shows that brands need to adapt their social media and e-commerce strategies in order to better target Chinese consumers. Simply transferring their existing strategies on Western social media sites to Chinese social media platform will not be working.

Chinese social media users love being online and are very tech affine (Tenba group, 2020). They use their favorite applications like WeChat for everything - from connecting with friends to shopping, and from payment to booking appointments, gaming, and more. More than 840 million online users in 2019 in the Chinese market (compared to 300 million online users in the US) trust their peers more than the regular advertisements (Chernavina, 2019). China is the biggest social media market worldwide with close to 350 million current social media users (Statista, 2021). Chinese social media landscape is unique because of the platforms rising and falling on a fast timescale, and constantly evolves with the emergence of new players every year to keep up with the high demand (Chan, 2019). Global brands looking to build their presence in the Chinese market need to keep a close eye on what's happening with these platforms.

According to Chiu et al. (2012), there are two main types of Chinese social media, which are microblogging (e.g., Wechat and Weibo, analogous to Twitter) and social networking sites (e.g., Renren and RED, analogous to Facebook). Weibo allows users to express themselves with no word limit with photos or videos. As of April 2018, the number of monthly active Weibo users exceeded 390 million, an increase of 67%, compared to the previous year (Statista, 2018).

Different from Weibo, RED created in 2013 is a type of social networking sites (Qiangua, 2020). Users can share their lives using videos, pictures, and notes. They can also search for their desired products to obtain information on product performance and usage, as well as product

evaluation to help them make purchasing decisions. By the end of September 2020, the amount of the users in RED application have increased to over 100 million, with 85 million monthly active users, generating more than 3 billion posts a day. The top three product categories on RED postings are fashion, cosmetics, and food. Users' attention toward travel, technology, and education also increases over the years. The target users of the RED platform are getting younger, with a major target group of users aged 18-34. The RED platform is dominated by women, accounting for 88.37% of its users. Urban white-collar workers and elites are their main user groups, with strong consumer power and strong consumer demand (Qiangua, 2020). RED was one of the most popular applications in China in 2019 for e-commerce, exciting a female audience, in particular (McLeod, 2020). Fashion and beauty lifestyle products are heavily posted among regular RED users and popular influencers. Restaurant and travel services reviews are also populated among the users. RED is becoming one of the most trusted social shopping platforms in China.

Several factors contribute to the success of RED. First, the large number of young users are very loyal to RED. The registered users on RED are now more than 250 million and monthly active users are 85 million. More than 70% of its users are those born in the post-90s (Nanjing Marketing Group, 2019). Second, breakthroughs of the information sharing mode, i.e., the combination of text with videos, make it a great attraction to its users, who are looking for information as well as evaluation of products and services. Third, RED facilitates a very active online community, where consumers feel welcomed and motivated to share their experience and even their daily life. Therefore, RED has become a very important step for many Chinese consumers' pre-purchase journey (Daxue consulting, 2020).

Recently, RED has become a rising star in the live streaming field. It allows users to share their life with picture notes and video notes (Nanjing Marketing Group, 2019). Video notes are one of the main venues for users on RED to share their thoughts on products they want to recommend

to their followers. In the era of using video notes to share lives, a large number of influential vloggers have been emerging. At the same time, because of its popularity, RED also attracted many Chinese celebrities and some well-known bloggers from other platforms to join in.

According to 2021 RED Brand Research Report (2021), beauty and fashion are the categories that users focused most on RED application. It shows that over 90% RED users search for recommendation and reviews of products before their purchase. Fashion products sold on RED include women's, men's, and beauty products. Consumers can also purchase well-matched outfits suggested by the fashion key opinion leaders on RED. There are millions of posts regarding fashion, including recommendations of fashion products, influencers' daily outfits, and product review. Fashion consumers could browse any posts provided by influencers on RED and decide which recommended products to purchase. RED has become an important source for Chinese consumers' pre-purchase information research. Some people simply use RED for "window shopping", searching for fashion inspiration for things like clothing and hairstyles. Many fashion companies run their own brand accounts on RED to attract potential consumers. For example, luxury brand Louis Vuitton has been very successful in breaking into the Chinese market on RED with 863,5000 of followers to their account. On their other hand, fashion brands have been cooperating with fashion key opinion leaders, who maintain a large number of followers on the RED, to promote their products.

## **2.2. Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs)**

Rogers and Cartano (1962) defined opinion leadership as "the degree to which an individual is able informally to influence other individuals' attitudes or overt behaviors in a desired way with relative frequency". Opinion leaders are described by Katz and Lazarsfield (1955) as "individuals who lead in influencing others' options". Flynn et al. (1994) provided a marketing perspective as follows: "as consumers frequently rely upon other people as sources of information, in addition to

advertisements and media, opinion leaders exert a disproportionate amount of influence on the decisions of other consumers”.

Key opinion leaders (KOLs) are individuals who can influence other people’s thoughts, attitudes, or behavior, leading them to perform in a certain way at a certain frequency with a large number of followers (Rogers. 1983). KOLs can strongly impact the decision-making process of others (Carpenter & Sherbino, 2010), and play an important role in the environment of new media (Turcotte et al., 2015). By expressing their opinions in product reviews and sharing pictures or videos containing products or services (Bernritter et al., 2016), KOLs are increasingly recognized as powerful individuals who affect audience attitudes via personal blogs, tweets, and other social media platforms (Freberg et al., 2011). KOLs build a large network of followers, and followers’ trust and emotional identification endow KOLs with marketing potential. Based on their expertise, enthusiasm, and other attributes (Bakshy et al., 2011), KOLs act as capable marketers, exerting strong influence over potential consumers (Brown and Hayes, 2008).

Studies on opinion leaders commonly focused on three aspects: who transmits the information, how the information is transferred, and what information is transferred. In their study of the diffusion of technological innovations, Cho et al. (2012) suggested that opinion leaders could act as information transmission agents for risk reduction. The WOM of opinion leaders have an impact on the attitudes or behaviors of their opinion followers (Rogers, 1983; Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Haron et al. 2016). Li et al. (2013) suggested four distinguishing features of opinion leaders: expertise, novelty, influence, and activity. Opinion leaders transmit information through communication channels, usually through frequent and informal discussions in social networks (Turcotte et al., 2015; Rogers, E, 1983). Social media websites, which are relatively new eWOM platforms, have brought a new aspect to eWOM, through enabling users to communicate with their existing networks. Nowadays, consumers are able to easily exchange opinions and experiences

about products or services with their friends and acquaintances on social media (Chu & Kim, 2011; Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010). Opinion leaders are perceived as more credible and persuasive than mass media or marketing campaigns by consumers (Turcotte, et al. 2015; Solomon & Michael, 2017).

KOLs have been found to have a great impact on consumers' purchase intention (e.g. Hsu et al., 2013; Meng & Wei, 2015; Li et al., 2018; Chetioui et al., 2020). Hsu et al. (2013) found that consumers' attitudes toward fashion KOLs have a positive influence on their purchase intention of products recommended by the KOLs in the context of online shopping. In their study of the effects of KOL on Chinese consumers' purchase intention via social media, Li et al. (2018) found that Micro-blog KOLs could increase the brand trust in the minds of consumers, thereby affecting consumer's behavior more effectively.

With the rapid development of the e-commerce, KOLs play a vital role in fashion e-commerce (Fanke & Zou, 2019). Since fashion KOLs are pioneers who are willing to adopt new styles and share information about new products, they are more sensitive to changes in fashion than other consumers. Fashion followers do not buy a new-style product until the later stages of fashion adoption, where the fashion has been filtered through social media and advertising (Zou and Peng, 2019). Fashion KOLs are defined as the creative communicators, or the individuals who can persuade others to buy and wear new fashion products (Cho & Workman, 2015). According to the study of Casaló et al. (2020), originality and uniqueness are crucial factors for a user is to be perceived as a fashion KOL on Instagram. Fashion KOLs can influence their followers by sharing their knowledge about new fashion styles and by interpreting and passing over the new fashion trends with attractive implications (Workman & Freeburg 2009; Kim & Hong, 2011). In their study of the influence of fashion opinion leaders on fashion market, Zou and Peng (2019) found that fashion KOLs could narrow the distance and build up trust with their followers, which in turn

increases the purchase conversion rate. In addition, it was that the recommendations by KOLs are the second largest preferred source, only next to fashion shows, for consumers to learn about fashion news.

Fashion marketers have been strategically advertising their products and services through fashion KOLs (Li & Du, 2011). In the context of the information explosion, the path for consumers from contacting and understanding products to purchasing products is rapidly shortening (Zeng, 2021). The unique advantage of fashion KOLs is that they can better convey product information to consumers and become an important bridge connecting brands and users. Consumers trust more on the information provided by fashion KOLs as KOLs are perceived as authoritative in this field (Xu & Wu, 2021).

### **2.3. Electronic Word of Mouth of KOLs**

In the context of marketing, word-of-mouth (WOM) is defined as the informal communications about the property, usage, or performance of certain goods and services among consumers (Westbrook, 1987). WOM is widely regarded as one of the most influential factors affecting consumer behavior (Daugherty and Hoffman, 2014). This influence is especially important with intangible products that are difficult to evaluate prior to consumption, such as tourism or hospitality. Consequently, WOM is considered the most important information source in consumers' buying decisions (Litvin et al., 2008; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012) and intended behavior.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication refers to any positive or negative statements made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004). The strategy of WOM communication became easier and faster via the Internet (Trusov et al., 2009). Also, eWOM communications are more convenient as consumers can get connected with the internet at any time via mobile devices. Consumers can review others' comments and recommendation of products, services, or the brands to help them

make purchasing decisions. For marketers, eWOM provides a cost-effective way to advertise their products and service (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). For example, the customers most satisfied with a product or service tend to become loyal representatives via positive eWOM (Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2011), which can yield highly competitive advantages for establishments, businesses, or sellers, especially smaller ones, which tend to have fewer resources. In addition, eWOM provides an opportunity for consumers and marketers to directly communicate with each other, which can provide benefits for both consumers and marketers (Erkan & Evans, 2014). However, negative comments will spread fast also among a large number of consumers as well (Fang & Ben-Miled, 2017). While it might be challenging for marketers to fully take advantage of eWOM, especially in the situations of negative or inaccurate eWOM, the importance of eWOM can never be too emphasized.

The Internet has facilitated eWOM communications through a variety of platforms. However, there is one major difference between social media and other eWOM platforms. Before the advent of social media websites, eWOM only occurred between people who did not know one another. In other words, users were talking with “strangers” (i.e., anonymous people) on the Internet. For this reason, understanding the reliability of comments was difficult (Schindler and Bickart, 2005). Consumers searching for information on the Internet could reach many product or brand recommendations but did not know how trustworthy the information was. The only strong tool for determining the reliability of the information was the volume of similar comments (Park et al., 2007). With the advent of social networking sites, however, people started communicating using their identities on the Internet. Although eWOM still continues among anonymous people through online reviews, social media has brought with it a new, pioneering perspective in that it allows eWOM to take place amongst people who already know each other.

Consumers have found a great opportunity for conveying and discussing their opinions and experiences regarding products, services, and brands with their friends and acquaintances (Kozinets et al., 2010; Moran & Muzellec, 2014). Therefore social media websites are considered absolutely appropriate platforms for eWOM (Canhoto & Clark, 2013; Erkan & Evans, 2014; Kim et al., 2014; Knoll & Proksch, 2015; Toder-Alon et al., 2014). In fact, many studies show that consumers increasingly apply social media for the purpose of acquiring information about unfamiliar brands (Baird and Parasnis, 2011; Barreda et al., 2015; Goodrich and de Mooij, 2014; Naylor et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014). Furthermore, since people are more likely to use social media accounts with their real names rather than nicknames, the anonymity matter has been reduced or resolved. This critical feature of social media transposes the feeling of providing offline WOM to the Internet. Communicating eWOM on social media sites, thus, may be more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than eWOMs communicated on other online platforms.

Many researchers investigated the antecedents and consequences of eWOM (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014; Nyilasy, 2005). For the antecedents of eWOM, researchers focused on the motivations of consumers' engagement with eWOM (Cheng & Ho, 2015; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Filieri, 2015; Gunawan & Huarng, 2015; Liang et al., 2013). For example, in their study of consumers buying behavior on social media, Erkan and Evans (2016) found that argument quality, information credibility, consumers' needs of information and attitude towards information will influence perceived eWOM usefulness, which in turn will influence consumers' adoption of the eWOM.

