

Variables affecting WeChat loyalty in the business environment: time and cost reduction

Variables que inciden en la lealtad hacia WeChat en el ámbito empresarial: reducción de tiempo y costes

Rocío Mecinas-Cantos

PhD student at Universidad de Castilla La Mancha, Spain

rocio.mecinas@alu.uclm.es

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5355-1592>

María Pilar Martínez-Ruiz

Professor of Trading and Market research in the Faculty of Economy and Business Sciences at Universidad de Castilla La Mancha, Spain

mariapilar.martinez@uclm.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5890-5174>

Inés González-González

Professor of Business at Universidad Internacional de La Rioja, Spain

ines.gonzalez@unir.net

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0435-8435>

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Abstract: this work analyzes the effect of the functional value of WeChat (considering both time and cost reduction as such value) on the attitudinal and behavioral loyalty of Chinese entrepreneurs residing in Spain. To this end, the methodology combines a qualitative and quantitative approach, first conducting in-depth interviews with ten business owners of Chinese nationality residing in Spain, which then allowed for surveys to be conducted with a sample of these individuals. The results obtained through descriptive statistics and regression models have shown the key influence of the functional value of this social network (especially that derived from cost reduction) on the attitudinal and behavioral loyalty of these entrepreneurs. The findings have led to several recommendations for management.

Keywords: WeChat, functional value, attitudinal loyalty, behavioral loyalty, Chinese residents in Spain, Chinese entrepreneurs.

Resumen: este trabajo analiza la influencia del valor funcional de WeChat (considerando como tal valor tanto la reducción de tiempo como de costes) en la lealtad actitudinal y comportamental de empresarios chinos residentes en España. Para ello, la metodología realizada combina un enfoque cualitativo y cuantitativo, en el que primeramente se realizaron entrevistas en profundidad a diez propietarios de negocios de nacionalidad china residentes en España, lo que permitió posteriormente realizar encuestas a una muestra de estos. Los resultados obtenidos mediante estadísticos descriptivos y modelos de regresión han mostrado la influencia clave del valor funcional hacia esta red social (especialmente, el derivado de la reducción de costes) en la lealtad actitudinal y comportamental de estos empresarios. Los resultados obtenidos han permitido formular diversas recomendaciones para la gestión.

Palabras clave: WeChat, valor funcional, lealtad comportamental, lealtad actitudinal, residentes, nacionalidad china en España, empresarios chinos.

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Introduction

Global development in recent decades has shown extraordinary advances in information and communication technology systems (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Jiménez-Pitre *et al.*, 2023). In this context, social networks have experienced an important growth, being part of almost all activities of daily life (Luan *et al.*, 2020).

In the business environment, companies have chosen to invest in technologies with the aim of increasing the visibility and sale of their products and services, thus generating a competitive advantage in both the traditional market and the online environment (Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo, 2020). Increased consumer interaction on social media has transformed these platforms into key tools for information and communication creation, not only between businesses and consumers, but also between consumers themselves (Luan *et al.*, 2020; Raposo *et al.*, 2022; Hua and Yang, 2023). In addition, the widespread use of digital platforms has allowed companies to optimize their marketing strategies, reducing costs and reaching stakeholders more quickly and directly (Primack *et al.*, 2017). The high levels of satisfaction derived from their use encourage consumers to return, make purchases and recommend the company to others (Vargas, 2007). This scenario highlights the need to analyze the rapid growth of new technologies and social networks, as well as their impact on society and business development.

In the international arena, China stands out in the field of online sales for having followed a different development path than the rest of the world (Kontsevaia and Berger, 2016). Moreover, it is important to note that China has its own social networks, exclusive to the country and not available globally. Among them, WeChat stands out, the mobile social network with the largest presence in the country (Hua and Yang, 2019). WeChat has established itself as the dominant social network of the Asian giant thanks to its wide variety of services, including instant messaging, voice calls, mobile payments, and access to public and private services, among others (Hua and Yang, 2019). This diversity of functions has

not only boosted its popularity among users but has also made it a global business tool. On WeChat, companies can conduct multiple business activities, positioning it as a key platform for business (Watson IV *et al.*, 2018). In this regard, the perceived value generated by WeChat among its users has as one of its key objectives to promote their loyalty (Zhang *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to analyze the rise of WeChat and its growing popularity as an online marketing tool. Its model has allowed companies to reach a marketing level characterized by being direct, efficient and practically without costs.

