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EDITED BY
Chi Zhou,
Tianjin University of Technology, China

REVIEWED BY
Charmaine Du Plessis,
University of South Africa, South Africa
Mingsen Chu,
South China Normal University, China

*CORRESPONDENCE
Chunling Zhang
✉ tszcl@sina.com

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Social platform content marketing strategies for sustainable sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products

Moran Fan[1] and Chunling Zhang[1,2]*

[1]School of Management and Economics, Yanshan University, Qinhuangdao, China, [2]Country Common Wealth Research Center, Hebei University, Baoding, China

Introduction: Social platform content marketing, with its extensive reach and precise targeting, has gradually become a key driver in promoting the sustainable sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products.

Methods: This study examines local specialty green agricultural products in China, using Sichuan Pujiang dekopon as the research subject. Based on the ELM theoretical model, it analyzes 232 TikTok accounts selling this product. By utilizing sales data, the study applies a combination of PLS-SEM and fsQCA to explore the impact mechanism of content marketing on sustainable sales growth and constructs pathways and strategies to enhancing the sustainable sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products.

Results: The results show that product trust evaluations, source credibility, and content flow experience significantly contribute to sales growth, while account trust evaluations, product trust evaluations, source credibility, and content flow experience positively influence relationship commitment. Notably, account trust evaluation did not significantly affect purchase behavior, suggesting a rational decision-making process and a broken conversion path from account trust to action in local specialty agricultural products consumption. fsQCA reveals the complex causal relationships between the central route and peripheral route in shaping the pathways to sustainable sales growth.

Discussion: The findings provide guidance for local specialty green agricultural products in leveraging social platform content marketing, ensuring their sustainable sales growth.

KEYWORDS

local specialty agricultural products, green agricultural products, sustainable sales growth, social platform, content marketing

1 Introduction

Under the dual drive of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and consumption upgrading, Green agricultural products have gradually become a focus of consumer attention. Local specialty green agricultural products, relying on unique geographical environments and ecological farming methods, enhance their brand value through local culture and serve as an effective way to improve the market competitiveness of green agricultural products (Geng et al., 2023). Social platforms have become key channels for marketing local specialty green agricultural products. According to the 2024 Harvest Festival TikTok E-commerce Pro-Agriculture Report,

Shelf-based scenarios drove a 60% year-on-year increase in sales volume of local specialty agricultural products. Over the year, the number of agricultural product categories sold rose by 170%, and the total number of orders for local specialty agricultural products increased by 61%. This phenomenon reflects not only a shift in consumer behavior but also a transformation of the traditional agricultural product distribution system through new marketing approaches. The content marketing association defines this type of marketing as a strategic approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience and ultimately drive profitable customer actions. Thanks to their ability to reconstruct value and respond dynamically, Social Platforms offer an ideal environment and channel for content marketing. By producing content, Social platforms link agricultural products with regional culture, creating differentiated brand value. User-generated content further strengthens regional brand identity (Jiang et al., 2023), shifting communication from one-time "push" to spontaneous "resonance," and forming a sustainable communication effect. At the same time, platform algorithms accurately identify potential consumers, improving the efficiency of supply–demand matching. Compared with traditional e-commerce, Social platforms demonstrate unique advantages in several aspects. On the one hand, full-process visibility makes the production, processing, and transportation of agricultural products more transparent and perceivable, effectively reducing the trust cost for consumers (Ding et al., 2024). On the other hand, Social Platforms optimize the multi-step process of traditional e-commerce—active search, price comparison, and decision-making—through recommendation algorithms, contextual embedding, and instant purchase functions, enabling seamless integration between Content and transactions (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019).

However, the development of content marketing for local specialty green agricultural products on social platforms also faces several practical challenges. First, the widespread use of emotional appeals and performative content has led some consumers to question the authenticity of regional agricultural products. When the eco-farming scenes shown in the content do not match the actual products received, consumers experience a loss of trust. This creates a "trust deficit," making it difficult for them to build relationship commitment. Originating from commitment-trust theory, relationship commitment refers to the extent to which an organization or individual is involved in an exchange relationship and willing to maintain it over time. Trust directly influences and generates relationship commitment, which facilitates long-term relationships (Park et al., 2012). Second, the explosive nature of viral dissemination is often unsustainable. Although wildly popular content may bring short-term traffic peaks, it usually results in low conversion and repurchase rates, making it hard to ensure stable income from agricultural products. Third, content homogeneity causes aesthetic fatigue among users. As a result, consumer decision-making shifts from emotional drivers to price sensitivity, weakening the original advantages of content marketing (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). These challenges reflect a disconnect between the "short-term traffic dividend" and the "long-term value accumulation" in the current content marketing practices for local specialty green agricultural products. Therefore, this study proposes a framework for building a stable monetization mechanism and a relationship commitment mechanism on social platforms, aiming to achieve sustainable sales growth. In this study, sustainable sales growth refers to a dual-goal process based on content marketing, aiming to retain clearly targeted users and drive profitable customer actions. The term "sustainable" emphasizes the continuity of consumer behavior. It focuses on how content delivers information to consumers and fosters long-term recognition and commitment to the product. Unlike existing research that emphasizes short-term traffic-driven sales growth (Li and Zhong, 2025), this study centers on building long-term transactional relationships guided by content marketing.