For the consequences of eWOM, researchers focused on the effects of eWOM (Coursaris et al., 2018), such as the influence on brand attitude and purchase intention (Sparks & Browning, 2011). For example, in the study of consumers' purchasing behavior of smartphones, Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) founded that positive eWOM via social media platforms could positively affect

brand attitude and purchase intention of the products. Considering the growth of internet usage and its important role in the field of e-commerce, the eWOM phenomenon has been changing people's behavior and decisions (Lee et al., 2008). People count on other users' opinions and information; they sometimes even make offline decisions based on information acquired online (Lee et al., 2008). Compared with other types of corporate messages, it was proved that eWOM is more trusted among online users since it "directly communicate what are perceived to be consumers' own experiences" (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). KOLs are one of the main sources of eWOM because of their high credibility and trustworthiness among the followers (Shi & Wojnicki, 2014).

There is great amount of literature on the influence of eWOM of KOLs on consumer behaviors. For example, Hsu et al. (2013) investigated the influence of influencers' recommendation on customers' online shopping intentions and found that influencers' recommendation will influence customers' purchasing intention of the recommended products. Consumers are willing to follow the recommendations to purchase the products. Therefore, it was suggested that influencers' eWOM could be a promising marketing strategy to increase sales. In their study of online reviews, Zhu et al. (2014) found that reviews written by KOLs received more helpful votes than others, suggesting a stronger influence of KOLs eWOM on consumers. According to Nunes et al. (2018), the eWOM of KOLs can change the followers' attitudes toward the recommended products and influence their purchase intention of the recommended products.

In the context of consumers' purchase behavior toward fashion, research found that with the growth of social networking sites, eWOM can significantly shape consumers' purchase intention of fashion products. For example, according to Saleem and Ellahi (2017), customers are willing to read the positive and negative reviews of other users' experience of fashion products, which in turn could influence their purchase intention of fashion products. The findings of this study confirm that factors that motivate consumers to engaging themselves in eWOM are homophily, trustworthiness,

informational influence, expertness and high fashion involvement that enhance eWOM and purchase intention of fashion products in social networking sites. In addition, in the context of a Chinese social media platform, Bilal et al. (2021) found that the essential elements of eWOM will have impact on consumers' online purchase intention of fashion products. The findings of this study demonstrate that social link is the main driver influencing individual decision-making in the social commerce field. A highly positive and substantial connection extends from social link to affective attitude, eWOM intention, social support, and online purchase intention of fashion products.

Since the online social networks have been rapidly developing in recent years, eWOM has become a powerful and attractive marketing tool in China. However, to use eWOM effectively, marketers should first identify the opinion leaders in these networks. In the eWOM marketing, opinion leaders, who usually have more social relationships and higher social positions, can deliver product information, give personal suggestions and recommendations, as well as supplementing professional knowledge. It is beneficial for fashion companies to promote their products and services through fashion opinion leaders (Li & Du, 2011).

Some previous studies employed Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explain the adoption of eWOM. (Ayeh, 2015; Elwalda et al., 2016; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Yang, 2013). TAM is a widely accepted theory, proposed by Davis (1989), which identifies the behavioral issues of users in the acceptance of new technologies. While TAM is a useful first step in understanding how behavioral intentions toward adopting a message are formed, it was not designed to the information context (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). TAM mostly focuses on the individual usage of a computer and disregards the essential social processes of information adoption (Riffai et al., 2012). Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is also widely adopted to investigate consumer's information adoption process. The ELM describes how individuals are persuaded, which varies depending on the extent

they are willing to be engaged in the persuasive elaboration (Wang, 2015). This theory is used to explain the persuasive power of eWOM among consumers (Filiari and McLeay, 2013) and show how different consumer perspectives deal with the information (Li, 2013). ELM states that there are many processes of attitude change that move along the elaboration continuum (Petty and Briñol, 2014).

#### **2.4. Elaboration Likelihood Model**

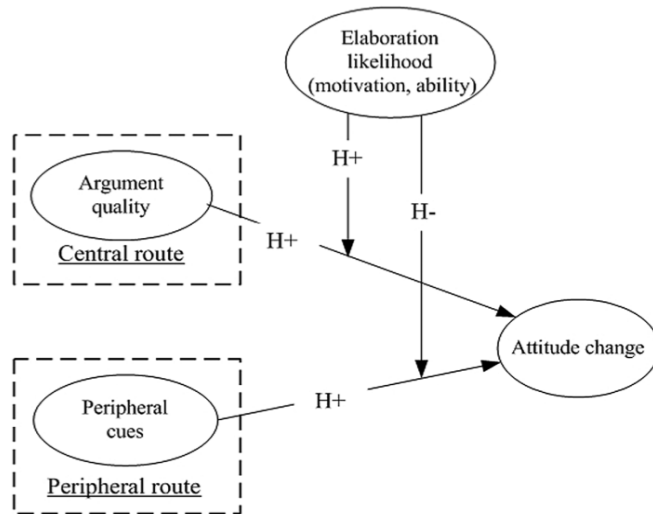
Communication plays a very important role in shaping consumer's attitude (Johnson et al., 2005). There is considerable literature on the relationship between persuasion of communication and attitude, such as theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962), consistency theory (Abelsen, 1983) and others. Aiming at addressing factors and process for communication-induced attitude change, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) provides a general framework for organizing, categorizing, and understanding the basic processes underlying the effectiveness of persuasive communications. The ELM argues that when a person encounters some form of communication, they can process this communication with varying degrees of elaboration, ranging from a low degree of thought (low elaboration) to a high degree of thought (high elaboration (Kruglanski, et al., 2012). Factors that contribute to elaboration includes different motivations and abilities (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Depending on the degree of elaboration, the recipient will take one of the two routes to process the information: the central route and the peripheral route. In the central route, the recipient processes arguments related to information, and it entails efforts and time spent on information scrutinizing. The peripheral route more likely occurs as a result of some simple cues in the persuasion context, such as source credibility (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

There are four components within ELM: argument quality (central route), peripheral cues (peripheral route), changed attitude and the elaboration likelihood. The central route refers to the

essence of arguments within the message, while the peripheral route refers to issues which are indirectly related to the essence of the message (Cheung et al., 2008; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Shu and Scott, 2014). Argument quality determines the degree of informational influence when an individual is willing to cognitively elaborate on a persuasive communication. It is the critical variable of informational influence under conditions of high elaboration likelihood. For the peripheral route, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) indicated that many different variables could serve as peripheral cues related to the information, such as source credibility, and these variables may affect attitudes by modifying information processing under certain conditions. Changed attitude reflects the consequence of the informational influence in the context of persuasive communication. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) defined the attitude as general evaluations people hold in regard to the objects and issues, which affected by a variety of behavioral, affective, and cognitive experiences. The degree of influence of the two routes on the changed attitude depends on the elaboration likelihood. In the context of persuasion, elaboration refers to the extent to which an individual thinks about the issue-relevant arguments contained in a message. In the condition with high elaboration likelihood, central route will be the critical variable of informational influence. While in the low elaboration likelihood condition, peripheral route will be the critical variable of informational influence. ELM suggests that the information receiver's ability and motivation to process information are two factors influencing the degree of elaboration. When conditions promote people's motivation and ability to engage in issue-relevant thinking, the "elaboration likelihood" is said to be high, and vice versa. One determining factor of consumers' elaboration level is information receiver's ability to understand the information (Ratneshwar & Chaiken, 1991). Another factor is the information receiver's motivation levels. High levels of motivation to get involved tend to lead to increased elaboration on the information which are more likely to be influenced by central route. While those that are not involved will be less likely to engage in elaboration and more likely to be influenced by

peripheral routes (Petty et al., 1981). Figure 1 depicts the relationships suggested in the ELM model.



**Figure 1.** Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is a widely adopted model in examining the influence of eWOM on consumer behaviors in various contexts from advertising (Lien, 2011) to online review (Yang et al., 2021). In the context of online review, Zhu et al. (2014) investigated the helpfulness of online opinion leaders' review of hotel on Yelp by using ELM. Liu and Ji (2018) utilized ELM to explore the influence of online reviews on Chinese consumers' purchase intention in the context of online group buying behavior. Mousavizadeh et al. (2020) adopted ELM to examine how the peripheral and central cues of online customer review influenced online customer reviews performance. Therefore, in this study, ELM was adopted to investigate consumers' information adoption intention toward KOL's eWOM.

#### **2.4.1. Central Route - Argument Quality**

According to ELM, central route occurs from a person's careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information presented in support of an advocacy (Petty &

Cacioppo, 1986). The ELM identifies argument quality as the critical variable of informational influence under conditions of high elaboration likelihood. The model suggests that the stronger the argument quality, the stronger the influence of the persuasion. Literature on eWOM confirmed this relationship in that the quality of online product reviews had a positive influence on consumers' purchase intentions of the mentioned products (Lee & Shin, 2014; Park et al., 2007). Other studies also demonstrated the positive relationship between the argument quality of the information and consumers' perceived usefulness of the information received (McKnight & Kacmar, 2006).

Argument quality of the information, also referred to as information quality, has a variety of dimensions in different contexts. According to Doll and Torkzadeh (1988), in the end-user computing context, the argument quality was basically measured in terms of accuracy, format, timeliness, and information contents. With the development of online shopping, researchers started to extend the existing dimensions of argument quality. DeLone and McLean (2003) argued that the following measures of argument quality were most relevant in the e-commerce studies: relevance, accuracy, understandability, completeness, dynamism, currency, variety, and personalization. In the context of social media, Cheung et al. (2008) used four dimensions to measure the argument quality in the context of online customer communities, including timeliness, accuracy, relevance, and comprehensiveness. In their study of KOL's influence on a Chinese Social platform, Sina Weibo, Li et al. (2018) used consistency, frequency, and visual cue to measure argument quality. RED is an image and video-oriented consumer community, comprehensiveness, timeliness, relevance, and visual attractiveness were used as the four dimension of argument quality in this study.

### **Comprehensiveness**

The comprehensiveness dimension of argument quality refers to the completeness of the information. In their study of news website, Sullivan (1999) suggested that the more detailed the

information, the wider the breadth of user categories and the more user-orientation, and thus resulting in a greater likelihood of user acquisition and retention. Similarly, in their study of online review, Cheung et al. (2008) stated that the more comprehensive the messages are, the higher the perceived information usefulness of the message.

### **Relevance**

Relevance of the information refers to the extent to which information is appropriate for the consumer needs (Chai et al., 2009). Nah and Davis (2002) pointed out that internet users want to find their needed information quickly with less effort. According to Celsi & Olson (1988), perceived relevance of information places an important role in generating positive impact on information effectiveness in behavioral areas. In addition, consumers are more likely to show a positive attitude toward information when it includes relevant products (Trampe et al., 2010). Previous research also showed that the perceived relevance of information could increase consumers' intention to purchase recommended products (Pavlou & Stewart, 2000).

### **Timeliness**

Timeliness of information concerns whether the information is timely, current, and up to date (Cheung et al., 2008). Doll and Torkzadeh (1988) proposed that in online environment, the timeliness of the eWOM information is one of the most crucial factors that influence perceived quality of products. The identification of timeliness is especially important because acquiring timely information and content was found to be the most common motivation for interacting with users via social media (Rohm et al., 2013). According to Madu and Madu (2002), website can provide expected performance and add value to users when the update is timely. In the study of Cheung et al. (2008), it was proved that the higher the timeliness of information, the higher the usefulness perceived by consumers. In the context of fashion, Fu et al. (2011) argued that the

influence of eWOM information timeliness on consumer trust is stronger when buying fashion products compared with buying functional products.

### **Visual Attractiveness**

In addition to verbal information, consumers commonly seek visual information when purchasing products. Visual information (e.g., pictures, photos, videos, etc.) refers to pictorial representation of a product (Kim and Lennon, 2008). Internet shopping sites usually presents product information in a combination of visual and verbal forms to enhance consumers' cognitive elaboration and comprehensiveness of products. Starch (1966) found that advertisements with photos were easier to recognize and remember over time. Kisielius and Sternthal (1984) postulated that the information presented pictorially stimulates more cognitive elaboration and thus results in the development of more storage locations and pathways in the memory, which in turn increases the likelihood of the information being retrieved in later recall tasks. Most previous studies have focused on visual information in traditional media or internet shopping sites (Im et al., 2010; Kim and Lennon, 2008; Kisielius and Sternthal, 1984; Mitchell and Olson, 1981; Park et al., 2005; Then and DeLong, 1999), while very few have addressed its impact on eWOM. In the previous studies, the attractiveness of the fashion clothing images has been evaluated, based on the ability to draw consumers' attention, interest, and in return their engagement (Di et al., 2014). According to Di et al. (2014), visual attractiveness is important in fashion e-commerce. In addition, in the study of a Chinese social media platform, Li et al. (2018) found that visual attractiveness has significant influence on the perceived value and trust of the products.

