

HOW ONLINE COMMENTS ON MARRIAGE TOPICS ON WEIBO INFLUENCE MARRIAGE INTENTIONS OF UNMARRIED WOMEN IN CHINA

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Abstract

The study aimed to use a combination of Information Adoption Model and Theory of Reasoned Action to explain the underlying mechanisms by which online comments on marriage topics in Weibo influence unmarried women's marital intentions. Argument quality and source credibility were identified as content features of online comments on marriage topics in Weibo. Perceived information usefulness, and marital attitudes were identified as the internal processes by which content features of online comments influence marital intention. The study collected data from 422 un-married women through a questionnaire on the Weibo platform. PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4.0 was utilized to test the structural model. The results showed that the content characteristics (argument quality and source credibility) of online comments on marriage topics had a positive effect on perceived information usefulness and a negative effect on marriage intention. In addition, the perceived information usefulness of online comments had a negative effect on marital attitudes. Positive marital attitudes had a positive effect on marital intentions. Perceived information usefulness and marital attitudes acted as serial mediators between the content characteristics of online comments on marital topics and marital intentions. This study extends the literature on online commenting research by examining the effects of content features of online comments on marriage topics on marital intentions, fills a theoretical gap in the scope of related re-search, and provides valuable theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: *Argument quality; Source credibility; Perceived Information Usefulness; Attitude; Intention*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the innovation and development of mobile internet, the decentralized communication method of social media has become the main channel for people to obtain information, analyze information and interact with each other, which has led to an exponential growth in the time people spend on social media [1]. As of June 2021, Weibo had 566 million monthly active users and 246 million average daily active users, making it the largest social media platform in China [2]. Users can get the latest news information and social dynamics from Weibo, and online comments on Weibo promote the open exchange of information and become a tool for users to freely express their opinions. Online comments on the topic of marriage have always been a hot topic on Weibo. 2018 Weibo User Development Report shows that among the content verticals of Weibo users, the reading

volume of the emotional field ranks fourth [3]. Weibo user groups are dominated by the post-90s and post-00s, accounting for 78% of the total, with female users accounting for 54.6% of the total [4]. Many female users have engaged in heated discussions in the comments section under the topic of marriage, expressing their views on marriage, with most of the comments on marriage showing a negative trend. In the comments on Weibo and other social media, late marriage, no marriage and fear of marriage have become a trend [3]. Previous research has argued that the exposure of marital information and views from various sources such as social media, and individuals' exposure to descriptions of this marital information can influence individuals' marital behavior [5,6]. Open-ended webinars in social media influence young women's perceptions of marriage [7]. Although these findings suggest that comments on marital

topics can shape and change an individual's views on marriage, the psychological processes by which this influence occurs remain under-theorized.

Online comments on marriage topics are essentially a form of user-generated content, which is information or content that is generated and posted online by a user [2]. User-generated comments can change other readers' opinions on specific issues [9]. According to the Information Adoption Model (IAM), this alteration of the process of analyzing and accepting the quality of arguments and source credibility of the content of the comments depends on how the individual perceives the information [10]. Some scholars have pointed out that the IAM should be combined with other models to increase its applicability in different contexts, such as combining the IAM with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to study the characteristics of online information use that influence consumers' purchase intentions [11,12]. Unmarried women who browse online comments on marriage in Weibo may be fully critical of these comment messages, and when they perceive the messages as useful, it may influence their marriage intentions. Therefore, this study used the use of an information adoption model to explain the characteristics of online comment messages on marriage topics, combined with some of the variables of the TRA theory to explain unmarried women's responses to their marriage intentions under the processing of marriage comment information.