Research on content marketing for local specialty green agricultural products has mainly focused on three dimensions: the product, the platform, and the consumer. At the product level, scholars have examined the functional characteristics and trust foundations of local specialty green agricultural products. Green agricultural products are considered to possess trust-related attributes such as health, nutrition, and safety (Boobalan, 2019), while also meeting consumers' moral expectations regarding environmental protection and sustainable development. Their multiple attributes—as "trust goods," "experience goods," and "search goods"—provide the basis for consumer evaluation and decision-making in content marketing contexts (Massey et al., 2018). To address consumer concerns about product quality and information asymmetry, content marketing often emphasizes region-specific green traceability mechanisms and product labeling. This helps enhance product trust evaluation and strengthens purchase confidence (Li and Wu, 2024). At the platform level, the rapid development of content marketing on social platforms offers stronger interactivity and visual communication channels for local specialty green agricultural products. Studies show that immersive content such as origin display, production process reconstruction, and storytelling can trigger emotional resonance and cognitive trust among consumers (Dai and Luo, 2022). Moreover, user reviews, Anchor identity, and platform credibility reflect source credibility awareness, which indirectly influences consumers' information processing (Xiong et al., 2021). The integration of digital intelligence and content algorithm mechanisms also significantly improves marketing efficiency and conversion paths (Cadario and Chandon, 2019). At the consumer level, existing studies have examined the formation of purchase behavior toward local specialty green agricultural products, focusing on factors such as health awareness, environmental motivation, pricing strategies, and consumption subsidies. Mechanisms such as green labeling, price adjustment, and point-based incentives have been shown to enhance consumers' willingness to pay and their willingness to adopt local specialty green agricultural products (Jiang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2024).

Although existing studies have made substantial progress in the content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products, especially in terms of product characteristics, platform advantages, and consumer behavior, there are still several systematic limitations. These limitations restrict a deeper understanding of effective mechanisms for content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products on social platforms.

First, in terms of products, most studies focus on the health, environmental, and ethical attributes of local specialty green agricultural products, as well as the role of green traceability and certification in building trust. However, these studies mainly describe product features from the supply side or assess consumer preferences based on attribute evaluations. Few studies examine how these product attributes are presented in content marketing, and how they activate consumers' trust evaluations through specific informational cues. Specifically, it remains unclear how products are encoded as "processable trust information" in the content and how they influence consumer purchase decisions and attitude changes

through the central route. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the coupling between content presentation and cognitive processing. It introduces product trust evaluation as a central route variable to explore how product trust cognition affects sustainable sales growth.

Second, in terms of platforms, although some studies have shown that social platforms enhance consumer experience and purchase intention through immersive content and interactive features, most focus on the association between platform functions and user behavior. They lack an information processing perspective to explain how peripheral cues such as immersive content and interaction frequency trigger consumer responses under low-involvement conditions. In addition, source credibility awareness features—such as Anchor expertise, expression style, and account stability—have attracted attention, but their specific influence mechanisms within the Peripheral Route remain unclear. This limits strategic optimization of content design and trust-building from a platform operation perspective. This study addresses the above gaps by introducing source credibility awareness and flow content experience as peripheral route variables, enriching the dimensions of the peripheral route.

Third, in terms of consumers, existing studies mainly focus on consumers' willingness to pay, green cognition, and purchasing behavior toward local specialty green agricultural products. However, most of these studies only explain what triggers a one-time purchase. They lack a mechanism-based explanation of how consumers build trust through repeated exposure to content and gradually form relationship commitment. Relationship commitment is a core indicator for measuring the quality of long-term consumer relationships and the willingness to repurchase. Yet, its formation path and the role of information processing have not been systematically explored in current research. To address this gap, this study introduces relationship commitment as an outcome variable. It constructs a complete influence mechanism of Content Marketing based on the chain of cognition–emotion–behavior.