Bilateral relations between Spain and China have undergone considerable evolution throughout history. The beginning of diplomatic relations in 1973 was the beginning of a strategic cooperation that has been strengthened over time (Rios, 2020). Since then, Spain has positioned itself as a key partner of China within the European context (Bregolat, 2013), while China has consolidated itself as Spain's largest economic and commercial ally on the Asian continent (Rios, 2020). Since the beginning of the 21st century, the socioeconomic interactions between both states have shown an increasing trend, which has manifested itself in the increase of bilateral trade. In fact, in 2017, Spanish exports to China experienced exponential growth, reflecting a pattern of constant evolution (Ríos, 2020). In this context, China has emerged as a central player in the global economy, becoming a market of high strategic relevance for Spain (Rios, 2020).

Based on these, this study focuses on analyzing the impact of functional value (considering as value the reduction of time and costs) on the loyalty, both attitudinal and behavioral, to WeChat by Chinese entrepreneurs living in Spain. The research is divided into two main areas: on the one hand, to examine the impact of functional value associated with time reduction on WeChat loyalty and the impact of WeChat functional value derived from cost reduction in relation to loyalty. In this context, the following division presents an exhaustive review of the relevant literature in this line of research, with the aim of theoretically substantiating the study and establishing the research hypotheses. The third

section describes the methodology carried out, consisting of the elaboration and administration of a questionnaire in the urban area of Albacete, aimed at Chinese entrepreneurs living in the area, from the literature review carried out and from in-depth interviews to a small sample of these entrepreneurs. The work concludes with the presentation of the key results, as well as practical recommendations, methodological limitations and future lines of research.

Perceived value, loyalty and social media

In the literature, perceived value has been defined as a key antecedent of satisfaction, both concepts being antecedents of consumer loyalty (Lu *et al.*, 2011). Several studies *have* shown that a higher perception of value can generate higher levels of loyal behaviors (Gregory *et al.*, 2016) and increase the willingness of customers to buy (Chang and Wang, 2011).

The definition of perceived value, in the context of the Theory of Equity, refers to the contrast made between the benefit obtained from a service or product and the economic sacrifice made to obtain such benefit (Zeithaml, 1988; Yang *et al.*, 2011). According to this theory, the perceived value affects the consumer's purchasing behavior, provided that the benefits exceed or equal the sacrifice made, the purchase will be made since the perceived value will be positive (Forero-Molina and Neme-Chaves, 2020). Previous studies have identified multiple dimensions of perceived value. Sweeney and Soutar (2001), under the PERVAL scale, identify three dimensions: emotional value, social value and functional value (associated with price and quality). Within these dimensions, functional value and emotional value have shown a greater interaction with consumer loyalty (Carvache-Franco *et al.*, 2019). For their part, Ryu *et al.* (2010) distinguish between hedonic and utilitarian value, while Jamal *et al.* (2011) extend this categorization to four dimensions: functional, experiential, experimental and emotional value. Other approaches, such as that of Hur *et al.* (2012), differentiate between functional, hedonic and social value, while García *et al.* (2018) propose

emotional value, price value and social value. In a broader framework, Petrick (2002) identifies five dimensions: emotional value, social value, utilitarian value, quality and price.

Despite the differences between classifications, there is a concordance in the literature that perceived value constitutes a fundamental antecedent of loyalty (Forero-Molina and Neme-Chaves, 2021). As a result, companies must prioritize strategies that reinforce the perception of value among consumers, in order to foster their loyalty and commitment to the brand.