The research objective of this study was to explore the mechanisms by which marital online comments influence unmarried women's marital intentions. Specifically, the relationship between argument quality, source credibility, and perceived information usefulness of marital comments and unmarried women's marital attitudes and marital intentions was tested. The results of the study provide theoretical insights into online comments on marital topics and contribute to the literature through the proposed model. In terms of practical significance, the China Marriage and Family Report 2022 study shows that China's marriage rate has been declining year by year, from 9.9% in 2013 to 5.8% in 2020 [13]. Moreover, the number of unmarried women aged 30 and above in China has climbed from 1.54 million to 5.9 million, and women's willingness to get married is lower than that of men. Therefore, this study can provide theoretical and empirical support for solving the hot social issue of unmarried women's willingness to marry.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Sussman and Siegal [10] proposed an information adoption model by combining the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) [14] with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) [15]. The IAM considers argument quality and source credibility as two attributes of online information that can help information receivers identify useful information, where argument quality is the central path and source credibility is the peripheral path [16]. Argument quality indicates the degree to which information is supported by facts and logic, while source credibility is the degree to which the source provider of the perceived information is reliable [10]. In previous research, the IAM model has provided strong theoretical support for the process of online comment adoption and information decision-making by explaining how people process persuasive online comment information [11,12,17]. Although the IAM model has not yet been applied to online comments on marriage topics in any study, online comments on marriage topics in Weibo are also a persuasive message, and the quality of arguments and source credibility of online comments on marriage topics can allow unmarried women to perceive whether the comment is useful or not. Therefore, this study utilized the three main factors of the information adoption model, argument quality, source credibility, and perceived usefulness to understand how unmarried women process information about marital comments.

2.1 Theory of Reasoned Action

Fishbein and Ajzen [18] proposed a TRA based on previous research in attitude theory. The theory of rational action separates behavioral intention from behavior, arguing that intention is between attitude and actual behavior, and that behavioral intention is the most important determinant influencing the behavior of an actor. In turn, an individual's behavioral intention is determined by attitudes and subjective norms towards behavior. Behavioral attitude refers to the subject's view and evaluation of a particular behavior. TRA has been extensively validated in studies of online comments and consumer purchase attitudes and behaviors [19,20]. Some studies have also applied TRA to the study of college students' marital intention and verified the applicability of the model in the study of marital intention [21,22]. Therefore, this study used TRA to explain the tendency of unmarried women to have marital attitudes and marital intentions under the influence of online comments on marital topics. Only two

components of the TRA, attitudes and behavioral intentions, were used in this study.

2.2 Research models and hypotheses

According to the IAM, argument quality and source credibility are two informational variables of different nature that can persuade individuals to adopt information. Bhattacharjee and Sanford [23] define argument quality as the strength of the argument and measure it with persuasive items. A study of online comments on marketing defines argument quality in terms of relevance, comprehensibility, adequacy, objectivity, accuracy, timeliness [24]. Bhattacharjee and Sanford [23] consider source credibility as the degree to which a source is perceived as credible, knowledgeable and trustworthy by the recipient of the information. Source credibility generally consists of expertise and credibility [25]. The results of a large number of empirical studies show that argumentation quality and source credibility have a positive impact on the perceived usefulness of information to the recipients of the information [26,27]. In addition, the argument quality and source credibility of online comments have a positive effect on the intention to buy of information recipients [28,29].

Therefore, unmarried women will be more likely to rely on online commentary on the topic of marriage if it is persuasive and logically structured [30]. Under the topic of marriage, female users share not only their views on marriage, but also their positive and negative feelings about it. This personal information improves perceived usefulness because unmarried women may perceive it as unbiased and independent. In fact, unmarried women will perceive the information in female users' comments as more truthful, authentic, and useful [31]. Online comments on the topic of marriage have given unmarried women a great boost in expressing their claims and fighting for their rights, probably because they perceive the content of the online comments to be useful [32]. Therefore, if unmarried women perceive online comments posted on the Weibo platform about marriage topics as reliable and credible, they will find these comments useful in their marriage decision-making process. In addition, online comments on marriage topics are more likely to be negative, and due to the negative effect, negative information has a stronger influence than neutral or positive information [33]. The content of marriage comments may have influenced unmarried women's willingness to marry and created anxiety about marriage [34]. Therefore, the hypotheses are:

H₁. The argument quality of online comments on marriage topics has an effect on the perceived informational usefulness of comments.

H₂. Source credibility of online comments on marriage topics has an effect on the perceived informational usefulness of comments.

H₃. There is a negative effect of argument quality of online comments on marriage topics on marital intention.

H₄. There is a negative effect of source credibility of online comments on marriage topics on marital intention.