Fourth, most existing studies use linear models for causal analysis. These models fail to reveal the complementarity and substitutability among different types of informational factors, making it difficult to explain why similar content can yield different outcomes. Therefore, this study introduces the fsQCA method and combines it with PLS-SEM for a mixed-method approach. From the perspective of causal complexity, it identifies multiple path-equivalent mechanisms for sustainable sales growth, thereby enhancing both explanatory power and practical relevance.

To address the above research gaps in product, platform, and consumer dimensions, this study adopts the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) as the theoretical foundation. It aims to explore how consumers process different types of information presented in content marketing on social platforms, based on the dual-route model (the peripheral route and the central route), and how such processing influences their sales growth and relationship commitment. This study seeks to construct a mechanism for sustainable sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products. Specifically, this study addresses the following four sub-questions:

First, how do consumers process information through the peripheral route and the central route when exposed to content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products on social platforms, and how does this affect their attitudes and behavioral patterns?

Second, how do the processing mechanisms of the peripheral route and the central route facilitate sales growth in the content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products?

Third, how do the processing mechanisms of the peripheral route and the central route affect consumers' relationship commitment in the context of content marketing?

Fourth, from a configurational perspective, how do the peripheral route and central route factors form multiple effective combinations to jointly drive sustainable sales growth? Do multiple equivalent paths exist?

2 Theoretical foundation

2.1 The comprehensive possibility model and agricultural product content marketing

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1979), is an important theory in the fields of cognitive psychology and communication. The core idea of this model is that individuals, when processing information, adopt different cognitive pathways to form attitudes or make decisions based on varying levels of motivation and ability. The model proposes two pathways: the Central Route, where the audience, with high cognitive effort, carefully analyzes the content of the information and forms attitude judgments based on the logic, evidence, and arguments presented. The peripheral route, on the other hand, involves the audience making attitude judgments with low cognitive effort, being more easily influenced by external cues.

The ELM model has been widely applied in the field of marketing. Researchers have found that ELM has been extensively used to help understand the attitude formation process of consumers or individual users (Filieri and McLeay, 2014). Wang et al. (2020) pointed out that the quality of creative content is the central cue influencing users' adoption of creativity, while user community status, user contribution behavior, and community identification, etc., are peripheral cues that affect users' creative adoption. Wang et al. (2021) found that the usefulness of online reviews is influenced by central cues (review depth, review polarity, and review timeliness) and peripheral cues (reviewer expertise). In content marketing, User Generated Content (UGC) comes from diverse and personalized sources, with the content being described based on the differentiated product experiences of the creators (Fatemi et al., 2023). Consumers tend to use the peripheral route when processing scattered, low-involvement information. The emphasis on the natural qualities of organic products, unique taste experiences, exquisite packaging, and consumption methods that align with users' lifestyle and habits are more likely to trigger consumer interaction and sharing (Huang and Yang, 2025).

2.2 Other theoretical support

2.2.1 Source credibility theory and content marketing

Source Credibility Theory was first proposed by Hovland et al. (1953) in the fields of communication studies and persuasion research. They found that the effectiveness of information dissemination not only depends on the content itself but also on the credibility of the

information source. Ohanian (1990) suggested that the three dimensions of expertise, credibility, and attractiveness can be used to measure source credibility.

In content marketing, according to source credibility theory, expertise refers to the consumers' perception that the anchor possesses the relevant knowledge and experience to endorse the product. Anchors in content marketing generally possess a certain level of expertise, allowing them to provide professional explanations to consumers. They leverage their professional marketing skills and influence consumer behavior through their own specialized knowledge (Wang and Jiang, 2021). Credibility is earned through the honesty, integrity, and reliability demonstrated by the anchor or account, gaining the trust of consumers. In product-oriented origin-based content marketing, local farmers provide onsite demonstrations, allowing consumers to gain a more direct understanding of the product's cultivation and processing, thereby increasing the product's credibility. Attractiveness refers to the appeal that the anchor or account gains from consumers through external charm and a unique personality (Zhang et al., 2021). Visual characteristics not only enhance the expressiveness of information but also create visual appeal. In content marketing on social platforms, short videos and live streams generate richer semantics than pure text, and their visual features are more attractive (Bai et al., 2019). Existing research has shown that the credibility, expertise, and attractiveness of the anchor have a positive impact on the public's behavioral attitudes and willingness to change (Veen and Song, 2014).

2.2.2 Flow theory and content marketing

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) proposed the flow theory, which refers to a highly immersive mental state individuals enter when they are fully absorbed in an activity.