On the other hand, the incorporation of social networks in the daily life of consumers has made these platforms essential tools for companies to attract customers (Sundararaj and Rejeesh, 2021). Through them, companies can implement marketing campaigns that strengthen relationships with their customers, understand better their needs and adapt to them. This allows them to generate additional perceived value that matches consumer expectations, thereby promoting higher levels of purchase intent and recommendation. Various studies have shown that marketing actions through social networks have a positive effect on loyalty, both attitudinal and behavioral, towards the company (Ibrahim, 2021).

In the next section, we will analyze the influence of the perception of one of the dimensions of WeChat's perceived value on loyalty—attitudinal and behavioral.

Impact of WeChat's perceived value on loyalty

Within the various dimensions of perceived value, functional value is defined as the added benefit arising from the use of a service or product (Sheth *et al.*, 1991). This concept is relevant in the context of technological tools such as WeChat, since its functionality is intrinsically linked to the practical benefit it offers its users.

In the following sections, a specific study on functional value associated with two key WeChat activities will be addressed: its ability to reduce time and its ability to reduce costs. From this review, the influence of these functions on

two types of loyalty will be analyzed: attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty.

Functional value derived from time reduction and its influence on loyalty

WeChat, launched in 2011 by Tencent, emerged as an instant messaging app (Plantin and De Seta, 2019) but has evolved into a multifunctional platform that integrates social networking features (adding friends, posting information), in-app payments and purchases without the need for additional software (Plantin and De Seta, 2019; Watson IV *et al.*, 2018). This versatility positions it as a platform that combines the features of Facebook, WhatsApp, PayPal and LinkedIn combined (Yanes and Berger, 2017). It is the most relevant social network in China due to its dual nature: basic social network features and a robust infrastructure that expands its functionality (Plantin and De Seta, 2019). Its tools facilitate business activity, allowing direct communication with key stakeholders (Primack *et al.*, 2017), which reduces time in negotiations and promotes brands and products efficiently (Seow *et al.*, 2020), thus fostering relationships of trust and loyalty (Fan and Liu, 2024).

Through features like “add friends” and “Moments,” companies can share documents, images, videos, and user experiences, reaching a broader audience quickly and directly (Chen *et al.*, 2018; Fan and Liu, 2024; Jin *et al.*, 2015). A prominent feature of WeChat is the ability to create Mini Programs, which function as in-app store shortcuts, eliminating the need to download additional apps. This allows consumers to make purchases more efficiently, reducing the time needed and improving their shopping experience (Chen *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, WeChat Payment allows to make payments directly from the application, speeding up the purchase process. Consumers can make payments both online and in stores by scanning a QR code (Plantin and De Seta, 2019). In 2017, this functionality accounted for 60% of online payments in China (Loubere, 2017), standing out as a key tool to reduce time in commercial transactions. Another service that WeChat offers is the possibility of creating Official Accounts to companies, which generates trust

towards the company in less time, since the authenticity of the information provided has already been certified (Cheung and To, 2017).

WeChat has driven a significant reduction in the time required to manage business and associated costs. This translates into more positive experiences for companies and a greater likelihood that users will develop loyalty to the platform (Jiang *et al.*, 2018). Due to its innovative features and its ability to combine various functionalities in a single platform, WeChat has become a highly recommended tool for companies to support the development of their innovation (Seow *et al.*, 2020). Considering the positive impact of WeChat functionalities in reducing time and the positive perception generated among business users, it is feasible to propose the following research hypotheses:

H1: The functional value of WeChat derived from the reduction of time influences positively and significantly the attitudinal loyalty towards this social network.

H2: The functional value of WeChat derived from the reduction of time influences positively and significantly on the behavioral loyalty towards this social network.

The functional value derived from cost reduction and its influence on loyalty

The development of social networks as platforms for business use has transformed traditional marketing strategies (Jin *et al.*, 2015), serving, among other things, to launch online marketing campaigns designed to generate value through these tools (Tuten and Solomon, 2016). Currently, social media marketing is one of the most used strategies due to its effectiveness in attracting potential customers (Ibrahim, 2021) and its positive impact on consumer loyalty (Ismail, 2017). This is due to its ability to foster direct relationships, trust and brand positioning (Ibrahim, 2021; Seow, Choong and Ramayah, 2020).