Perceived information usefulness is, at the earliest, the extent to which individuals believe that using information systems will improve their productivity [35]. In studies of electronic word-of-mouth, the perceived informational usefulness of online comments has a direct impact on the decision of information recipients to accept the content of the comment [12], as well as on their attitudes toward consumption [36]. Marriage information disseminated in social media has an impact on unmarried women's perception and evaluation of marriage [5,6]. The sharing of opinions among group members, in the recognition of opinions and emotional resonance of the shared content, unmarried women both realize their self-identity and unite with other similar individuals to enhance their attitudes to resist marital pressure [37]. Comments on Weibo about marriage topics, such as personal freedom after marriage, distribution of household chores, cheating after marriage, and domestic violence, have given young unmarried women a more concrete understanding of life after marriage, and they have become cautious and even fearful of marriage in their perception and recognition of these comments. Therefore, the hypothesis is:

H₅. Perceived information usefulness of online comments on marriage topics has a negative impact on marriage attitudes.

According to TRA, Fishbein and Ajzen [18] argue that attitudes have a direct effect on behavioral intentions. People with positive attitudes toward marriage have higher willingness to marry, and positive thinking about marriage reduces conflict about whether to get married or not [39]. People with positive attitudes toward marriage are more likely to enter into a romantic marriage relationship [40]. One study investigated the

relationship between college students' attitudes toward marriage and marital intentions and found that college students' attitudes toward marriage significantly and positively predicted marital intentions [41,42]. Therefore, the hypothesis is:

H₆. Marital attitudes have an effect on marital intentions.

Previous research has found that perceived usefulness mediates the relationship between Internet word of mouth content characteristics (argument quality and source credibility) and users' willingness to revisit the site to spend money [43]. The stronger the perception of perceived usefulness of user-generated product comment features, the greater the willingness of individuals to share user-generated comment information with others [44]. Attitudes can mediate the relationship between perceived usefulness and level of social media use [45,46]. Therefore, the stronger the perception of the perceived usefulness of the content features of the comments on the topic of marriage by unmarried women, the more it will make them re-examine the inherent concept of marriage. In the face of marital problems, unmarried women do not want to be bound by the traditional marriage system in their personal life and career development, which in turn affects their marital intention. Therefore, the hypotheses are:

H₇. Perceived information usefulness and marital attitudes serially mediate the negative relationship between argument quality of online comments on marriage topics and marital intention.

H₈. Perceived information usefulness and marital attitudes serially mediate the negative relationship between source credibility of online comments on marriage topics and marital intention. The research model is shown in Figure 1.

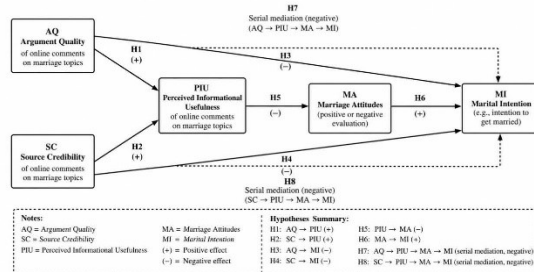


Figure 1: Conceptual Model.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Sampling and data collection

The population of this study is unmarried women in China, i.e., women who have never been married before and who have reached the legal marriage age of 20 years or older. The inclusion criteria for the sample were based on unmarried female users who had viewed online comment content on marriage topics on Weibo.

The sampling strategy employed in this study is a non-probability, self-selected online sampling approach. Therefore, the sample may be subject to potential selection bias, as individuals who are more active on Weibo or more interested in marriage-related topics may be more likely to participate. In addition, because data were collected through online recruitment on specific discussion boards, the sample may overrepresent digitally engaged, urban, and relatively educated unmarried women in China. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution regarding generalizability to the broader population of unmarried women, particularly those who are less active on social media or from rural or less digitally connected regions.

To recruit participants, we posted recruitment advertisements on three popular Weibo discussion boards focused on marriage, relationships, and women's life choices. These advertisements included a brief description of the study, the eligibility criteria, and a link to the survey hosted on Wenjuanxing (Questionstar), a Chinese online survey system similar to Qualtrics [47]. Participants were provided with a link to the survey through Wenjuanxing, which they could then answer directly and anonymously, and participants were asked to complete the online survey after reading and agreeing to the informed consent statement.