In recent years, flow theory has been widely applied in fields such as social platform content marketing. Research mainly focuses on how flow content experiences enhance user engagement, increase purchase intention, and strengthen brand identity (Fan and Jiang, 2025; He et al., 2023). According to flow theory, the entertainment aspect shaped by content marketing, with its intrinsic stimulation, is one of the key factors that leads consumers into a state of immersion (Martocchio and Webster, 1992). The Uses and Gratifications Theory suggests that the value of entertainment lies in its ability to fulfill people's needs for escapism, leisure, aesthetic enjoyment, or emotional release (Yu and Xu, 2017; Hamari et al., 2014). Visualization emphasizes visual accessibility, making it easier for potential consumers to understand the presented information, which has a positive impact on consumers' immersion state (Skadberg and Kimmel, 2004). Research has found that product origin content marketing types for local specialty green agricultural products can create an immersive experience for consumers by showcasing authentic rural landscapes (Brakus et al., 2009). Usefulness is reflected in the value and helpfulness of the video information to consumers (Sun et al., 2019). Content marketing can enhance engagement in the consumer purchase experience, and the display of consumption methods can stimulate consumers' imagination, allowing them to mentally simulate the product's consumption experience, further enhancing immersion (Barsalou, 2008). Interactivity is a prerequisite factor for consumers' immersion state (Su and Hsaio, 2015). From the perspective of social interaction theory, these interactive behaviors bring consumers an immersive experience. Content interactions with a similar persona can enhance consumers' sense of belonging and social connection, thus increasing their immersion (Relling et al., 2016).

3 Research hypotheses and model construction

3.1 Information processing based on the peripheral route: source credibility, immersive content, and sustainable sales growth

(1) The impact of source credibility on the sustainable sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products in content marketing

In the context of social media content marketing, Source credibility is an important heuristic cue for consumers to process information and make decisions (Ohanian, 1990). According to source credibility theory, the expertise, credibility, and attractiveness of the source form the core dimensions of its overall influence. These features not only affect consumers' information adoption and purchase decisions (Huyghe et al., 2017; Chiu et al., 2018), but also shape their relationship identification and emotional attachment to the communicator and the product.

Existing studies show that source credibility, as a heuristic cue of information richness, significantly influences consumers' purchase decisions (Zhang et al., 2014). Chou et al. also find that the expertise of the anchor and the trustworthiness of the information delivery improve consumers' willingness to adopt information in virtual environments (Chou et al., 2015). In the content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products, due to the non-contact communication format, sensory cues such as taste and touch are weakened. As a result, they tend to rely more on the information provided by the livestreamer to judge the product's real value (Nuttavuthisit and Thøgersen, 2015). Previous studies have shown that the professionalism, visualization, and attractiveness created by anchors encourage consumers to value green attributes closely related to health and environmental sustainability, leading to purchasing behavior (Huyghe et al., 2017). In summary, source credibility in content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products directly triggers purchase intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> *H1:* Source credibility positively influences the sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products in content marketing.

In the content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products, the source credibility conveyed by the account or anchor is a key factor in building consumer relationship commitment. In terms of expertise, the anchor's professional explanation of the product can significantly enhance consumers' cognitive trust and emotional identification, which helps establish a continuous and stable relationship with the account. In terms of attractiveness, the anchor anchor's friendly language, sense of humor, and real-time interaction with consumers reduce the social-psychological distance. This

increases the consumer's sense of attachment and belonging to the live-streaming environment, which promotes the formation of online relationships (Sun et al., 2022; Yao and Zhang, 2021; Chen et al., 2022). In terms of credibility, Zhang et al. (2021) found that the trustworthiness of source credibility can influence consumers' brand love, that is, their emotional dependence. This also helps form a long-term and stable consumption relationship network, which promotes the sustained occurrence of sustainable consumption behaviors (Chen and Geng, 2023). Therefore, source credibility not only enhances consumers' cognitive and emotional identification, but also provides a foundation of trust for continuous interaction and long-term relationships. Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

> *H2:* Source credibility positively influences consumers' relationship commitment to the content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products.

(2) The impact of flow content experience on the sustainable sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products content marketing

Local specialty green agricultural products use the features of content marketing, including entertainment, visualization, and interaction, to bring consumers into a highly focused immersive state. This aligns with flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).

Flow scenes, with their entertaining, visual, and interactive features. These features help stimulate consumer purchase motivation and convert it into actual buying behavior (Zhao et al., 2022; Dong and Li, 2024). Existing studies show that the entertainment value of content marketing not only makes consumers familiar with the anchor and their content style on a cognitive level, but also leads to positive emotional experiences, which foster purchase intentions (Wang and Li, 2015). At the same time, immersive live-streaming or short videos visualize the planting environment, harvesting process, and nutritional value of local specialty green agricultural products. This increases the visual immersion experience of the product and quickly boosts brand awareness and sales revenue. In addition, local specialty green agricultural products have dual value. One is their benefit to personal health, and the other is their positive impact on the ecological environment and sustainable development. When these sustainability-related messages are embedded into the content at the right time and in the right way, they are more likely to activate consumers' interactive information processing. Therefore, flow content marketing, through entertaining scenarios, visual presentation, and high-interaction mechanisms, effectively promotes the conversion from purchase motivation to actual behavior. Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

> *H3:* Flow content experience positively influences the sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products content marketing.