#### **2.4.2. Peripheral Route - Source Credibility**

According to ELM, peripheral route occurs as a result of some simple cues in the persuasion context that induced change without necessitating scrutiny of the true merits of the information presented (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), such as source credibility. Source credibility

refers to the degree to which the information receiver perceives the source as being knowledgeable and being someone the consumer can gain expertise in terms of product knowledge (Ohanian, 1990). According to Desarbo and Harshman (1985), high source credibility could improve the persuasiveness of the information. Source credibility can be used to reflect the influencer's positive features that can influence the follower's adoption of the information (Pashaei, 2020). In the study of users' purchase intention regarding product recommended by influencers (Pashaei, 2020), three dimensions of source credibility were adopted, including attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness. Previous research confirmed the role of source credibility as peripheral route in the information acceptance model. According to Sussman and Siegal (2003), source credibility has a positive impact on users' perceived usefulness of the information in the context of computer-mediated communication. Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2006) also confirmed the positive impact of source credibility on the perceived usefulness of information in the context of information technology. Ohanian (1990) proposed that expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness are the three main factors that can cover all definitions of source credibility. In this study, three KOLs were selected for participants to review and answer the questions. It cannot be confirmed that the participants have followed that KOL before. Therefore, trustworthiness was not investigated in this study, only expertise and attractiveness were selected to measure the source credibility.

### **Source Expertise**

According to Andersen and Clevenger (1963), a source that demonstrates expertise is more persuasive than one that does not. It was also proved that individuals tend to agree more with the opinions of experts than with those of non-experts (Horai et al., 1974). The Heuristic Systematic model defines expertness as a persuasion cue that triggers individuals to use cognitive heuristics such as "statements by experts can be trusted" (Chaiken, 1979; Ratneshwar & Chaiken, 1991). In the context of marketing, Martensen et al. (2018) found that expertise enhanced the persuasiveness

of a fashion brand influencer. However, Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) failed to demonstrate that beauty influencers' expertness had an impact on the perceived influence or the influence to purchase, although it was marginally significant if consumers had particular low expertise they depended strongly on the influencer's expertise.

### **Source Attractiveness**

Attractiveness is defined in terms of how likeable or physically attractive the influencer is to the audience (Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2016). Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019) constructed an extended source credibility framework and confirmed that followers consider attractiveness as one of the important characteristics of influencers in the context of social media. Kang and Choi (2016) suggested attractiveness as one of the primary factors of credibility of influencers. Referring to Wang and Yang (2010), attractiveness of influencers can be defined by their physical appearance and beauty. Furthermore, there was a tendency of young consumers, who are primary followers of KOLs, seeing social media and KOLs as more positive for social and personal benefits (Ghazisaeedi, 2012). Zhu et al. (2014) utilized ELM and investigated the helpfulness of the hotel reviews on Yelp. Reviewer attractiveness was used as one of the peripheral cues and was shown that it has a positive influence on the helpfulness of the review.

### **2.4.3. Peripheral Route – Blog design**

Prior study suggested that the complexity of a message led audience members to use different aspects of message content such as: type of data or rhetorical argumentation, number of arguments, argument rigor or vividness, and use of exemplars or anecdotes to justify message credibility (Slater and Rouner, 1996). In eWOM communication, consumers are now able to convey their messages through vivid visual information. 46 percent of internet users upload photos to a web site so they can share them with others online (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2010). A blog can be personal, hosted by a third party, or hosted for business purposes. A personal

blog, an ongoing diary or commentary of an individual, is the traditional and most common form of blogs. For business purposes, blogs are used internally to enhance the communication and culture in a corporation or externally for marketing, branding or public relations purposes. However, no matter whether the blogs are hosted by businesses or third parties, the information that KOLs provide will influence the contents (texts and pictures) in blogs. It is crucial for KOLs to provide better tools (vivid visuals) to connect more easily with their peers and pass along messages.

#### **2.4.4. Changed Attitude - Information adoption**

The ELM model predicts the influence of various factors on changed attitude under different levels of elaboration likelihood. In the study of Shankar et al. (2020), they adopted ELM to examine the influence of eWOM on the adoption of mobile banking. Mobile banking adoption intention was used as the independent variable, reflecting the consequence of changed attitude. In the study of Sussman and Siegal (2003), the mediating effect of information usefulness between the changed attitude and the constructs of central route and peripheral route was examined and confirmed. Previous studies have confirmed the role of information usefulness in the context of online communities (Zhu et al., 2016) and social media (Erkan & Evans, 2016). In the study of Erkan and Evans (2016), it was examined that argument quality and information credibility will influence the usefulness of eWOM information, which in turn influence the adoption of eWOM information.

Information usefulness refers to the user's perception that using the new information will enhance their performance (Bailey and Pearson, 1983; Cheung et al., 2008; Erkan & Evans, 2016). It is an essential predictor of behavioral intention in the information acceptance process. Previous studies have shown that information usefulness has a positive influence on consumers' information adoption intention (Cheung et al., 2008; Lee & Koo, 2012). In their study of online product reviews, Lee and Koo (2015) found that perceived information usefulness was a main

predictor of consumers' purchase intention of reviewed products. In the context of online customer communities, Cheung et al. (2008) found that the perceived usefulness of a review has a significant impact on consumers' intention to follow with a review. In addition, consumers who think the information is useful will be more likely to adopt and use the information to make purchases (Nabi & Hendricks, 2003). Especially for social media, since consumers have access to a great amount of information from the online key opinion leaders (Chu & Kim, 2011); consumers might have greater intention to purchase the product mentioned by the opinion leaders when they find the information useful.

## **2.5. Posting Characteristics**

### **2.5.1. KOL Popularity**

Influencers are generally distinguished based on their number of followers, ranging from nano influencers with several hundreds of followers, to mega influencers with more than a million followers (Boerman 2020; Campbell and Farrell 2020). According to the 'popularity principle' on social media, quantity as expressed in terms of likes, friends, or followers has value, because the larger the influencer's network, the larger the reach of a message (Van Dijck 2013). Consumers also tend to use number of friends or followers as a heuristic cue for judging the merits of the source and message content (e.g., Djafarova and Rushworth 2017; Jin and Phua 2014; Utz 2010). In line with these observations, in their study of comparing user responses to Instagram influencers with a moderate number of followers (2100) vs a high number of followers (21,200), De Veirman, et al. (2017) found that influencers with a high number of followers were perceived as more popular and more likeable. In addition, in earlier work focusing on traditional celebrities, Jin and Phua (2014) demonstrated that consumers were more willing to buy a product endorsed by a celebrity on Twitter when this person had a high number of followers, comparing to a low number of followers.

Research findings thus seem to imply that influencers with a large follower base are more successful product endorsers. Kay et al (2020) confirmed in their study that an influencer Instagram post with a high number of Likes resulted in higher intentions to purchase the endorsed product from the followers, comparing to posts with a low number of Likes. Although a large reach seems intuitively appealing, the effects of follower count may not be as straightforward as they seem. Dutch market research showed that consumers nowadays are more likely to trust product endorsements of influencers that operate on a smaller scale, such as nano and micro influencers, who tend to have a more devoted follower base than macro and mega influencers (Reputatiefabriek 2019), which is also acknowledged by influencer marketing agencies (e.g., Mooitheagency, 2021). In addition, Westerman et al. (2012) showed that both too many and too few followers can negatively affect people's perceptions of a social media account, as compared to a moderate number of followers. Because of these mixed findings, one of objectives of this study is to explore the effect of number of followers on consumers' information adoption processes in the RED context.

### **2.5.2. Information Details**

There are varying degrees of product related details on RED postings, with some only covering very basic product information and other with very detailed product information as well usage recommendations. The added depth of information can help the decision process by increasing the consumer's confidence in the decision (Jiang and Benbasat, 2004). According to previous research, the understandability of a review text (e.g., a product review) is directly related to its qualitative characteristics, such as readability and length (Korfiatis et al., 2012). On RED, reviews with more information often include more product details, and more details about how and where the product was used in specific contexts (Pemarathna, 2019). In the context of online customer review, quantity of comments can reduce product quality uncertainty and allow the

consumers to picture themselves buying and using the product (Dabholkar, 2006). The length of the information can increase the diagnosticity of a review and facilitate the purchase decision process.

Regarding the information richness of reviews, many studies indicated that review length, measured by the word count of the review, positively affects review helpfulness (Kuan et al., 2015; Salehan and Kim, 2016; Yin et al., 2014) or has a positive effect within a certain length (Huang et al., 2015). According to Mudambi and Schuff (2010), when reviews have higher word counts, they are perceived as more useful because readers treat word counts as representing greater depth of information comprehensiveness and usefulness. Depending on motivations, elaboration level, or interests, people will have different preferences toward contents. In the context of online review on Amazon, Mudambi and Schuff (2010) found that the product type could moderate the effect of review details on the helpfulness of the review. Specifically, review details have a greater positive effect on the helpfulness of the review for search goods than for experience goods. Conversely, some studies revealed the negative effect of review length on helpfulness (Racherla and Friske, 2012). In the context of online reviews, Racherla and Friske (2012) found that the review length has no significant contribution to overall perceptions of usefulness. It was argued that given the numerous reviews available for every service provider, some consumers are overwhelmed by information and therefore do not even pay attention to long (and seemingly rambling) reviews. These consumers would prefer reviews that are ‘short, sweet and to the point’. In this study, it was proposed that consumers have different information adoption intention toward the RED postings with different level of information details.

## **2.6. Individual Differences**

### **2.6.1. Fashion Involvement**

ELM suggests that elaboration likelihood determines how information recipients process information via the central route vs. peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Two factors

determine information recipients' elaboration likelihood: motivation and ability (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Information receivers with higher involvement in the information will be more likely to be involved in high elaboration (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). In contrast, information receivers with lower involvement will be less likely to be involved in elaboration and more likely to be impacted by central route (Petty et al., 1981; Stamm & Dube, 1994; Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

Involvement was defined as a person's perception of the objective based on his or her inherent needs, values, and interest (Zaichnowsky, 1985). On one hand, fashion has been classified as high involvement product with a strong association with personal identify (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). On the other hand, consumers have varying levels of involvement with fashion products. Fashion involvement refers to the extent that consumers view fashion activities as meaningful and enchanting in their life (O'cass, 2004). Literature suggests it being one of the important variables related to consumers' buying behaviors of fashion products (Nam et al., 2007).

In the social media context, Cheng and Fang (2015) suggested that fashion involvement significantly influenced the information-searching behavior of fashion consumers. Specifically, their study showed that consumers with high fashion involvement are more likely to revisit fashion blogs than their low fashion involvement counterparts. Wolny and Mueller (2013) also found that consumers with high fashion involvement are more likely to engage in fashion brand-related eWOM.

Therefore, in this study, it was proposed that fashion involvement has an influence in consumers' information adoption process. The information adoption intention of consumers with different level of fashion involvement will be influenced by different variables in the framework of ELM, i.e., central route vs. peripheral route.

### 2.6.2. Age

Age is one of the demographics that was found exerting significant influence on consumer behaviors, in terms of consumer needs, decision making processes, and information processing styles, just name a few (Frasquet et al. 2015; Tseng et al. 2013; Tseng et al. 2014; Wang et al. 2015b). For example, Frassetto et al. (2015) found that age shows significant influences in the case for purchasing electronics. As people get older, they become more cautious and seek greater certainty in their purchase decisions (Akhter 2003). In the context of hotel booking, Tseng et al. (2013) indicated that the older the consumer the higher the intention to book a hotel room.

Members of age-based cohort experience common social, political, historical, economic, and technological environments as they mature (Phillips & Sternthal, 1977). Age-based cohorts consequently generally differ with respect to their values, needs and behavioral patterns, and in this case, communication channel preferences (Iyer et al., 2017). The new forms of media are more appealing to younger generation, as they seek out higher levels of interactivity and instant gratification (Richard and Meuli, 2013; Krishen et al., 2016). Younger generations are used to receiving information really fast and have a penchant for messages that are short and to the point, i.e., shallow messages. On the other hand, the older generations seem to prefer messages that are deep and provided a detailed explanation (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015; Krishen et al., 2016). Younger generations likely assign greater importance to brevity. They likewise have shorter attention spans than their older counterparts (Newman, 2004). Complex messages require more processing effort because they feature more information. In this study, it was proposed that age will have moderating effect in the information adoption process. It was assumed that older consumers will be influenced more by argument quality while younger consumers will be influenced more by source credibility and blog design.

## **2.7. Hypotheses Development and Proposed Research model**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Chinese consumers fashion purchase behaviors are influenced by the eWOM of KOLs on RED. Following the ELM model, this study aims to investigate the factors affecting the influence of KOLs on Chinese fashion consumers on RED. Specially, the influence of KOLs are measured in terms of argument quality of postings, source credibility and blog design of RED. Additionally, the moderating effects of posting characteristics (information details and KOL popularity) and individual consumer differences (age and fashion involvement) on the influence of KOL on Chinese fashion consumers were also investigated. Therefore, following ELM, the following hypotheses were proposed to investigate the impact of RED KOLs on Chinese consumers' fashion purchase behaviors.