In China, WeChat has established as a key marketing tool, thanks to its functionalities that simplify communication and commercial transactions (Chen *et al.*, 2018). Specifically, WeChat

Marketing is an essential component of e-commerce (Zhang, 2015) and a pillar in contemporary marketing strategies (Min, 2024). WeChat allows companies to create advertising campaigns faster and cheaper than other traditional ways (Sun *et al.*, 2023). There is no upfront cost to accessing WeChat, simply create a profile, share an ID or QR code, and start interacting and sharing information (Kontsevaia and Berger, 2016).

Given the diversity of communication tools that WeChat provides, companies and consumers can maintain direct contact at any time, allowing companies to adapt more immediately to market changes (Fan and Liu, 2024). WeChat offers different communication channels, such as individual and group messages, and allows sharing text, voice, images, videos, documents and links (Chen *et al.*, 2018; Fan and Liu, 2024). These characteristics make communication more dynamic and authentic (Wedel and Kannan, 2016). In addition, being a direct communication and without cost, it contributes to customer satisfaction, which increases the probability of repurchase. A satisfied customer, in turn, is a potential ambassador, as it is more likely to make positive recommendations to other users (Qi, 2018).

On the other hand, the “Moments” function allows companies to publish information not only about their products, but also about promotions, directly on their “wall”, which is accessible to all WeChat users (Yu *et al.*, 2019). These publications may include a variety of elements, such as images, videos, and links, that make information more attractive to users (Gibson, 2008; Jung *et al.*, 2011). In addition, the ability for other users to comment and share their opinions in Moments publications gives greater value to these recommendations, since they come from real consumers (Chen *et al.*, 2018). This type of interaction significantly increases the confidence of other consumers, a key

element in the online shopping process (Izquierdo Yusta and Martínez Ruiz, 2009).

Thanks to the “Official Accounts”, WeChat previously verifies the authenticity of the companies, reducing the possibility of fraudulent information (Chen *et al.*, 2018; Yu *et al.*, 2019). The Mini Programs features allow companies to create shortcuts to their product or service catalog, eliminating the need to develop standalone applications (Jin, 2019) and, in addition, it makes it easier for consumers to make their purchases online (Jin, 2019). In short, WeChat marketing is a new form of online marketing (Zhang, 2015), characterized by lower costs (Mao, 2012), more direct communication with customers (Chen *et al.*, 2018) and more real and truthful information (Yi, 2014).

These findings allows formulating the following hypotheses:

H3: The functional value of WeChat derived from the reduction of costs positively and significantly influences the attitudinal loyalty towards this social network.

H4: The functional value of WeChat derived from the reduction of costs positively and significantly influences the behavioral loyalty towards this social network.

Materials and methods

The methodological framework was divided into two phases. The first phase focused on a qualitative study through in-depth interviews with a sample chosen for convenience of ten Chinese entrepreneurs (five men and five women, aged 30 to 50) living in Albacete (Spain), owners of various businesses and WeChat users in their commercial activities. The questions asked focused on gathering information on the perceived functional value of WeChat (reduction of time and costs), as well as its intention of use and recommendation.

Table 1
Technical description: in-depth interviews

Data collection tool	In-depth interviews
Sample group	10 people
Field data collection interval	1-15 June 2020

The conclusions from the interviews were that 90% of respondents adopted WeChat after its launch in China (2012), while 10% did so a year later. Their use in Spain is mainly limited to communication with suppliers, due to their low penetration among final consumers. The international version features reduced functionality compared to the Chinese version, restricting its application to communication and excluding direct selling options. However, 100% of participants acknowledged that WeChat optimizes their business operations. The platform facilitates direct communication with suppliers, group videoconferences and immediate access to detailed product information (descriptions, images, videos), reducing operating costs and minimizing the need for travel. In addition, it allows to establish commercial networks and run free marketing campaigns through WeChat Marketing, reaching multiple users with a single click.