Consumers' flow content experience is a key factor in building relationship commitment. In the entertainment value created by content marketing, the flow experience brings emotional reactions such as liking, curiosity, and satisfaction. These emotions increase consumer stickiness (Schouten et al., 2007). Noort et al. (2012) further point out that flow experiences can trigger a continuous tendency to explore entertaining content. This helps form the habit of repeated visits and interactions. In terms of visualization, the clearly presented product characteristics help consumers concentrate better. They are more willing to stay longer in the livestream or explore more valuable content (Lee and Kozar, 2009). In terms of interaction, content marketing enriches and delivers the information about "people" and "products" through the construction of "scenes." Content labels such as "green," "healthy," and "real farmer" are conveyed through visual, verbal, and emotional expressions. These efforts aim to increase immersive experience, interaction frequency, and average watch duration. Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

> *H4:* Flow content experience positively influences consumers' relationship commitment to local specialty green agricultural products content marketing.

3.2 Information processing based on the central route: trust judgment and sustainable sales growth

(1) The influence of product trust evaluation on the sustainable sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products content marketing

To understand the role of product trust evaluation in local specialty green agricultural products content marketing, this study summarizes key findings in three aspects: First, how green traceability and ecological attributes presented in content enhance consumers' perception of product quality and safety. Second, how long-term trust assets such as regional brand reputation and geographical indication deepen consumers' product identification and brand preference. Third, how consumer reviews and content interaction on social platforms regulate risk perception and strengthen trust.

Product trust evaluation is a key precondition for triggering consumers' purchase intention. One advantage of local specialty green agricultural products content marketing is showing the full production process to reveal the product's value. The focus on green traceability improves transparency and increases consumers' trust and support (Zhang and Jing, 2024). Meanwhile, the regional brand reputation and strong market feedback of these products push producers to improve production techniques. This raises product quality and credibility, which further stimulates buying motivation (Min and Qing, 2024). In addition, consumers' trust in local specialty green products is influenced by the evaluations of other users on social media platforms. Research shows that positive user reviews and feedback increase potential buyers' social recognition, reduce perceived risks, and lead to stronger purchase intention (Xiong et al., 2021). Therefore, product trust evaluation is not only the foundation of initial trust. It also plays a key role in continuously strengthening consumers' buying intention and brand preference during the information processing stage. Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

> *H5:* Product trust evaluation positively influences the sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products content marketing.

Product trust evaluation is a key foundation for consumers to build a lasting relationship. According to the commitment-trust theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), high product trust evaluation not only enhances consumer recognition of the product itself but also helps strengthen emotional bonds with it. This is particularly important in the green traceability mechanism of local specialty green agricultural products (Luo et al., 2022). Existing studies have pointed out that content marketing documents the entire journey of agricultural products from production to distribution. This realizes traceability from farm to table. It not only improves consumer trust in product quality and safety but also enhances their brand loyalty. In addition, local specialty green agricultural products rely on geographical indication certification, intellectual property protection, and unique ecological and cultural backgrounds. These features strengthen brand differentiation and market recognition (Cheng et al., 2022; Li et al., 2024). As a result, consumers show stronger emotional attachment and a deeper trust foundation, which helps build relationship commitment (Zhao and Yang, 2025). At the same time, content marketing uses big data and precise profiling to respond to consumer needs dynamically and interact in a refined way. This improves the user experience and promotes long-term connections between consumers and products. Studies have also shown that product reviews play a significant role in trust formation. A high negative review rate increases consumers' perceived risk, which weakens both their initial trust and subsequent commitment. Therefore, product trust evaluation reflects not only consumers' recognition of product characteristics and control of risk perception but also a stable psychological expectation formed through information processing in content marketing. We propose the following hypothesis:

> *H6:* Product trust evaluation positively influences consumers' relationship commitment in the content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products.

(2) The impact of account trust evaluation on the sustainable sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products in content marketing

In the content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products, the account is not only the publisher of information but also a key touchpoint for consumers to build trust and make purchasing decisions. Existing studies point out that the account trust evaluation mainly lies in its performance in Eco-transportation, service assurance, and value delivery (Zhang and Zhao, 2025).