H1: Argument quality (H1a: comprehensiveness; H1b: relevance; H1c: timeliness; and H1d: visual attractiveness) of the postings of RED KOLs has a positive influence on Chinese consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs.

H2: Source credibility (H2a: attractiveness; and H2b: expertise) has a positive influence on consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs.

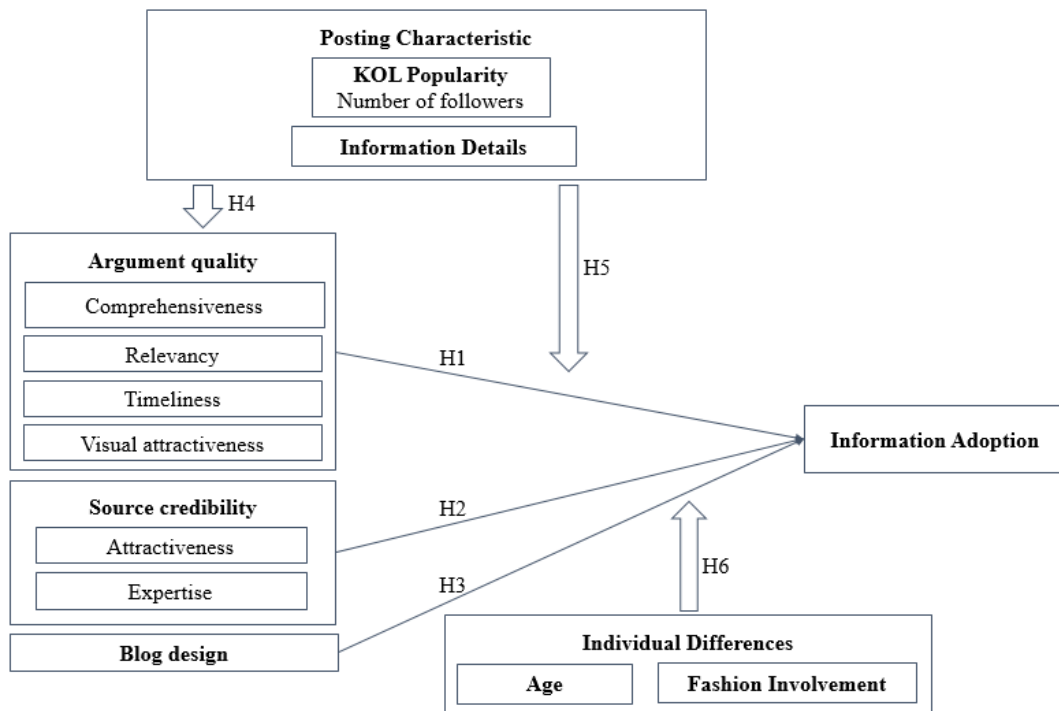
H3: Blog design of RED has a positive influence on consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs on RED.

H4: The two posting characteristics (H4a: KOL Popularity; H4b: information details) have a significant influence on argument quality, source credibility and blog design.

H5: The two posting characteristics (H5a: KOL Popularity; H5b: information details) have moderating effects in Chinese fashion consumers adoption process of RED KOLs postings.

H6: The two individual differences (H6a: fashion involvement; H6b: age) have moderating effects in Chinese fashion consumers adoption process of RED KOLs postings.

Figure 2 depicts the research framework of this study and represents the relationships as proposed in the hypotheses.



**Figure 2.** Conceptual Framework containing Hypotheses 1-6

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of RED KOLs on Chinese fashion consumers. This study also aims to explore how the characteristics of the postings as well as consumer individual difference moderate the influence of KOL on consumers. This chapter presents the methodological procedure utilized to collect data and the instruments used to measure the variables. In addition, data analysis method used in the research are discussed.

### **3.1. Data Collection**

Data for this study was collected via a Chinese online survey platform – Wenjuanxing in January 2021. The questionnaire was initially developed in English, translated into Chinese and then back translated into English. To ensure the validity of the survey translation, the back translated questionnaire was checked against the original questionnaire and revised accordingly. Before distribution, the survey was sent to five Chinese consumers to check if there were any grammatical or comprehension problems. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained through North Carolina State University prior to the survey distribution. According to IResearch statistics (2019), the most active users of RED are those born in the 90s. Therefore, the target subjects for this survey were purposefully identified as Chinese consumers aged 18 to 40 who have followed at least one fashion opinion leader on RED. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for the survey. The goal was to obtain a total of 400 completed surveys. During the data collection process, ongoing monitoring was implemented to delete incomplete surveys.

To test the moderating effect of two posting characteristics (KOL popularity and level of information details), three KOLs on RED were purposefully chosen for this study. The first KOL (KOL1) has 72,300 of followers (less followers) and provides a relatively high level of information details in their postings (Figure 3). The second KOL (KOL2) has 77,400 of followers (less followers) and provides lower level of information details in their postings (Figure 4). The third

KOL (KOL3) has 501,500 of followers (more followers) and provides a high level of information details in her postings (Figure 5). Participants were randomly assigned to review one of the KOLs to complete the survey.

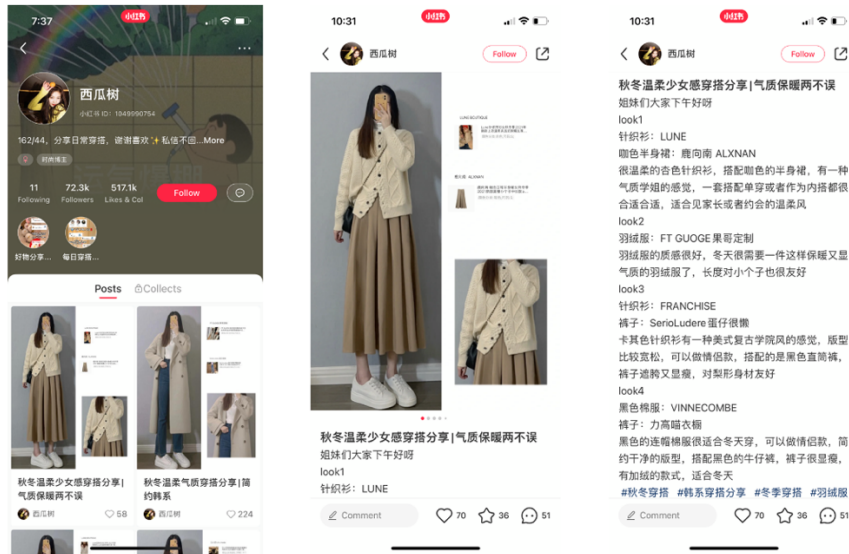


Figure 3. KOL1 (less KOL popularity and high level of information details)

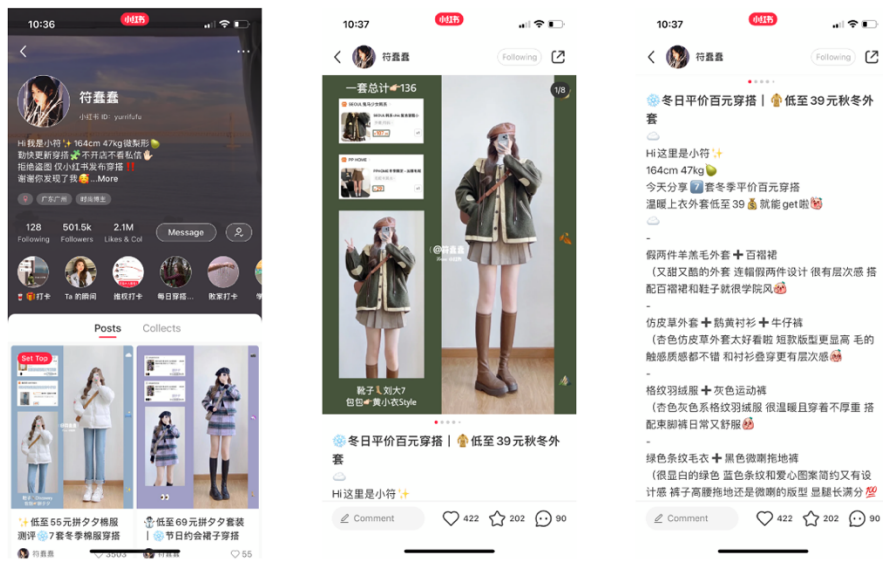
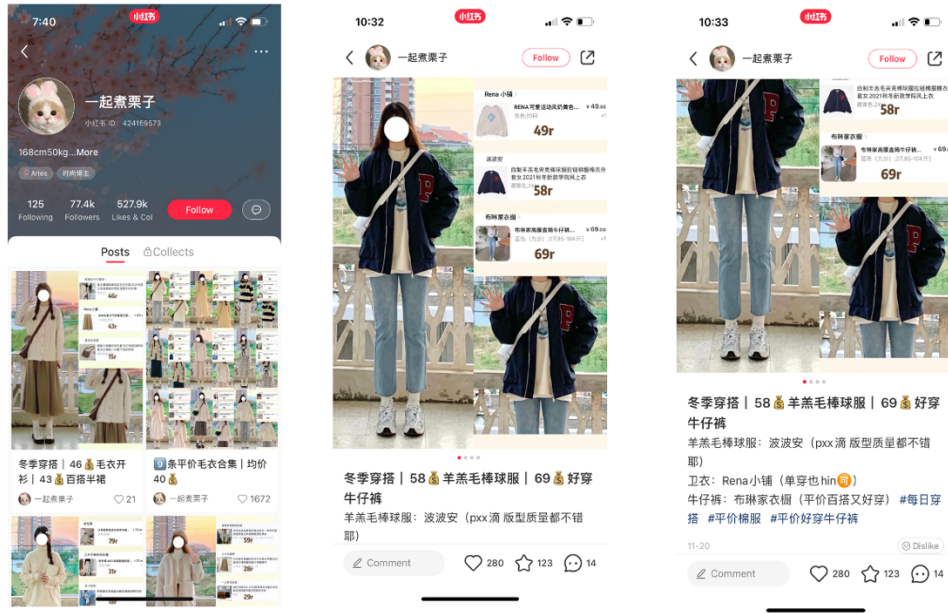


Figure 4. KOL2 (more KOL popularity and high level of information details)



**Figure 5.** KOL3 (less KOL popularity and low level of information details)

### 3.2. Survey Instrument

There are four sections in the questionnaire. The first section measures Chinese consumers' general online shopping behaviors, including their online shopping frequency and use experience of RED. The second section focuses on argument quality, source credibility, blog design, fashion involvement and information adoption. Specifically, argument quality is measured in terms of comprehensiveness, relevancy, timeliness, and visual attractiveness. Source credibility is measured in terms of expertise and attractiveness. Existing scales were adopted/modified to reflect the context of this study. Each of the constructs was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The third section measures the moderating factor of fashion involvement. The last section includes the demographic information including age, level of education, and family annual income level.

### 3.2.1. Argument quality

Argument quality measures the quality of the information provided by the KOL on RED via their postings. It was measured in the following four aspects of the postings of KOLs: comprehensiveness, relevance, timeliness, and visual attractiveness.

#### Comprehensiveness

In this study, comprehensiveness refers to the information completeness. As the focal products contained in the postings were fashion products, the comprehensiveness measures the completeness of product features and values related to consumers' fashion shopping. It was measured by three items modified from the study of Cheung et al. (2008), reflecting the nature of the products covered in this study. Table 2 lists the measurements of comprehensiveness.

**Table 2.** Comprehensiveness (CO) measurements

Item	Statement
CO1.	The information posted by this KOL includes all necessary values of fashion products (e.g. price, brand, material...).
CO2.	The information posted by this KOL sufficiently complete your needs for seeking fashion products.
CO3.	The recommendation posted by this KOL includes all the aspects of the review of fashion products (e.g. material, quality, purpose...).

#### Relevance

Relevance of information is defined as the degree to which the information is helpful and appropriate for consumer needs (Chai et al., 2008). In this study, the relevance of information is measured by three items modified from the study of Cheung et al. (2008). Table 3 lists the measurements of consistency for information quality.

**Table 3.** Relevance (RE) measurements

Item	Statement
RE1.	The fashion products shared by this KOL fit my fashion consumption purpose (e.g. business or casual wearing).
RE2.	The price of the fashion products shared by this KOL is relevance to me.
RE3.	The style of the fashion products shared by this KOL is relevance to me.

## **Timeliness**

Timeliness refers to whether the messages are current, timely, and up to date. (Cheung et al, 2008). In this study, as fashion changes quickly, the timeliness measures if the information posted by KOLs reflects the fashion trend account. It is measured by two items modified from the study of Cheung et al. (2008). Table 4 lists the measurement items of timeliness for information quality.

**Table 4.** Timeliness (TL) measurements

<b>Item</b>	<b>Statement</b>
TL1.	The fashion information posted by this KOL is in line with the current season.
TL2.	The information posted by this KOL keeps up with fashion trends.