To verify that participants met the inclusion criteria, the survey began with two screening questions: (1) "What is your current marital status?" (Response options: unmarried/never married, married, divorced, widowed) – only those selecting "unmarried/never married" proceeded; and (2) "Have you ever viewed or read online comments about marriage topics on Weibo?" (Response options: yes, no, not sure) – only those selecting "yes" proceeded. Participants who failed either screening question were redirected to the end of the survey and were not compensated.

Upon completion of the survey, each participant was rewarded with a nominal cash prize (approximately 5 RMB, equivalent to 0.70 USD)

drawn from a random lottery system. This nominal amount was chosen to provide a token of appreciation without unduly incentivizing hasty or inattentive responses [52]. To further mitigate potential bias, we included two attention-check items (e.g., "Please select 'Agree' for this question") in the questionnaire; participants who failed either attention check was excluded from the final analysis ($n = 18$ excluded). In the current study, there were a total of 422 unmarried women who passed all screening and attention checks. Of these, 51.7% were 20-24 years old, 28.0% were 25-29 years old, 18.0% were 30-34 years old, and 2.4% were 35 years old or older.

3.2 Measures

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part showed the respondents a specific, representative topic of marriage on the Weibo platform and the corresponding comments about that marriage topic. Specifically, participants were shown the following topic: 'Should women postpone marriage to focus on their career?' along with three actual anonymized comments from Weibo users: (1) 'Marriage is not a must; financial independence comes first,' (2) 'There is no perfect age for marriage; it depends on the right person,' and (3) 'Getting married before 30 gives you more family support.' The examples in the questionnaire helped respondents to understand the context of the study, refresh their memory of this type of information, and improve the accuracy of their responses [48,49]. The complete list of all questionnaire items for each of the five constructs (argument quality, source credibility, information usefulness, marital attitudes, and marital intentions), including the 7-point Likert scale anchors (1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree), is provided in Supplementary Appendix A. The appendix also includes reverse-coded items where applicable.

The second section measured five constructs: argument quality, source credibility, information usefulness, marital attitudes, and marital intentions. A 7-point Likert scale between "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" was used for all scale items. Measures of argument quality and source credibility were developed based on the Bhattacharjee and Sanford [23] study and consisted of 6 items for argument quality and 5 items for source credibility (adapted to the context of online comments). Perceived information usefulness consisted of 4 items, adapted from the scale developed by Song et al. [12]. The Marital Attitudes and Marital Intentions scales were

developed according to Ajzen's [50] guidelines for questionnaire structure development and consisted of 7 items for marital attitudes and 5 items for marital intentions. All items are presented in Supplementary Appendix A.

In addition, the questionnaire was edited and pre-tested to improve its clarity and comprehensibility. Thirty unmarried women were invited to participate in testing the content validity of the questionnaire to confirm the reliability of the items. No changes were made to the content of the survey during these processes. This study used Harman's one-factor test to overcome the possibility of common method bias. The results showed that the initial eigenvalue of the first factor was 36.97%, which means that there is no common method bias in this study because Harman's one-factor value is less than 50% [51].

3.3 Data analysis

To test the research hypotheses, structural equation modeling SEM combined with partial least squares (PLS) was applied for estimation, which is less restrictive on data distribution than covariance-based SEM methods [52]. The method was implemented in two steps, with the first step consisting of assessing the reliability and validity of the measurement model, while the second step assessed the fit of the structural model [53,54]. Data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 software.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Measurement model

The model in this study is the reflective measurement model, and the validation of the reflective measurement model is done by testing its indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity [55]. As shown in Table 1, the indicator loading levels were acceptable in this study as all items had loading values above 0.708 [56]. The composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values were above 0.70 and below 0.95, indicating good reliability [56]. This study examined the average variance extracted (AVE) values and found that the AVE scores of the potential constructs were above 0.50, which shows sufficient convergent validity [52]. Finally, we tested the discriminant validity by evaluating the square root of AVE. The results in the table 1 indicate that the square root of AVE is higher than its highest correlation with any construct. Thus, the findings ensure the discriminant validity of the scale [57].

Table 1. Construct Validity and Reliability.

[Table 1 about here]

Note. Argument quality = AQ, Source credibility = SC, perceived information usefulness = IU, Marriage attitude = AT, Marriage intention = IN, α = Cronbach's alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted. Bold diagonal elements are square root AVE. Elements below diagonal elements are the correlations among constructs.