Analysis of in-depth interviews reveals that WeChat optimizes business management by reducing time spent on business operations through its ability to facilitate communication with

suppliers, access detailed product information (descriptions, images, videos) and monitor order status, improving operational efficiency. In addition, WeChat contributes to cost reduction, mainly through WeChat Marketing, a free tool that, together with other features of the platform, minimizes operating expenses. Finally, the interviewees widely recommended its use, both in business and personal contexts, highlighting its multifunctional character and its consolidation as a comprehensive platform of high value in their experience.

The deductions obtained from the in-depth interviews, supported by a review of the exhaustive bibliography, allowed to configure the second phase of the study: the elaboration of a questionnaire. Data collection was carried out during the second half of June 2020 (from 15 to 30). The questionnaire was designed and distributed by email to a sample group of Chinese entrepreneurs and workers living in the city of Albacete. Over a period of fifteen days, 57 valid responses were collected (see table 2).

Table 2

Technical description: questionnaire

Data collection tool	Online questionnaire sent by email
Sample group	57 Chinese businessmen living in Albacete
Sample group selection mechanism	Non-probabilistic for convenience
Field data collection interval	15-30 June 2020

In relation to the scales used in this study, various methodologies were used. For analyzing the sociodemographic profile of the participants, nominal scales were applied. Subsequently, five-point Likert scales (1 = "I do not agree", 5 = "totally agree") were implemented to evaluate the user's perception of WeChat's functional value in reducing time and costs. Questions were asked such as *please express your degree of agreement regarding the following statement: "I consider that WeChat saves me a lot of time in my business"* or *express your degree of agreement regarding the following statement: "I consider that WeChat saves me costs in my business"*. Five-point scales were also used to measure the endogenous variables of the model: attitudinal and behavioral

loyalty. On these scales, the value 1 represented the lowest level and the value 5 represented the highest level. Questions were asked such as *Would you recommend using WeChat? Do you intend to continue using WeChat?*

Table 3 provides a summary of the scales used to measure dependent and independent variables.

Table 3
Identification of variables

Name of the variable	Measurement scale	Variable role in the model	Description	Sources
Functional value derived from time reduction	Metric Scale	Independent Variable	WeChat provides functional value by reducing work time. 5-point Likert scale (1 = "no agreement", 5 = "totally agree")	Adapted from De Vries and Carlson (2014), Ranaweera and Karjaluoto (2017).
Functional value derived from cost reduction	Metric Scale	Independent Variable	WeChat provides functional value by reducing costs. 5-point Likert scale (1 = "no agreement", 5 = "totally agree")	Adapted from De Vries and Carlson (2014), Sweeney <i>et al.</i> (1999).
Attitudinal loyalty	Metric Scale	Dependent Variable	Would You Recommend WeChat? 5-point scale (1 = lower recommendation, 5 = higher recommendation)	Adapted from Sweeney and Soutar (2001), Hur, Kim and Park (2012), Yang and Peterson (2004).
Behavioral loyalty	Metric Scale	Dependent Variable	Do you intend to continue using WeChat? 5-point scale (1 = lower intention, 5 = higher intention)	Adapted from Sweeney and Soutar (2001) Hur, Kim and Park (2012), Yang and Peterson (2004).

Results and discussion

This section presents the results of the two methodological phases of the study: (1) qualitative research, based on in-depth interviews, and

(2) quantitative research, carried out through the design and application of a questionnaire.

The results of in-depth interviews are summarized in the following table:

Table 3
Results of in-depth interviews

Question asked	Answers obtained
Are you a man or woman?	5 men and 5 women.
Age?	Age between 32 and 46 years.
Profession?	1 owner of Academia de chino 1 owner of a Chinese restaurant 3 clothing store owners 5 bazaar shop owners (multi-products)
When did you start using WeChat?	Nine out of ten started using WeChat in 2012, while only one person started 2 years later in 2014
Do you use WeChat in your business?	All the interviewees said yes, but only to be able to communicate directly with suppliers, obtain information about news, product news, place orders, etc.
What are the benefits it offers to your business?	Two main advantages. The opportunity to maintain direct contact with suppliers, which reduces the time in activities by not having to go through intermediaries. The ability to receive and consult information at any time and not just depend on when users can communicate with each other. This results in a reduction of time and costs, since WeChat is a free social network.
How much time do you spend a day using WeChat?	Nine out of ten interviewees use WeChat 24 hours a day. Only one uses WeChat 2h a day.