First, regarding eco-transportation, green logistics is a key link to ensure the quality and safety of local specialty green agricultural products. Research shows that measures such as green packaging, low-carbon transport, and full cold-chain delivery help consumers obtain high-quality and healthy local specialty green agriculture products, and also enhance their trust and loyalty toward the account (Yang and Wang, 2023). These practices also attract more consumer attention and recognition, boosting their purchasing confidence and actions (Tang et al., 2024). Second, in terms of service experience, factors like the anchor's service attitude, customer service response speed, and after-sales policies are key references for evaluating the Account's trustworthiness. Studies show that good service experience reduces uncertainty during the purchase process. It also increases consumer trust in the platform and account, which helps build long-term relationships and stimulates purchasing behavior (Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut, 2020). Third, in terms of value perception, existing studies show that transparent pricing and price adjustment mechanisms on social platforms help consumers compare prices and evaluate value, thus improving their decision-making when buying local specialty green agricultural products (Song et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). At the same time, through green consumption subsidies and reward point systems, accounts can further guide repeat purchases and promote sustainable consumption behavior. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

> *H7:* Account trust evaluation positively influences the sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products in content marketing.

> *H8:* Account trust evaluation positively influences consumers' relationship commitment in the content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products.

Based on the above hypothesis development and theoretical reasoning, the theoretical framework of this study is established (as shown in Figure 1).

4 Research methods and indicator construction

4.1 Research methods

This study adopts a mixed research approach combining PLS-SEM and fsQCA. The PLS-SEM method is employed to explore the impact mechanisms by which local specialty green agricultural products leverage content marketing to promote sales growth and establish consumer relationship commitment. fsQCA is used to examine the interactions between different factors in the central route and peripheral route, aiming to construct the implementation pathways for local specialty green agricultural products to achieve sales growth and relationship commitment through content marketing on social platforms.

The reasons are as follows: First, PLS-SEM is suitable for exploratory research and supports the development of emerging theoretical frameworks. It can handle both reflective and formative variables simultaneously, making it well-suited for the multi-dimensional measurements involved in this study. Second, while PLS-SEM validated the linear relationship, fsQCA is needed to further analyze how these values combine to influence sustainable sales growth. Different value elements may play a role under different conditions. fsQCA can distinguish between necessary and sufficient conditions, allowing for the construction of optimal pathways. Additionally, fsQCA can reveal the synergies generated by multiple factor combinations, helping to identify best practices and propose targeted implementation strategies.

4.2 Data sources

This study takes Sichuan Pujiang Dekopon on the TikTok platform as an example. The reason for choosing TikTok is as follows:

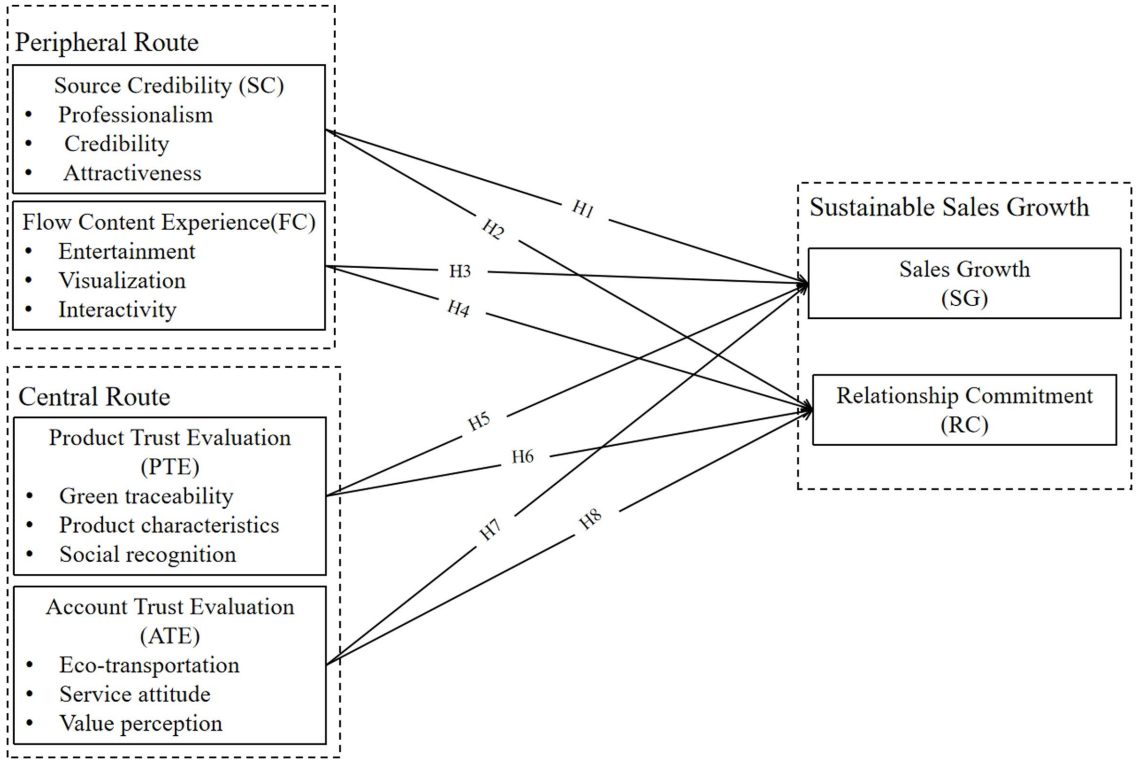

FIGURE 1
Theoretical framework.

TikTok is one of the most influential social platforms in China. According to the *2024 TikTok E-commerce Harvest Festival Report on Agricultural Support*, from September 2023 to September 2024, TikTok e-commerce sold 7.1 billion orders of agricultural specialty products. It is evident that TikTok has become an important channel for agricultural product content marketing. Therefore, in terms of content diversity, audience base, and compatibility with agricultural products, TikTok has strong representativeness as a social platform.

The reasons for selecting Sichuan Pujiang Dekopon are as follows: It was recognized as a China's Top 100 Regional Brands in 2023. Its growing process adopts organic fertilizer instead of chemical fertilizer, green pest control instead of chemical methods, physical and chemical trapping, and biological control, making it a representative of local specialty green agricultural products. Data show that Sichuan Pujiang Dekopon has more than 200 cold-chain storage enterprises and over 20 packaging companies. Overall, Sichuan Pujiang Dekopon possesses regional brand value and green attributes, making it an ideal research object.

This study collected product links on TikTok with Sichuan Pujiang Dekopon and sales volume over 5,000 between March 9, 2024, and April 7, 2024 (30 days). Based on this, the actual participating accounts were identified, resulting in a total of 232 representative account samples. Based on the marketing Accounts, data collection was conducted in three dimensions: First, at the product link level, the comment data under each Dekopon link was collected. Second, at the account level, the basic information of each account was extracted, including profile description, number of followers, and historical performance in product promotion. Third, at the content marketing behavior level, the study focused on specific marketing data shown in the short videos or livestreams where these products were featured, such as the number of viewers, sales revenue, sales volume, like interaction, danmaku interaction, and average watch duration. These data were used to test the proposed hypothesis model.

4.3 Indicator construction

(1) Source credibility

According to the theory of source credibility and hypotheses H1–H2, consumers usually perceive the source credibility of content creators from three dimensions: expertise, credibility, and attractiveness. This study introduces three indicators of accounts—marketing index, conversion index, and popularity index - to correspond to these three dimensions.

In terms of expertise, the marketing index reflects the anchor's ability to retain and engage users. Consumers often judge professionalism based on the logic of the anchor's explanation, the accuracy of information, and the professional level of expression (Li and Wang, 2020). Under the support of platform algorithms, anchors or accounts with higher marketing index are more likely to obtain recommended positions. This forms a chain of "technical exposure-content perception-professional judgment," which helps consumers build expertise evaluations based on external information cues.

In terms of credibility, the conversion index refers to the account's sales-driving ability. When the conversion index is high, it triggers the "social proof" effect. This is based on the psychological

mechanism that "seeing others interact and purchase makes users more likely to follow." From the operation logic of the social platform, the conversion index is tied to the platform's traffic allocation strategy. A high-conversion anchor is likely to receive exposure resources, which further enhances their source credibility among users.

In terms of attractiveness, the popularity index measures the account's basic ability to attract users. The "internet celebrity halo" brought by a high popularity index tends to attract users more easily (Hou and Zhang, 2024). The platform's streaming recommendation mechanism also favors livestreams with large viewer numbers and high interaction. This creates a positive feedback loop of popularity, encouraging user participation and improving both content reach and source credibility.

(2) Flow content experience

According to flow theory and hypotheses H3–H4, flow content experience is jointly driven by pleasure from entertainment, sensory appeal from visual presentation, and a sense of social presence through interactive participation. Based on user behavior, this study selects four key indicators: danmaku interaction, like interaction, average online viewers, and average watch duration.

Danmaku Interaction: Danmaku is a form of real-time interaction. A high level of danmaku interaction indicates that users actively participate in the livestream, interacting with both the anchor and other viewers, which enhances the immersive experience (Gong and Zhao, 2025). A large number of danmaku comments means users are willing to express opinions, emotions, and feedback. This results from both immersive experience and social motivation. Danmaku content is often identified by platform algorithms as "high-interaction content," increasing viewers' sense of belonging and participation, attracting more users to join the interaction, and triggering a snowball effect that eventually leads to purchase behavior (Meng et al., 2021).