## **Visual attractiveness**

Visual attractiveness refers to the attractiveness of any image included in the message (Cheung et al., 2008). In this study, visual attractiveness measures if the pictures of the fashion products posted by the KOL are attractive. It is measured by four items modified from the study of Cheung et al. (2008). Table 5 lists the measurements of visual attractiveness.

**Table 5.** Visual attractiveness (VA) measurements

<b>Item</b>	<b>Statement</b>
VA1.	The pictures posted by this KOL are visually attractive.
VA2.	The fashion products shared by this KOL look high quality.
VA3.	The fashion products shared by this KOL are unique.
VA4.	The pictures posted by this KOL show the details of the clothing.

### **3.2.2. Source credibility**

Source credibility refers to the degree to which the information receiver perceives the source as being knowledgeable and being someone the consumer can gain expertise in terms of product knowledge (Ohanian, 1990). Previous literature has shown the positive influence of a communicator's physical attractiveness on message persuasiveness (Pallak et al., 1983; Till and

Busler, 1998). In this study, the source credibility was measured in the following two aspects: expertise and attractiveness.

### **Expertise**

A source that demonstrates expertise is more persuasive than one that does not (Andersen and Clevenger, 1963). Indeed, individuals tend to agree more with the opinions of experts than with those of non-experts (Horai et al., 1974). Expertise describes a way of exerting influence on others. According to the balance model, an endorser’s expertise is helpful in communicating a bond with the product (Mowen, 1980). It is measured by three items modified from the study of Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2020). Table 6 lists the measurements of KOL’s expertise.

**Table 6.** Expertise (EX) measurements

<b>Item</b>	<b>Statement</b>
EP1.	This KOL is knowledgeable in fashion and style.
EP2.	This KOL is knowledgeable in the fashion trends.
EP3.	This KOL is an expert in the material and quality of the fashion products.

### **Attractiveness**

Attractiveness is the amount of peers’ attentions, acceptances, and emotional approvals that a reviewer attracts and maintains, that is, his or her popularity in an online community. It reflects the reviewer’s social presence, value, and influence in that community in the form of his or her online friendships (Rindova et al., 2006). It is measured by three items modified from the study of Peetz (2012). Table 7 lists the measurements of influencer’s attractiveness.

**Table 7.** Attractiveness (AT) measurements

<b>Item</b>	<b>Statement</b>
AT1.	The fashion style of this KOL is attractive.
AT2.	This KOL is in good shape.
AT3.	This KOL is fashionable.

### 3.2.3. Blog design

Blog design refers to the presentation of product information through multiple visual elements and hedonic features (Jiang and Benbasat, 2004), which jointly form a vivid and attractive information presentation, thereby enhancing users' affective responses to the product (Zhang, 2013). In this study, blog design measures if the posting and the layout of the posted pictures are well designed. It is measured by three items modified from the study of Chen et al. (2019). Table 8 lists the measurements of blog design.

**Table 8.** Blog design (BD) measurements

Item	Statement
BD1.	Overall, the pictures of the posts provided by this KOL (e.g., colors, layout etc.) are of high quality.
BD2.	In general, the postings of this KOL are visually pleasing.
BD3.	In general, the layout of the pictures makes the posts of this KOL look professional and well-designed.

### 3.2.4. Information adoption

In this study, information adoption refers to consumer's intention to take the KOL's recommendation to purchase the fashion products referenced in their posting. It is measured by two items modified from the study of Hussain et al. (2017). Table 9 lists the measurements of consumers' purchase intention.

**Table 9.** Information adoption (IA) measurements

Item	Statement
IA1.	I agree with the KOL's recommendation regarding the fashion products on RED.
IA2.	I would like to adopt the KOL's recommendation to purchase the fashion products.

### 3.2.5. Fashion Involvement

Fashion involvement refers to the extent that consumers view the fashion activity as a meaningful and enchanting activity in their life (O'cass, 2004). Fashion involvement is measured

by using six items adopted from the study of O’Cass and Choy (2008), which represents a modified short version of the scale used by O’Cass (2000, 2004). Table 10 lists the measurements of consumers’ fashion involvement.

**Table 10.** Fashion involvement (FI) measurements

<b>Item</b>	<b>Statement</b>
FI1.	Fashion clothing means a lot to me.
FI2.	Fashion clothing is significant to me.
FI3.	For me personally fashion clothing is important.
FI4.	I am interested in fashion clothing.
FI5.	I pay a lot of attention to fashion clothing.
FI6.	I am very much involved with fashion clothing.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis process includes three stages: data cleaning, descriptive analyses, and hypotheses testing. In the first stage, incomplete questionnaires were eliminated (questions for the key constructs were not answered).

In the second stage, descriptive analyses were conducted for a sample profile and to gain an understanding of participants’ general online fashion shopping behaviors and RED behaviors. In addition, reliability analysis was conducted to test the internal consistency of all latent variables. And tertiles of the fashion involvement was used to divide respondents into three groups for testing the moderating effects of fashion involvement on the information processing routes.

In the final stage, SPSS was used to test the proposed hypotheses. Linear regression analysis was used to assess the impact of argument quality, source credibility, and blog design on information adoption intention (H1-H3). Multiple T-tests were used to investigate the influence of information details and KOL popularity on argument quality, source credibility, and blog design (H4). Multigroup comparison analysis was conducted to explore the moderating effect of two posting characteristics (KOL popularity and information detail) and two individual differences

(fashion involvement and age) on the relationships among the variables in the proposed model (H5 and H6).

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In the following sections, results of online survey are presented. First, characteristics of the survey respondents are described with an explanation of the data screening and cleaning process. Second, to understand the effect of argument quality, source credibility and blog design on consumers' information adoption intention toward KOLs on RED, the measurement model was evaluated. Third, the moderating effects of posting characteristics and individual differences were tested. This chapter ends with a discussion of the results.

### **4.1. Data Screening and Cleaning Process**

A total of 475 surveys were collected. Out of the 475 surveys collected, 126 questionnaires were removed from the data pool. The following two criteria were used to screen and delete questionnaires in the monitoring process: (1) questions for the key constructs were not answered (74 questionnaires were deleted) and (2) selected the same choice for every question (52 questionnaires were deleted). After this data screening and cleaning process, 73.5% of total questionnaires (n=349) were retained for further data analyses. Among the 349 surveys, 104 subjects were from KOL1 (low popularity and high level of information details), 144 subjects were from KOL2 (low popularity and low level of information details), and 101 subjects were from KOL3 (high popularity and high level of information details).

### **4.2. Descriptive Analyses**

#### **4.2.1. Sample Profile**

Frequency analyses were conducted to prepare the sample profile. The demographic characteristics of the sample are summarized in Table 11. Among the final sample (n=349), over half of the respondents (58.2%) were in the age range of 18 to 25, with another 25.8% in the age range of 26 to 30 and the remaining 16% between 31 and 35. The sample in general was well educated, with majority of the respondents (84.5%) having at least some college education. About

two-third (66.4%) of the respondents' annual family income was greater than 100,000 Chinese Yuan (CNY) (approximately 14,600 USD).

**Table 11.** Sample Profile

<b>Demographic variables</b>	<b>Count (N)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Age		
18-25	203	58.2
26-30	90	25.8
31-35	56	16.0
Education		
High school or below	54	15.5
Some college, no degree	103	29.5
Bachelor's degree and above	192	55.0
Annual household income		
Less than ¥ 75,000	70	20.1
¥ 75,000- ¥ 99,999	47	13.5
¥ 100,000- ¥ 149,999	88	25.2
¥ 150,000- ¥ 199,999	72	20.6
¥ 200,000 or more	72	20.6

#### 4.2.2. Online Shopping Frequency and RED Use Experience

In addition to demographic characteristics, respondents' online shopping frequency was also measured. Table 12 shows that most respondents had online shopping experiences (93.4%). About half of the respondents indicated they shopped online very frequently (often or always).

**Table 12.** Online Shopping Frequency

<b>Demographic variables</b>	<b>Count (N)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Online shopping frequency		
Always	22	6.3
Often	148	42.4
Sometimes	123	35.2
Occasionally	33	9.5
Never	23	6.6

In terms of RED use experience, as shown in Table 13, close to 70% of the respondents used RED often or always. More than three quarters (77.7%) of the respondents had followed

fashion KOLs on RED. In general, while most of the participants had online shopping experiences, almost half of the respondents (42.7%) had never shopped on RED. Most of the participants (88%) had adopted the recommendation of the fashion KOLs on RED to purchase products. In addition, about 81.1% participants are satisfied with their RED use experience.

**Table 13.** RED Use Experience

		<b>Count (N)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
RED use experience	Always	49	14.0
	Often	191	54.7
	Sometimes	57	16.3
	Occasionally	52	14.9
Have you followed any fashion KOLs on RED?	Yes	271	77.7
	No	78	22.3
RED shopping frequency	Always	8	2.3
	Often	42	12.0
	Sometimes	78	22.3
	Occasionally	72	20.6
	Never	149	42.7
Take reference of RED KOLs	Always	31	8.9
	Often	64	18.3
	Sometimes	104	29.8
	Occasionally	108	30.9
	Never	42	12.0
RED Satisfactory	Unsatisfied	11	3.2
	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	55	15.8
	Satisfied	272	77.9
	Very satisfied	11	3.2

Consumers have different purposes of using RED. The results indicated that searching for products' comments the most common purpose of using RED, following by spending spare time, purchasing products, and sharing personal life (Table 14).

**Table 14.** Purpose of using RED

<b>Purpose of using RED</b>	<b>Count (N)</b>
Searching for comments	315
Spending spare time	237
Purchasing products	114
Sharing life	102

There are six different channels on RED, including fashion, cosmetic, food, travel, home decoration and gaming. Depending on their interests, consumers chose to visit certain channels more frequently than others. As shown in Table 15, fashion is the most popular channels on RED, followed by cosmetic, food, travel, home decoration, and gaming.

**Table 15.** RED Channels used most frequently by consumers

<b>RED Channels</b>	<b>Count (N)</b>
Fashion	315
Cosmetic	293
Food	271
Travel	216
Home Decoration	113
Gaming	78

Table 16 reports some popular Chinese online apparel shopping platforms among respondents. Taobao, an online marketplace (similar to Amazon), was ranked the first in terms of the respondents' mentioning, followed by TMall, VIP Shop, RED, Jingdong, and brands' websites.

**Table 16.** Popular Online Fashion/Apparel Shopping Platforms among Respondents

<b>Online Shopping Platforms</b>	<b>Count (N)</b>
Taobao	326
TMall	213
VIP Shop	148
Jingdong	113
Brand Website	70
RED	125

### 4.2.3 Multi-item variables reliability

A reliability analysis was conducted on each of the multi-item variables related to argument quality, source credibility, blog design, and consumers' information adoption. Results (Table 17) suggested good reliability for all the nine variables with Cronbach's alphas above 0.7.

**Table 17.** Multi-item scales reliability statistics

Multi-item scales	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Comprehensiveness	0.765	3
Relevance	0.813	3
Timeliness	0.645	2
Visual Attractiveness	0.734	4
Expertise	0.736	3
Attractiveness	0.714	3
Blog Design	0.803	3
Information Adoption	0.853	2

Fashion involvement was measured by a scale of four items. Reliability analysis reveals a Cronbach's alpha of 0.775. The result showed that fashion involvement at a medium level ( $M = 3.659$ ,  $SD = 0.850$ ). Respondents were then classified and divided to three levels based on the tertiles. The two tertiles are 3.382 and 3.956. Either of the two points that divide an ordered distribution into three parts, each containing a third of the sample.

**Table 18.** Reliability analysis of fashion involvement

Multi-item scales	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fashion Involvement	0.775	3.659	0.850

## 4.3. Hypotheses Testing

### 4.3.1. Influence on Information Adoption Intention

A linear regression was employed to test the influence of argument quality, source credibility and blog design on consumers' information adoption. The results (Table 19) showed that

comprehensiveness ( $\beta = .269, p < .001$ ), relevance ( $\beta = .250, p < .001$ ), timeliness ( $\beta = .367, p < .001$ ), visual attractiveness ( $\beta = .273, p < .001$ ), and blog design ( $\beta = .336, p < .001$ ) all had a significant positive influence on consumers' information adoption intention toward KOLs on RED, which supported H1 and H3. However, the influence of expertise ( $\beta = .007, p < .897$ ) and attractiveness ( $\beta = .023, p < .643$ ) on consumers' information adoption intention was insignificant, not supporting H2.