4.2 Structural model

After recognizing the validity and reliability of the research model, the structure of the research model was measured. Based on the direct effects in Table 2, it is known that argument quality ($\beta=0.262, p=0.000$) and source credibility ($\beta=0.327, p=0.000$) have a positive effect on perceived information usefulness, supporting H₁ and H₂, respectively. Similarly, the path values of argument quality ($\beta=-0.144, p=0.004$) and source credibility ($\beta=-0.121, p=0.015$) path values on marital intention show a significant negative effect of argument quality and source credibility on marital intention, confirming H₃ and H₄, respectively. Similarly, the path coefficient of perceived information usefulness on marital attitudes ($\beta=-0.326, p=0.000$) shows a significant and negative effect of perceived information usefulness on marital attitudes, supporting H₅. In addition, the effect of marital attitudes on marital intention ($\beta=0.363, p=0.000$) showed a positive and significant effect of marital attitudes on marital intentions, supporting H₆.

Indirect effects showed that perceived information usefulness and marital attitudes serially mediated the relationship between argument quality and marital intentions. The indirect path (argument quality → perceived information usefulness → marital attitude → marital intention) was significantly negative ($\beta=-0.031, p=0.001$), confirming the role of perceived information usefulness and marital attitude as serial mediators, supporting H₇. Similarly, the indirect effect of source credibility through the serial mediation path (source credibility → perceived information usefulness → marital attitude → marital intention) on marital intention was significantly negative ($\beta = -0.038, p = 0.000$), indicating that perceived information usefulness and marital attitudes serially mediate the relationship between source credibility and marital intention, supporting H₈. The structural model path coefficient results are shown in Figure 2.

Perceived information usefulness, marital attitudes, and marital intention R² values were 0.257, 0.106, and 0.242, respectively, indicating

that the model has moderate predictive accuracy [58]. Regarding the predictive relevance of the model, Q² values were calculated using the blindfold method [59]. The results indicated that the predictability of perceived information usefulness (Q² = 0.18), marital attitudes (Q² = 0.08), and marital intentions (Q² = 0.18) was at an acceptable level [60,61].

Table 2. Results of the structural model.

[Table 2 about here]

Note. Argument quality = AQ, Source credibility = SC, perceived information usefulness = IU, Marriage attitude = AT, Marriage intention = IN. S = Supported, Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

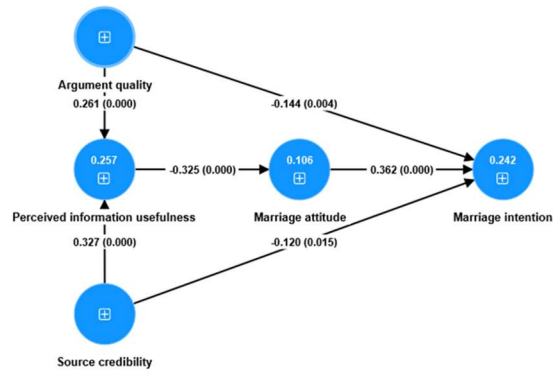


Figure 2. Results of Path Analysis.

5. DISCUSSION

This study tested a theoretical model combining the IAM and the TRA that explains how content features of online comments on marriage topics affect the psychological steps of unmarried women's willingness to marry. Critically, the online comments on Weibo used in this study were predominantly negative in sentiment (e.g., expressing fear of marriage, concerns about loss of personal freedom, and challenges in marital life). Therefore, when we refer to "argument quality" and "source credibility" in this context, we are referring to the perceived strength, logic, and trustworthiness of these negative comments, not neutral or positive ones. The results show that the higher the perceived argument quality and source credibility of these negative online comments, the more useful such comments are perceived by unmarried women. At the same time, consistent with H₃ and H₄, unmarried women's willingness to marry is lower when argument quality and source credibility are

higher. The stronger the perception of the usefulness of online comments on marriage topics, the more unmarried women's attitudes toward marriage are negatively affected by the content of the comments (supporting H5). However, as shown in H6, positive marital attitudes significantly and positively predict marital intentions, suggesting that positive attitudes can partially counteract the negative effects of online comments.