Question asked	Answers obtained
What is the feature you use most?	The Communication function either with providers or with friends and family. The Moments feature allows to view other people's profiles and let those people see yours and your activities.
Do you think that using WeChat has helped you talk to your providers?	Yes, WeChat allows direct communication with them, you can get immediate answers about products, order situations, etc.
Do you think that using WeChat has increased satisfaction with your providers?	Yes.
Do you think that using WeChat has increased loyalty to your providers?	Yes, they often repeat purchases with them, for the solution and reduction of problems, speed in communication...
Would you recommend using WeChat?	Yes, but the reasons of each participant were different. Because it allows direct conversations between users, improve relationships between them, know different information through the Moments function, meet people through the Shake function. It is an All-in-One app.
Why do you think WeChat is different from other apps?	It is an All-in-One application, which also has features that other applications do not offer. For companies it also allows marketing campaigns at zero cost.
Do you use the application to get information, discounts, promotions... of the products?	In Europe you can only get product information, news, etc., but you can not apply promotions or discounts because the application does not allow it, only discounts that can be applied in physical stores.
Do you think WeChat marketing provides more benefits than other marketing media?	Seven out of ten interviewees stated that WeChat marketing provides more benefits than other media, as it is a free and accessible media for everyone with many opportunities and features. Three out of ten said yes, but they think there are other, more effective means.
Do you buy using the app?	Two out of 10 interviewees confirmed that they make purchases for their businesses, because they can order directly from suppliers. The rest claimed that they only buy in China.

For analyzing the results of the questionnaire, the review of the results of the descriptive statistics was first carried out. First, within the exogenous variables, the variable "functional value in the reduction of time" presented the highest mean (4.11) and the lowest dispersion (1.16), while the variable "functional value in the reduction of costs" registered an average of 3.95 and a disper-

sion of 1.22. Regarding the dependent variables, "behavioral loyalty" showed the highest mean 4.63, and the lowest standard deviation 0.79. "Attitudinal loyalty" had the lowest average 4.32, and the highest standard deviation 1.00.

Finally, regarding the mode value, all variables, both endogenous and exogenous, presented a value of 5 (see table 5).

Table 5
Descriptive statistics

	Functional value: time reduction	Functional value: cost reduction	I would recommend using WeChat	You intend to continue using WeChat
Average	4.11	3.95	4.32	4.63
Mode	5	5	5	5
Typical deviation	1.16	1.22	1.00	0.79

The results obtained from the regression models indicate that attitudinal loyalty in Model 1 was analyzed as the dependent variable, while

the functional value variables in the reduction of time and functional value in the reduction of costs were analyzed as the independent varia-

bles. In Model 2, behavioral loyalty was set as a

dependent variable, keeping the same variables independent of the previous model (see table 6).

Table 6
Results of the Model 1 and Model 2

Model 1 R ²		Model 2 R ²	
0.770		0.592	
Variables	Non-standardized coefficient	Variables	Non-standardized coefficient
Constant	2,008***	Constant	3,171***
Functional value: time reduction	-0.274**	Functional value in time reduction	0.097
Functional value: cost reduction	0.869***	Functional value in time reduction	0.471**

Note. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$

Analysis of Table 6 reveals that the model fit is slightly higher in Model 1 ($R^2 = 0.770$) compared to Model 2 ($R^2 = 0.592$), indicating a higher percentage of variance explained by exogenous variables relative to the endogenous variable of Model 1.