**Table 19.** Linear regression result

Dependent Variable	Model	Standardized Coefficients		
		$\beta$	t	p.
Information adoption intention	Comprehensiveness	.269	5.612	<.001***
	Relevance	.250	4.182	<.001***
	Timeliness	.367	6.819	<.001***
	Visual attractiveness	.273	4.166	<.001***
	Expertise	.007	.130	.897
	Attractiveness	.023	.464	.643
	Blog design	.336	7.121	<.001***

Notes: \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

### 4.3.2. Influence of Posting Characteristics

#### 4.3.2.1. Independent-samples T-test

Independent-sample T-tests were employed to test whether there was statistical evidence regarding the influence of positing characteristics on consumers' perception of argument quality, source credibility, and blog design. Two posting characteristics were investigated in this study, including KOL popularity and information details. To test the influence of KOL popularity, survey data collected from KOL1 (low popularity, high level of details) and KOL3 (high popularity, high level of details) were compared. To test the influence of information details, KOL1 (low popularity, high level of details) and KOL2 (low popularity, low level of details) were compared.

## KOL Popularity

There were 104 subjects in the KOL1 group (low popularity and high level of information details) and 101 subjects in the KOL3 (high popularity and high level of information details) group. The T-test results (Table 20) indicated that there are significant differences between the high and low number of followers groups regarding comprehensiveness, relevance, timeliness, expertise, and attractiveness. In general, it showed that consumers perceived a higher level of argument quality, source credibility, and blog design for postings made by KOLs with high popularity than those made by KOLs with low popularity.

**Table 20.** T-test results based on KOL Popularity

	Number of followers	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Comprehensiveness	more	104	3.5490	.31227	2.309	.005**
	less	101	3.4394	.36442	2.314	
Relevance	more	104	3.6601	.38630	7.937	<.001***
	less	101	3.1411	.53568	7.974	
Timeliness	more	104	3.4952	.61672	1.114	<.001***
	less	101	3.4158	.37839	1.107	
Visual Attractiveness	more	104	3.3663	.37007	3.441	.097
	less	101	3.2091	.27893	3.427	
Expertise	more	104	3.5165	.37071	.350	<.001***
	less	101	3.4901	.66525	.353	
Attractiveness	more	104	3.6584	.38627	4.221	.003**
	less	101	3.3329	.67503	4.253	
Blog Design	more	104	3.7222	.65899	5.974	.146
	less	101	3.2359	.49756	5.950	

Notes: \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

### Information Details

There were 104 subjects in the KOL1 (low popularity and high level of information details) and 101 subjects in the KOL2 (low popularity and low level of information details). The T-test results (Table 12) suggested significant differences between the two groups in terms of comprehensiveness, relevance, timeliness, visual attractiveness, KOL's attractiveness, expertise, and blog design. Specifically, postings with more information details were perceived as having better argument quality, source credibility, and blog design.

**Table 21.** T-test results based on information details

	Information Details	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Comprehensiveness	more	101	3.5875	.31227	.656	<.001***
	less	144	3.5490	.52810	.714	
Relevance	more	101	3.6601	.38630	5.551	<.001***
	less	144	3.1111	.93931	6.295	
Timeliness	more	101	3.4952	.61672	.696	.007**
	less	144	3.3611	.59850	.692	
Visual Attractiveness	more	101	3.3663	.37007	1.137	<.001***
	less	144	3.2778	.71882	1.259	
Expertise	more	101	3.5161	.37071	3.223	<.001***
	less	144	3.2783	.58263	3.473	
Attractiveness	more	101	3.6584	.38627	2.529	<.001***
	less	144	3.4817	.62308	2.736	
Blog Design	more	101	3.7222	.65899	1.036	.002**
	less	144	3.6478	.46565	.976	

Notes: \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

### 4.3.2.2. Multi-group Linear Regression

#### KOL Popularity

To test the moderating effect of KOL popularity on consumers' information adoption process, the interaction of KOL popularity and argument quality, source credibility and blog design were added into the regression model. The results (Table 22) showed that KOL popularity significantly affected the influence of comprehensiveness, relevance, visual attractiveness, expertise, attractiveness, and blog design on the information adoption intention.

**Table 22.** Regression Analyses with KOL Popularity interaction

Dependent Variable	Model	Standardized Coefficients		
		$\beta$	t	p.
Information adoption intention	Comprehensiveness	.685	6.404	<.001***
	Relevance	3.289	7.184	<.001***
	Timeliness	.551	1.572	.117
	Visual attractiveness	.198	2.909	.004**
	Expertise	1.836	7.411	<.001***
	Attractiveness	.408	3.133	.002**
	Blog design	.938	6.841	<.001***
	KOL Popularity	1.944	2.506	.013*
	Comprehensiveness* KOL Popularity	1.434	3.137	.002**
	Relevance* KOL Popularity	7.776	7.971	<.001***
	Timeliness* KOL Popularity	1.223	1.214	.226
	Visual attractiveness* KOL Popularity	5.566	6.765	<.001***
	Expertise* KOL Popularity	1.746	3.824	<.001***
Attractiveness* KOL Popularity	2.398	4.701	<.001***	
Blog design* KOL Popularity	.685	6.404	<.001***	

Notes: \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

To further test how KOL's popularity moderated consumers' information adoption process on RED, a linear regression analysis was also conducted on each of the two popularity groups. The results (Table 23) showed that while all the factors had significant influence on consumers' information adoption intention toward KOLs RED postings, their importance varies between the two groups. In general, all factors had a stronger influence on the adoption intention in the high popularity group than in the low popularity group, with two exceptions. One exception was related to relevance, which exerted a significant influence in the low popularity group, but not in the high popularity group. Another one was related to timeliness, the influence of which was not significantly different between the two groups. This was in consistent with the results from the regression analysis with interactions, which suggested no interaction between KOL popularity and timeliness. Therefore, the moderating effect of KOL popularity in the consumers' information adoption process was confirmed. H5 was partially supported.

**Table 23.** Multi-group Regression Analyses (KOL Popularity)

Independent Variables	Information Adoption Intention					
	More number of followers (high popularity) (N=104)			Less number of followers (low popularity) (N=101)		
	$\beta$	t	p.	$\beta$	t	p.
Comprehensiveness	0.576	7.713	<.001***	0.334	15.706	<.001***
Relevance	0.141	2.008	.046*	0.049	1.256	0.005**
Timeliness	0.548	12.791	<.001***	0.512	5.572	<.001***
Visual attractiveness	0.717	15.394	<.001***	0.497	6.365	<.001***
Expertise	0.654	2.954	.003**	0.162	19.352	<.001***
Attractiveness	0.293	3.480	<.001***	0.185	10.266	<.001***
Blog design	0.192	3.780	<.001***	0.067	3.867	<.001***

Notes: \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

## Information Details

To test the moderating effect of information details on consumers' information adoption process, the interactions of information details and argument quality, source credibility and blog design were added into the regression model. The results (Table 24) showed that information details had strong interactions with most of the independent variables, including relevance, timeliness, visual attractiveness, expertise, and attractiveness. The interactions between the level of information details and comprehensiveness and blog design were not significant.

**Table 24.** Regression Analyses with interactions of information details

Dependent Variable	Model	Standardized Coefficients		
		$\beta$	t	p.
Information adoption intention	Comprehensiveness	.685	6.404	<.001***
	Relevance	3.289	7.184	<.001***
	Timeliness	.551	1.572	.117
	Visual attractiveness	.198	2.909	.004**
	Expertise	1.836	7.411	<.001***
	Attractiveness	0.408	3.133	.002**
	Blog design	0.938	6.841	.013*
	Information details	1.944	2.506	<.001***
	Comprehensiveness* information details	1.223	1.214	.226
	Relevance* information details	7.776	7.971	<.001***
	Timeliness* information details	1.434	3.137	.002**
	Visual attractiveness* information details	1.526	4.217	<.001***
	Expertise* information details	5.566	6.675	<.001***
Attractiveness* information details	1.746	3.824	<.001***	
Blog design* information details	2.398	4.701	0.081	

Notes: \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

To further test how information details moderated consumers' information adoption process on RED, a linear regression analysis was also conducted on each of the two information details groups. The results (Table 25) showed that the importance of the factors influencing information adoption process varies between the two information details groups. In general, all factors had a stronger influence on the adoption intention in the high popularity group than in the low popularity group, with two exceptions. One exception was related to comprehensiveness, the influence of which was not significantly different between the two groups. This was in consistent with the results from the regression analysis with interactions, which suggested no interaction between information details and comprehensiveness. Another one was related to blog design, the influence of which was not significantly different between the two groups. This was in consistent with the results from the regression analysis with interactions, which suggested no interaction between information details and blog design. Therefore, the moderating effect of information details in the consumers' information adoption process was confirmed. H5 was partially supported.

**Table 25.** Multi-group Regression Analyses (Information details)

Independent Variables	Information Adoption Intention					
	More information details (N=101)			Less information details (N=144)		
	$\beta$	t	p.	$\beta$	t	p.
Comprehensiveness	.376	7.713	<.001***	.336	6.273	<.001***
Relevance	.422	5.220	<.001***	.141	2.008	.046*
Timeliness	.312	5.572	<.001***	.104	1.568	.119
Visual attractiveness	.497	6.365	<.001***	.207	2.237	.027*
Expertise	.654	2.954	.003**	.123	2.014	.046*
Attractiveness	.293	3.480	<.001***	.126	1.737	.085
Blog design	.192	3.780	<.001***	.157	2.381	.019*

Notes: \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

### **4.3.3. Influence of Individual Differences**

Two individual differences were investigated in this study, including fashion involvement and age. The influence of individual differences was measured in terms of their influence on the perceptions of the postings (T-test) and on the relationship between the perceptions and information adoption intention (multi-group regression analyses).

#### **4.3.3.1. Independent-samples T-test**

Independent-sample T-tests were employed to test whether there was statistical evidence regarding the influence of individual differences on consumers' perception of argument quality, source credibility, and blog design. Two individual differences were investigated in this study, including fashion involvement and age.

#### **Fashion Involvement**

To test the influence of fashion involvement, the sample was divided into three groups based on the tertiles. The two tertiles are 3.382 and 3.956. Either of the two points that divide an ordered distribution into three parts, each containing a third of the sample. There are 126 subjects in high fashion involvement group, 118 subjects in mid fashion involvement group, and 105 subjects in low fashion involvement group (N=105).

T-test results (Table 26) indicated that there are significant differences between the high and low fashion involvement groups regarding relevance, timeliness, visual attractiveness, expertise, attractiveness, and blog design. In general, it showed that high fashion involvement consumers perceived a lower level of argument quality, source credibility, and blog design than low fashion involvement consumers.

**Table 26.** T-test results based on fashion involvement

	<b>Fashion Involvement</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Comprehensiveness	Low	105	3.3840	.40355	-6.468	.143
	High	126	3.6667	.41168	-6.474	
Relevance	Low	105	3.2792	.56369	.007	<.001***
	High	126	3.2786	.87369	.007	
Timeliness	Low	105	3.4066	.42855	-.332	<.001***
	High	126	3.4262	.64089	-.339	
Visual Attractiveness	Low	105	3.1928	.46519	-3.078	<.001***
	High	126	3.3648	.56738	-3.108	
Expertise	Low	105	3.3595	.51726	-1.604	<.001***
	High	126	3.4569	.60774	-1.617	
Attractiveness	Low	105	3.4118	.50808	-2.311	<.001***
	High	126	3.5580	.65615	-2.339	
Blog Design	Low	105	3.3877	.69303	-5.102	<.001***
	High	126	3.6907	.38744	-4.973	

Notes: \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

### Age

To test the influence of age, the sample was divided into two groups. Younger group (age 18-25) has 203 subjects, and older group (age 26-35) has 146 subjects. The T-test results (Table 27) indicated that there are significant differences regarding the relevance, timeliness, visual attractiveness, expertise, attractiveness, and blog design between the younger and older groups. In general, young respondents had more positive perceived argument quality, source credibility, and blog design than their older counterparts.

**Table 27.** T-test results based on Age

	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Comprehensiveness	18-25	203	3.6382	.42470	3.977	.215
	26-35	146	3.4560	.42041	3.970	
Relevance	18-25	203	3.3811	.68388	3.073	<.001***
	26-35	146	3.1368	.76582	3.131	
Timeliness	18-25	203	3.4110	.63703	.171	<.001***
	26-35	146	3.4212	.47844	.164	
Visual Attractiveness	18-25	203	3.3682	.51732	3.622	<.001***
	26-35	146	3.1644	.51960	3.624	
Expertise	18-25	203	3.4659	.55924	1.546	<.001***
	26-35	146	3.3708	.57194	1.551	
Attractiveness	18-25	203	3.6168	.55722	3.476	<.001***
	26-35	146	3.3962	.60386	3.522	
Blog Design	18-25	203	3.6616	.64785	3.220	<.001***
	26-35	146	3.4638	.49941	3.089	

Notes: \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

#### 4.3.3.2. Multi-group Linear Regression

##### Fashion Involvement

To test the moderating effect of fashion involvement on consumers' information adoption process, the interaction of argument quality, source credibility, blog design and fashion involvement were added into the regression model to test the moderating effect of fashion involvement. The results showed that fashion involvement only have the moderating effect on the relationship of expertise and blog design on the information adoption intention.