The findings are similar to those of previous studies on negative online comments and behavioral intentions [62,63]. Previous research has concluded that if negative online comments are informative (i.e., arguments are of high quality) and come from trusted users (sources are credible), then consumers tend to be persuaded and refuse to make a purchase [20]. In parallel, our findings show that when unmarried women encounter negative marriage-related comments on Weibo that are perceived as high in argument quality and source credibility, they are similarly persuaded—but in this case, the behavioral outcome is reduced marital intention and more negative marital attitudes. This study illustrates that online comments on marriage topics on Weibo play a negative role in shaping marriage intention. Thus, the negativity of the comment content (e.g., fears about marriage, reports of marital conflict) interacts with information features: high argument quality and source credibility amplify the persuasive impact of negative sentiment. It has been pointed out that fragmented online information has greatly impacted youth's marriage concepts and behaviors, and negative opinions about marriage in online communities negatively affect youth's attitudes toward marriage. Most people believe that statements and reports by netizens in social media have an impact on their marriage choices [64].

The content of the comments on the topic of marriage on Weibo presents the commenters' negative views on marriage, as well as the difficulties and challenges in marriage. Crucially, a comment can be both negative in sentiment and high in argument quality (e.g., a logically structured, evidence-based argument about why marriage may lead to loss of personal freedom). In this study, we observed exactly such a pattern: comments that were more persuasive and credible (high argument quality and source credibility) also carried negative sentiment, and together these features produced stronger negative effects on marital attitudes and intentions. These findings suggest that the persuasive influence of online comments is not solely driven by negativity, but by the interaction between negative content and high

informational quality. In this sense, argument quality and source credibility function as amplifiers of message persuasiveness, strengthening the impact of the underlying negative valence rather than independently determining outcome direction. This information may trigger unmarried women's own concerns or reflections about marriage, making them more cautious. Prospect theory states that people are sensitive to losses and gains differently, with the pain of a loss far outweighing the pleasure of a gain [65]. Therefore, when unmarried women perceive the quality of marriage comments to be accurate and objective, and the source to be credible, and when those comments emphasize potential losses (e.g., loss of freedom, career setbacks, or emotional strain), they may perceive greater risks associated with marriage, thereby increasing uncertainty. Thus, the negative paths observed (H₃, H₄, H₅) should be interpreted as reflecting the joint influence of message valence and perceived information quality.

The serial mediation results (H₇ and H₈) suggest that positive marital attitudes help reduce the negative effects of negative marital comments on marital intentions. Argument quality and source credibility influence perceived information usefulness, which in turn affects marital attitudes and subsequently marital intentions. Thus, even when negative comments are of high quality and from credible sources, their impact operates through sequential cognitive and attitudinal processes rather than directly. This highlights that the influence of online comments is indirect and cognitively mediated rather than immediate or driven solely by emotional responses.

Previous research has suggested that individuals process persuasive information differently depending on their prior attitudes and belief strength [66]. Constructs such as self-serving bias and defensive motivation have been proposed in the literature as potential mechanisms underlying resistance to attitude change [29,67,68]. However, it is important to emphasize that these constructs were not directly measured in the present study. Therefore, their role in explaining the observed relationships cannot be empirically confirmed within the current dataset.

Instead, the present findings may be interpreted as being consistent with these theoretical perspectives. For example, unmarried women with stronger positive marital attitudes may be less influenced by negative online comments, whereas those with weaker or less stable attitudes may be more susceptible to persuasive information characterized by high argument quality and source

credibility. Nevertheless, these interpretations remain speculative and should be treated as theoretical extensions rather than direct conclusions.

Future research should directly measure variables such as self-serving bias, defensive motivation, and attitude strength to more rigorously examine their potential mediating or moderating roles. Experimental or longitudinal designs would also help clarify the causal mechanisms underlying resistance or susceptibility to online persuasion.

7. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Overall, the current study contributes to understanding how unmarried women are influenced by online comments on marriage topics on Weibo. The process of persuasive influence highlights the interaction between perceived information usefulness and positive marital attitudes in shaping marital intentions. Although prior research has extensively examined the influence of online comments on consumer purchase behavior [67], limited attention has been given to their impact on life decisions such as marriage. By integrating IAM and TRA, the present study extends existing literature by demonstrating how informational and attitudinal processes jointly influence marital intention in the context of negative online discourse. Importantly, these findings are situated within the specific socio-cultural and digital context of China, where marriage norms, family expectations, and social media discourse may differ substantially from other cultural settings.