In Model 1, both exogenous variables positively and significantly influence the behavioral loyalty of WeChat, which are the functional value in cost reduction ($\beta = 0.869$, $p < 0.01$) and the functional value in time reduction ($\beta = -0.274$, $p < 0.05$). In the case of Model 2, there is only one variable that positively and significantly influences the attitudinal loyalty towards WeChat, which

is the functional value in the reduction of costs ($\beta = 0.471$, $p < 0.05$), while the other variable, functional value in the reduction of time, does not influence ($\beta = 0.097$) the endogenous variable.

The results indicate that the exogenous variable "functional value in cost reduction" exerts greater influence in Model 1, while in Model 2 this variable is the only one that shows a positive impact on behavioral loyalty. On the other hand, the exogenous variable "functional value in time reduction" does not have a significant effect on the endogenous variable. Table 7 summarizes hypothesis contracting.

Table 7
Summary of hypothesis validation

Hypothesis	Contrast
H ₁ :	Rejected
H ₂	Accepted
H ₃	Rejected
H ₄	Accepted

The findings confirmed two research hypotheses and rejected the remaining ones. It highlights the importance that Chinese entrepreneurs attach to the functional value of cost reduction, influencing their intention to continue using WeChat and their willingness to recommend it. On the other hand, the functional value associated with

time reduction did not show relevant effects on the recommendation, but it did demonstrate a significant impact on the intention to use.

Conclusions

This research has aimed to analyze the influence exerted by functional value, considering as such the reduction of time and costs on the behavioral and attitudinal loyalty towards WeChat on Chinese businessmen living in Spain. For this reason, given the high use of WeChat by this population, it was considered a relevant research objective.

To achieve the research objective, a comprehensive review of the literature on perceived value and loyalty was conducted, which made it possible to formulate four research hypotheses. Prior to this contrast, 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 Chinese entrepreneurs living in Albacete (Spain), which allowed obtaining prior knowledge about the hypotheses formulated. In particular, WeChat was found to play a significant role in reducing costs, while its impact on reducing time was less relevant.

However, to contrast these hypotheses, an online questionnaire was designed taking into account both the revised literature and the results of the qualitative study. After its distribution by email, 57 valid and reliable responses were obtained for the analysis. The analysis of descriptive statistics revealed that the variable functional value derived from the reduction in time manifested the highest mean and the lowest standard deviation of the exogenous variables, indicating homogeneity in the data. Among endogenous variables, behavioral loyalty stood out with similar consistency. Two regression models were proposed: Model 1 incorporated attitudinal loyalty as an endogenous variable, and Model 2 included behavioral loyalty as an endogenous variable. The results showed that the functional value derived from the reduction of costs significantly influences both variables, positively in behavioral loyalty and negatively in attitudinal attitude. On the other hand, functional value in time reduction only showed a positive and significant impact on attitudinal loyalty.

These data allowed to accept two of the proposed hypotheses and reject the remaining ones, highlighting the importance of functional value (derived from the reduction of costs) in loyalty

to WeChat, both in its continued use (behavioral loyalty) and in the intention to recommend it (attitudinal loyalty). However, the time reduction only influenced the intention of use, with no significant impact on the recommendation.

This study represents a pioneering contribution to the analysis of the perceived value of the social network WeChat from a business perspective, addressing a line of research practically unexplored in the Spanish context.

The study presents several methodological limitations. Initially, the small sample size and the implementation of non-probabilistic sampling for convenience limit the generalization capacity of the deductions obtained to the reference population, preventing the calculation of the margin of error and affecting the generalization of the findings. In addition, the language of the participants was able to influence the interpretation of the questions and answers, both in the interviews and in the questionnaire. An additional limitation lies in the coexistence of two versions of WeChat (Chinese and international), where the international version presents functional restrictions, which could have altered the perception of functional value among respondents.

As future lines of research, it is suggested: (1) to analyze in depth the Chinese version of WeChat to evaluate its full functionality; (2) to expand the sample size and employ a probabilistic sampling that allows the generalization of results; and (3) to incorporate a greater number of items in the questionnaire to explore additional exogenous and endogenous variables, thus enriching the analysis and providing a more comprehensive understanding of the object of study.

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