To test the moderating effect of fashion involvement on consumers' information adoption process, the interaction of fashion involvement and argument quality, source credibility and blog

design were added into the regression model. The results (Table 28) showed that fashion involvement significantly affected the influence of expertise and blog design on the information adoption intention.

**Table 28.** Multiple Regression Analyses (Fashion Involvement)

Dependent Variable	Model	Standardized Coefficients		
		$\beta$	t	p.
Information adoption intention	Comprehensiveness	.464	1.167	.244
	Relevance	.536	1.454	.147
	Timeliness	.993	1.879	.061
	Visual attractiveness	.086	.217	.829
	Expertise	1.202	2.500	.013*
	Attractiveness	1.070	2.098	.037*
	Blog design	.674	2.478	.014*
	Fashion Involvement	1.966	4.205	<.001***
	Comprehensiveness*Fashion involvement	.617	.693	.488
	Relevance*Fashion involvement	.196	.394	.694
	Timeliness*Fashion involvement	1.030	1.243	.215
	Visual attractiveness*Fashion involvement	.014	.018	.985
	Expertise*Fashion involvement	1.808	2.385	.018*
	Attractiveness*Fashion involvement	1.679	1.941	.053
Blog design*Fashion involvement	1.978	4.311	<.001***	

**Notes:** \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

A linear regression analysis was conducted on each of the two fashion involvement groups. The results showed that for the high fashion involvement group, consumers' information adoption intention was significantly influenced by the following factors: comprehensiveness, relevance,

timeliness, expertise, attractiveness, and blog design. For the low fashion involvement group, consumers' information adoption intention was significantly influenced by the following factors: comprehensiveness, relevance, timeliness, visual attractiveness, expertise, attractiveness, and blog design. In the regression with interaction, we confirmed fashion involvement has moderating effect on the influence of expertise and blog design on information adoption intention. From the Table 17, we could see that fashion involvement has a positive moderating effect in the relationship between expertise and information adoption intention and the relationship between blog design and information adoption. Therefore, H6 was partial supported.

To further test how fashion involvement moderated consumers' information adoption process on RED, a linear regression analysis was also conducted on each of the two fashion involvement groups. The results (Table 29) showed that visual attractiveness, expertise and blog design have significant difference between the high and low fashion involvement groups. Therefore, fashion involvement has significant influence on the information adoption process. H6 was partially supported.

**Table 29.** Multiple Regression Analyses (Fashion Involvement)

Independent Variables	Information Adoption Intention					
	High fashion involvement (N=105)			Low fashion involvement (N=126)		
	$\beta$	t	p.	$\beta$	t	p.
Comprehensiveness	.219	4.016	<.001***	.291	5.423	<.001***
Relevance	.375	4.999	<.001***	.651	6.676	<.001***
Timeliness	.265	4.403	<.001***	.648	8.572	<.001***
Visual attractiveness	.085	.919	.360	.627	9.118	<.001***
Expertise	.202	3.496	<.001***	.300	3.270	.001**
Attractiveness	.233	3.991	<.001***	.512	5.233	<.001***
Blog design	.375	7.358	<.001***	.932	11.611	<.001***

**Notes:** \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

## Age

To test the moderating effect of age on consumers' information adoption process, the interaction of age and argument quality, source credibility, blog design were added into the regression model. The results (Table 30) showed that age significantly affected the influence of timeliness, visual attractiveness, expertise, attractiveness, and blog design on the information adoption intention.

**Table 30.** Multiple Regression Analyses (Age)

Dependent Variable	Model	Standardized Coefficients		
		$\beta$	t	p.
Information adoption intention	Comprehensiveness	.046	.653	.514
	Relevance	.128	1.358	.175
	Timeliness	.094	.794	.428
	Visual attractiveness	.482	4.350	<.001***
	Expertise	.288	3.403	<.001***
	Attractiveness	.512	4.650	<.001***
	Blog design	.663	9.209	<.001***
	Age	1.338	2.455	.015*
	Comprehensiveness* Age	.877	1.901	.058
	Relevance* Age	.313	.633	.527
	Timeliness* Age	1.085	2.316	.021*
	Visual attractiveness* Age	4.027	7.670	<.001***
	Expertise* Age	1.111	2.741	.006**
	Attractiveness* Age	2.055	2.960	.003**
Blog design* Age	2.665	6.192	<.001***	

Notes: \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

To further test how age moderated consumers' information adoption process on RED, a linear regression analysis was also conducted on each of the two age groups. The results (Table 31) showed that while the comprehensiveness, relevance, timeliness, attractiveness, and blog design had significant influence on consumers' information adoption intention toward KOLs RED postings, their importance varies between the two age groups. In general, comprehensiveness, relevance, and timeliness had a stronger influence on the information adoption intention in the young age group than in the old age group. Visual attractiveness, expertise, attractiveness, and blog design had a stronger influence on the information adoption intention in the old age group than in the young age group. Therefore, the moderating effect of age in the consumers' information adoption process was confirmed. H6 was partially supported.

**Table 31.** Multiple Regression Analyses (Age)

Independent Variables	Information Adoption Intention					
	Age 18-25 (N=203)			Age 26-35 (N=146)		
	$\beta$	t	p.	$\beta$	t	p.
Comprehensiveness	0.195	3.295	0.001**	0.134	15.706	0.000***
Relevance	0.449	6.081	0.000***	0.438	1.256	0.000***
Timeliness	0.548	2.069	0.040*	0.157	12.791	0.000***
Visual attractiveness	0.012	0.140	0.889	0.717	15.394	0.000***
Expertise	0.005	0.071	0.943	0.654	19.352	0.000***
Attractiveness	0.205	3.325	0.001**	0.493	10.266	0.000***
Blog design	0.313	6.288	0.000***	0.067	3.867	0.000***

Notes: \*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

#### 4.4. Summary of Hypotheses Testing

In summary, the linear regression analysis and multiple regression analysis were conducted to test the hypotheses. Table 32 provides a summary of hypotheses testing results.

**Table 32.** Summary of Hypotheses Testing

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Statement of Hypothesis</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>H1</b>	Argument quality of the postings of RED KOLs has a positive influence on Chinese consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs.	Supported
H1a	Comprehensiveness has a positive influence on Chinese consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs.	Supported
H1b	Relevancy has a positive influence on Chinese consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs.	Supported
H1c	Timeliness has a positive influence on Chinese consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs.	Supported
H1d	Visual attractiveness has a positive influence on Chinese consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs.	Supported
<b>H2</b>	Source credibility has a positive influence on consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs.	Rejected
H2a	Attractiveness has a positive influence on consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs.	Rejected
H2b	Expertise has a positive influence on consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs.	Rejected
<b>H3</b>	Blog design has a positive influence on consumers' adoption intention of the information posted by KOLs.	Supported
<b>H4</b>	The two posting characteristics have significant influence on argument quality, source credibility and blog design.	Supported
H4a	KOL popularity has significant influence on argument quality, source credibility and blog design.	Supported
H4b	Information details has significant influence on argument quality, source credibility and blog design.	Supported
<b>H5</b>	The two posting characteristics have moderating effects in the information adoption process.	Partially supported
H5a	KOL popularity has a moderating effect in the information adoption process.	Partially supported
H5b	Information detail has a moderating effect in the information adoption process.	Partially supported
<b>H6</b>	The two individual differences have moderating effects in the information adoption process.	Partially supported
H6a	Fashion involvement has a moderating effect in the information adoption process.	Partially supported
H6b	Age has a moderating effect in the information adoption process.	Partially supported

#### 4.5. Discussion

This dissertation intends to analyze the impact of eWOM message made by key opinion leaders on the information adoption intention of Chinese female consumers. ELM has been used to

examine if the three factors, argument quality, source credibility, and blog design, have significant impact on Chinese consumers' information adoption intention. Furthermore, posting characteristics and individual differences were proposed as key influential factors for the varying perceptions of KOL's eWOM on RED and differed in consumers' information adoption intention.

#### **4.5.1. General online shopping behavior and RED using experience**

In the result of the general online shopping behavior of Chinese consumers, it was found that most of the RED users have online shopping behavior. And it is common for Chinese consumers to adopt the information posted by the RED KOLs to purchase products. In general, Chinese female consumers are satisfied with their using experience on RED. Fashion channel is the most frequently used channel on RED. Therefore, RED is a good platform for KOLs to share their recommendations on fashion products.

#### **4.5.2. Factors influencing information adoption intention**

Factors influencing information adoption information. The majority of eWOM related literature suggests that argument quality (central cues) and source credibility (peripheral cues) are key influential factors of consumers' information adoption intention, exerting varying degrees of influence. In this study of consumers' intention to adopt information shared by KOLs on RED, in addition to argument quality and source credibility, blog design, as another peripheral cue, was also investigated. The findings from this study confirmed the significant influence of argument quality on consumers' adoption intention toward KOLs postings on RED. Four factors measured argument quality in this study, specifically comprehensiveness, relevancy, timeliness, and visual attractiveness, each having significant influence on fashion consumers' adoption intention toward the information posted by KOLs on RED.

Comprehensiveness refers to the completeness of the information in consumers adoption intention. Consumers were looking for comprehensive information and details about the products featured in KOLs postings. In the context of this study, if the information posted by the KOLs on RED could sufficiently complete consumers' needs for seeking fashion products, including the price, brand, and product materials, consumers will tend to adopt the information.

Relevance refers to the extent to which information is appropriate for the consumer needs (Chai et al., 2009). Consumers would like to adopt the information that are relevance to them. In the context of this study, if the fashion products shared by the KOL could fit consumers' fashion consumption purpose, consumers are willing to adopt the information to purchase the fashion products.

Timeliness refers to if the information posted by the KOLs is up to date. Timeless may be more important for fashion related products due to the nature of fashion products. Consumers valued postings reflecting the fashion and market trend, as well as other situational factors, such as weather. Postings not updated in a timely manner would look dated and stale, less likely leading to consumers' adoption of the information shared in postings.

The visual attractiveness also has significant influence on consumers' information adoption intention. The visual elements presented in the recommendation contents can influence a consumer's emotional response to the product. Visual elements directly display the product information, previous studies have shown that the number of eWOM and visual elements can influence the awareness of consumers and ultimately affect sales. In the early development of online shopping, the clear pictures containing in the product introduction primarily tend to enable consumers to reduce perceived risk and improve the credibility of the product. And in today's more and more mature network environment, opinion leaders' display products through a variety of

pictures, videos and others are not to reduce the risk, but to show the image of the product details, product use and effects in a more direct way.

Contrary to expectation, source credibility did not show a significant positive influence on consumers' information adoption intention toward KOLs on RED. Source credibility refers to which the followers perceive the KOL as knowledgeable and from whom consumers can gain knowledge in terms of product knowledge (Ohanian, 1990). On RED, any user can freely register and post comments without any signature check or authorization process. It was left up to users to discern from individual signatures the source of the comment. It would be difficult for users to evaluate whether the comment was posted by an expert. Therefore, it was expected that source credibility would have a significant influence on user adoption of the information contained in a posting. However, the two measurements of source credibility, expertise and attractiveness, were not revealed as having significant influence on users' intention to accept the recommendation/advocation provided by KOLs via their postings. The reason may involve that in this study, three KOLs were selected for participants to review and answer the questionnaires. Participants may not follow that fashion KOL and cannot firmly evaluate the expertise and attractiveness of that KOL.

The blog design refers to the visual and information design posted by the KOLs on RED. It has significant positive influence on the information adoption intention. In the context of this study, if the layout of the pictures posted by the KOL on RED looks professional and well-designed, consumers are willing to adopt the information.

#### **4.5.3. Moderating factors influencing information adoption process**

Two types of moderating factors were investigated in this study: posting characteristics (popularity of KOL and level of information details) and consumer individual differences (fashion involvement and age). Before testing the moderating effects, T-tests were conducted to compare

consumers' perception of argument quality, source credibility, and blog design between different groups. Moderating effects were investigated by using multi-group comparisons via regression analyses.

Independent T-test results revealed that the argument quality, source credibility, and blog design have significant influence between the different posting characteristics groups and individual differences groups. Regarding the t-test of KOL popularity, it was found that KOL popularity has no significant influence on visual attractiveness and blog design. Regarding the t-test of information details, it has significant influence on all the argument quality, source credibility, and blog design factors. Regarding the t-test of fashion involvement, it only had no significant influence on comprehensiveness of the information. Regarding the t-test of age, it also only had no significant influence on comprehensiveness of the information.