The findings also have practical implications. The results suggest that the management of online public opinion is important, particularly in relation to sensitive social issues such as marriage. Online comments on marriage topics often reflect dissatisfaction and concerns among unmarried women. Therefore, policymakers and platform managers should consider monitoring and contextualizing highly negative yet persuasive content to avoid disproportionate influence on users' perceptions. Additionally, addressing the structural and social concerns reflected in online discourse—such as gender inequality and work–family balance—may help reduce negative perceptions of marriage. Promoting balanced narratives about marriage, rather than solely emphasizing positive attitudes, may provide a more realistic and constructive approach. However, such implications should be interpreted cautiously, as

their effectiveness may vary across different cultural and digital environments.

Finally, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study relied on self-reported questionnaire data, which may be subject to response bias and common method variance. Future research should incorporate multi-method approaches, such as experimental or behavioral data, to enhance validity. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to establish causal relationships among the variables. Third, this study focused exclusively on negative online comments on Weibo, which may limit generalizability to other platforms, populations, or comment valences. In particular, the findings are embedded within the Chinese socio-cultural context and the specific communicative environment of Weibo, where marriage-related discourse is shaped by collectivist values, family expectations, and socially salient norms regarding marriage timing and gender roles. Therefore, caution is needed when generalizing these results to individualistic societies or to platforms with different user demographics, communication norms, and regulatory environments.

Fourth, although this study examined argument quality and source credibility, it did not directly measure emotional tone or psychological processing mechanisms. Prior research suggests that emotional content (e.g., negative emotions) may also influence perceived usefulness and persuasion [69,70]. Future studies should simultaneously examine cognitive (argument quality), source-related (credibility), and emotional (sentiment) dimensions of online comments.

Fifth, and importantly, the discussion introduced theoretical constructs such as self-serving bias and defensive motivation without direct empirical measurement. While these constructs provide useful interpretive lenses, their explanatory role remains hypothetical in this study. Future research should explicitly operationalize and test these variables to strengthen the empirical grounding of theoretical explanations.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a novel contribution by highlighting how high-quality negative online information can shape marital attitudes and intentions, emphasizing the need for more nuanced research on digital influence in personal life decision-making.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Y.C. and A.A.M.; methodology, Y.C.; software, Z.Z.; validation, H.A., H.H.H. and

Z.Z.; formal analysis, Y.C.; investigation, A.A.M; resources, Z.Z.; data curation, H.A.; writing—original draft preparation, A.A.M.; writing—review and editing, A.A.M.; visualization, H.A.; supervision, Z.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Universiti Putra Malaysia. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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TABLE 1

Latent	Loadings	α	CR	AVE	Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker)					
					1	2	3	4	5	
AQ	AQ ₁ : .81	.87	.87	.72	.84					
	AQ ₂ : .83									
	AQ ₃ : .88									
	AQ ₄ : .86									
SC	SC ₁ : .81	.872	.87	.72			.85			
	SC ₂ : .83									
	SC ₃ : .89									
	SC ₄ : .85									
IU	IU ₁ : .86	.815	.81	.72				.85		
	IU ₂ : .86									
	IU ₃ : .83									
AT	AT ₁ : .90	.925	.92	.77	-.31	-.30	-.32	.88		
	AT ₂ : .83									
	AT ₃ : .85									
	AT ₄ : .90									
	AT ₅ : .90									
IN	IN ₁ : .90	.89	.90	.74	-.30	-.36	.44		.87	.86
	IN ₂ : .85									
	IN ₃ : .89									
	IN ₄ : .83									

TABLE 2

Paths	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Conclusion
Direct effects				
AQ → IU	0.26	5.29	.000***	H ₁ : S
SC → IU	0.32	7.16	.000***	H ₂ : S
AQ → IN	-0.14	2.87	.004**	H ₃ : S
SC → IN	-0.12	2.42	.015*	H ₄ : S
IU → AT	-0.32	7.23	.000***	H ₅ : S
AT → IN	0.36	7.23	.000***	H ₆ : S
Indirect effects				
AQ → IU → AT → IN	-0.03	3.46	.001**	S
SC → IU → AT → IN	-0.03	3.68	.000***	S