Regarding the moderating effect of the KOL popularity in the consumers' information adoption process, significant differences were revealed between the more followers group and less followers group. In the study of Jin and Phua (2022), the influence of number of followers on consumers' perceived credibility of a KOL and their intention to pass along eWOM was tested and confirmed. In this study, KOL popularity has a moderating effect on the relationship between the two dimensions of source credibility and consumers' information adoption intention. Consumers perceived the KOLs with a high number of followers as being more expertise and attractive. In addition, KOL popularity has no moderating effect in the relationship between timeliness and information adoption intention.

Regarding the moderating effect of the information details in the consumers' information adoption process, significant differences were revealed between the more information details group and less information details group. In the research of AlRabiah et al. (2022), it was found that greater depth and breadth of social disclosure by KOLs reduced influencer trust. Longer reviews

likely include more details of the product or service, and of peers' experience of using it in specific contexts. A large amount of information within the review helps reduce a user's uncertainty and increase his or her confidence. Empirical studies of product reviews, mostly on Amazon, found that review length was a highly significant predictor of review usefulness and information adoption (Baek et al. 2013; Korfiatis et al. 2012; Mudambi & Schuff 2010; Pan & Zhang 2011; Yin et al. 2014; Zhang et al. 2010). In this study, information details could positively moderate the relationship between argument quality, source credibility, blog design, and information adoption intention.

Regarding the moderating effect of the fashion involvement in the consumers' information adoption process, significant differences were revealed between the high fashion involvement group and low fashion involvement group. Also, the moderating effect of fashion involvement in the information adoption process has been confirmed. Fashion involvement is an influential driver of consumer's fashion adoption process (Goldsmith et al., 1999). O'Cass (2000) argues that fashion involvement is related to the personal characteristics of the consumer that reflects about his/her subjective knowledge of fashion, which in result helps in to develop their intentions to adopt new fashion. Involvement has the strongest influence on the consumer's buying behavior, which means that if consumers involve in fashion, for example selecting and evaluating the new fashion according to their choice and interest, then they will hold more positive intention to buy that particular product (SeoHathcote and Sweaney, 2001). In the study of Rahman et al. (2014), the relationship between fashion involvement and intention to adopt apparel fashion is positive which shows that the involvement of consumers in buying of fashionable products is a good predictor to influence their intention to adopt new fashionable clothes. The more they involve in fashion, the more they will quickly adopt a new fashion. According to Nkwocha et al. (2005), consumers with greater involvement process information differently in the persuasion stage as compared to the

consumers having low level of involvement. In this study, fashion involvement only influences the relationship between expertise, blog design and information adoption intention. The results showed that high fashion involvement group perceived less argument quality and source credibility than low fashion involvement group.

Lastly, the moderating effect of age was also confirmed in the process of consumer information adoption. According to Beatty and Smith (1997), age affects consumers' attitude and behavior. Older adults, given their extensive experience, tend to rely more on their own beliefs and, as such, are less likely to seek and use more information in their decision-making and adoption processes (Cheung, Xiao, & Liu, 2014). In the study of Assaker (2020), it was proved that age has moderating effect in the relationship between the proposed determinants on user generated content and online review adoption. In this study, younger consumers are more likely to be influenced by argument quality, source credibility and blog design in the information adoption process. Visual attractiveness and expertise have no significant influence on consumers' information adoption in the younger consumer group.

## **CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS**

In general, Chinese female consumers are willing to adopt the information posted by fashion KOLs on RED. The purpose of this study is to investigate Chinese consumers' information adoption intention toward the fashion KOLs on RED. The academic and practical implications of findings are provided in the first section of this chapter, followed by limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

### **5.1. Academic implications**

Existing research has shown the more and more important role of social media eWOM, especially the eWOM by opinion leader (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). From the theoretical perspective, this study contributes to existing eWOM research in several ways. First, our research model is built upon the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986). The current study applied the model in the context of a Chinese online consumer community. The explanatory power of the research model remains high. In addition to just applying ELM in the current investigation, our elaboration of information quality into the four components of relevance, timeliness, visual attractiveness and comprehensiveness (Negash et al., 2002; Bailey and Pearson, 1983; Cheung et al., 2008) added new insight into the ultimate effect these components ultimately have on information adoption. Also, this study contributes to a wider knowledge about the effect of eWOM in social media platforms on the information adoption intention, more specifically, the eWOM message by opinion leaders in RED. Focused on the segment of Chinese female consumers and based on the conceptual model, this study explained how the independent variable influences the information adoption intention of Chinese female consumers.

## **5.2. Practical implications**

This study examined the factors that drive consumers to adopt and use the messages (eWOM) from KOLs on RED. We expect the findings of this study can provide some advice to the KOLs on RED to help them better manage their postings for the purpose of presenting useful information. This would help them to attract users, and in effect paying advertisers. KOLs on RED need to provide up to date fashion information to attract their followers to adopt their shared information. This study also provided some useful implications for enterprises or brand. Firstly, the enterprise or brand should pay attention to the influence power of opinion leaders. In the context of digital area, consumers usually search information about a certain product/brand before they make a purchase. Opinion leaders in RED are one of the major parts of spreading e-WOM. They are considered as professional by consumers. Therefore, their recommendation will influence the purchase decision making process of consumers. According to the segmentation and product positioning, the enterprise or brand can choose appropriate opinion leaders to collaborate for advising product to consumers according to the professional area of opinion leaders. The emerging marketing trends are also constantly updated. The enterprise or brand should make scientific analysis of products, type of opinion leaders and their targeting consumers, launching advertisements accurately to achieve the best propagation effects and impact on consumer. In addition, from this study, we found that information relevance, information comprehensiveness, information timeliness, and visual attractiveness were the vital elements for influencing information adoption within RED.

## **5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

Despite the meaningful implications, this study bears several limitations. The first limitation lies in the convenience sampling method used to recruit the respondents. This study targeted those who had at least heard of RED and are RED users; therefore, sampling from the targeted

population can create unbalanced demographic data. Also, only female consumers have been investigated because over 80% of RED users are female. Consumers' true adoption intention can be better revealed by replicating the study by sampling from the general population.

Secondly, only three KOLs were chosen and they were randomly assigned to the participants to look through one of their main pages on RED. The participants may not follow the KOLs we chose and are not familiar with them. In addition, we only chose three KOLs whose posting characteristics are more information-more followers, more information-less followers, and less information-more followers. For future studies, the KOLs' postings with less information and less followers could also be included to investigate consumers' information adoption process.

Finally, it was discovered that there may be limitations to the model. The four dimensions of argument quality may play different roles in determining information adoption given the nature of desired information. Additional research could be conducted to explore different dimensions of argument quality found in other studies, which may be effective in influencing information adoption. These dimensions include format (Wixom and Todd, 2005), reliability (Bailey and Pearson, 1983) and understandability (Srinivasan, 1985) etc. As for the antecedents of KOL credibility, we only proposed two factors: expertise and attractiveness. However, there are other factors that also have an impact on eWOM credibility, such as trustworthiness. We did not consider other potential factors which may have impact on information adoption intention. Further studies can introduce more variables to deepen the analysis and increase the persuasiveness of the findings.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: IRB Form for Approval of Surveying

Dear Yingjiao Xu:

Date: December 21, 2021

IRB Protocol 24505 has been assigned Exempt status

Title: Key Opinion Leaders on RED and Chinese Fashion Consumers: What is the Connection?

PI: Xu, Yingjiao

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. Exempt d.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review. This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
3. If any unanticipated problems or adverse events occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website: <http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs/compliance/irb/submission-guidance/>.
4. Any unapproved departure from your approved IRB protocol results in non-compliance. Please find information regarding non-compliance here: [http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs-docs/irb/non-compliance\\_faq\\_sheet.pdf](http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs-docs/irb/non-compliance_faq_sheet.pdf).

Please let us know if you have any questions.

\*\*\*\*\*

NCSU IRB Office

## Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire

Note to individual filling out this questionnaire:

Thanks for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. The information that you provide will give us valuable insights into Chinese consumers' buying behavior for fashion products.

Please complete this questionnaire as completely as you can.

Thanks again for your time and effort.

Ailin Li  
Wilson College of Textiles, NCSU  
ali19@ncsu.edu  
(919) 272-9530

### **Consent Form**

**Project Title:** Key Opinion Leaders on RED and Chinese Fashion Consumers: What is the Connection?

**Principal Investigator:** Ailin Li, ali19@ncsu.edu

**Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. Yingjiao Xu, yxu11@ncsu.edu

#### **Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing this consent form electronically, I am affirming that I have read and understand the above information. All of the questions that I had about this research have been answered. I have chosen to participate in this study with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

- I consent to research
- I do not consent to research

### **Screening Questions**

- Have you ever used the RED application before?
  - (1) Yes
  - (2) No
- Do you follow any fashion influencers on RED?
  - (1) Yes
  - (2) No

### **Section One: General questions**

- How often do you use RED application?
  - (1) Always

- (2) Often
- (3) Sometimes
- (4) Occasionally
  
- What are the purposes of using RED application?
  - (1) Look for other users' reviews or tips
  - (2) Share your life
  - (3) Buy products
  - (4) Spend your free time
  - (5) other \_\_\_\_\_
  
- What channels do you often browse on RED?
  - (1) Fashion
  - (2) Travel
  - (3) Gaming
  - (4) Home deco
  - (5) Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Please rate your satisfaction of your using experience of RED.
  - (1) Highly dissatisfied
  - (2) Dissatisfied
  - (3) Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
  - (4) Satisfied
  - (5) Highly satisfied
  
- How often do you shop online for fashion products?
  - (1) Always
  - (2) Often
  - (3) Sometimes
  - (4) Occasionally
  - (5) Never

**Section Two: Main questions**

**Directions:** Please click this link to a specific RED KOL and look through the posts of her.

<https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/5707360f84edcd2b0039c777?xhsshare=CopyLink&appuid=56e7a9fb82ec3934b01d17a5&apptime=1638549981>

On a scale from 1 to 5, where ‘1’ means you would strongly disagree with the statement and ‘5’ means you strongly agree with the statement.

Tracking questions:

How many followers does this KOL have? \_\_\_\_\_

Please evaluate the following statements.

<b>Questions: Comprehensiveness</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
The information posted by this KOL includes all necessary values of fashion products (e.g. price, brand, material...).					
The information posted by this KOL sufficiently complete your needs for seeking fashion products.					
The recommendation posted by this KOL includes all the aspects of the review of fashion products (e.g. material, quality, purpose...).					

<b>Questions: Relevance</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
The fashion products shared by this KOL fit my fashion consumption purpose (e.g. business or casual wearing).					
The price of the fashion products shared by this KOL is fit for me.					
The style of the fashion products shared by this KOL is fit for me.					

<b>Questions: Timeliness</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
The fashion information posted by this KOL is in line with the current season.					
The information posted by this KOL keeps up with fashion trends.					

<b>Questions: Visual attractiveness</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
The outfits posted by this KOL are visually attractive.					
The fashion products shared by this KOL look high quality.					
The style of the fashion products shared by this KOL is unique.					
The pictures posted by this KOL show the details of the clothing.					

<b>Questions: Expertise</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
This KOL is knowledgeable in fashion and style.					
This KOL is knowledgeable in the fashion trends.					
This KOL is an expert in the material and quality of the fashion products.					

<b>Questions: Attractiveness</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
The fashion style of this KOL is attractive.					
This KOL is in good shape.					
This KOL is fashionable.					

<b>Questions: Blog design</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
In general, the posts of this KOL are visually pleasing.					
In general, the layout of the pictures makes the posts of this KOL look professional and well-designed.					
The content organization of the posts provided by this KOL is of high quality.					
The visual organization of the posts provided by this KOL is of high quality.					

<b>Questions: Information Usefulness</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
I think the information posted by this KOL on RED is generally useful for my shopping of fashion products.					
I learn about fashion trends when reading information provided by this KOL on RED.					
I think the information posted by the influencers on RED could help me better learn about the fashion products.					

<b>Questions: Information Adoption</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
I agree with the KOL's recommendation regarding the fashion products on RED.					
I would like to adopt the KOL's recommendation to purchase the fashion products.					

<b>Questions: Fashion Involvement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Fashion clothing means a lot to me.					
Fashion clothing is significant to me.					
For me personally fashion clothing is important.					
I am interested in fashion clothing.					
I pay a lot of attention to fashion clothing.					
I am very much involved with fashion clothing.					

### **Section Three: Demographics**

- Age
  - 1) 18~25
  - 2) 26~30
  - 3) 31~35
  - 4) 36~40
  
- Education Level
  - 1) High school diploma or below
  - 2) Some college, no degree
  - 3) Bachelor's degree
  - 4) Graduate degree
  
- Annual Family Income Level
  - 1) Less than ¥75,000
  - 2) ¥75,000~¥99,999
  - 3) ¥100,000~¥149,999
  - 4) ¥150,000~¥199,999
  - 5) ¥200,000 or more