Like Interaction: Likes are a low-cost form of interaction. A higher like interaction suggests users are more interested in the content and more willing to engage with the anchor, thereby enhancing immersion. This is a type of "instant attitude expression" and represents non-rational, intuitive judgments in the peripheral route (Luo and Ji, 2025). Within social platform algorithms, likes serve as core signals for recognizing user preferences and influence subsequent content recommendations.

Average Online Viewers: A high number of average online viewers is often perceived by consumers as an indicator that "this content is popular," which triggers audience effects and increases users' willingness to stay and interact (Zhang et al., 2024). The platform's recommendation logic prioritizes content with high average online viewers and frequent interaction, making average online viewers not only a result of content appeal but also a product of the platform's traffic distribution mechanism.

Average Watch Duration: Average watch duration reflects whether users are continuously attracted to the content and willing to spend time. If the content provides strong visual appeal, engaging narratives, or high information value, users are more likely to stay and keep watching. From the platform's operational perspective, average watch duration is used to assess content quality and stickiness.

(3) Product trust evaluation

According to hypotheses H5 and H6, consumers' trust judgment toward the product belongs to the central route and relies on a high level of information processing. It is mainly reflected in three aspects: green traceability awareness, identification of local specialty agricultural products characteristics, and the social recognition mechanism. This study introduces four indicators: brand authorization status, quality review ratio, number of associated top influencers, and repurchase review ratio. These indicators reflect the level of consumer trust in the product.

In terms of green traceability, brand authorization status serves as an authoritative endorsement of product compliance. It is an important reference for users to judge whether local specialty green agricultural products are trustworthy and traceable (Ho-Dac et al., 2013). On social platforms, brand authorization status is often highlighted on product cards. This reinforces users' perception of quality assurance, quickly triggering trust cue processing and building an impression of "official and authentic," which reduces cognitive uncertainty.

In terms of product characteristics, quality review ratio refers to the proportion of user reviews that positively mention taste, appearance, freshness, and similar attributes. For local specialty green agricultural products, subjective evaluations are a key basis for potential consumers to build trust and develop purchase intentions (Jiang et al., 2021). A high quality review ratio shows that the product has received more positive feedback in actual use. This encourages other users to process product attribute information through inductive reasoning (Noh and Borges, 2015). On social platforms, review content and keywords are frequently analyzed by algorithms for product ranking and recommendation.

In terms of social recognition, the number of associated top influencers reflects the authority and recognition of the product in the market. It easily triggers the authority effect and conformity psychology, which enhances consumer trust (Dong et al., 2025). This kind of influencer endorsement forms an information reinforcement mechanism within the social platform. The repurchase review ratio refers to the proportion of reviews in which consumers express willingness to repurchase after the initial purchase. A high repurchase review ratio can significantly increase new users' trust and purchase intention. On the social platform level, the system labels products with tags such as "high repurchase rate" through algorithms, which attract users to make trust judgments and rational purchasing decisions.

(4) Account trust evaluation

According to Hypotheses H7 and H8, consumers' evaluation of account trust mainly focuses on logistics, service, and value delivery. This study selects four indicators: store operation duration, official self-operated status, logistics shipping time, and account selling reputation, to measure consumers' account trust evaluation.

In terms of logistics, logistics shipping time usually reflects the fulfillment capability of the account. It reduces users' waiting cost and transaction risk and increases their confidence in receiving expected returns on time (Gao et al., 2025). On the social platform, logistics shipping time is also one of the weighted factors in content recommendation. Labels such as "Next-day Delivery" is often shown on product pages to strengthen consumers' sense of security and trust.

In terms of service, store operation duration is a key signal in evaluating account trust. Consumers often use store operation duration as a visible cue of the account's credibility, which leads to

stronger trust (Ping et al., 2025). In platform operations, longer store operation duration also improves the account's ranking, eligibility for campaigns, and livestream priority. Official self-operated status is also an important trust signal on social platforms. The self-operated label means the platform or brand directly controls the service process. Under information asymmetry, this gives consumers a stronger sense of service security. Official self-operated status is usually displayed with special tags or highlights, such as "Official Self-Operated," which significantly improve consumers' trust in the account.

In terms of value delivery, account selling reputation reflects the overall user feedback on product, service, and content. A high account selling reputation shows that the account has good reputation in the sales process. The platform also tends to give higher recommendation weight to such accounts. For consumers, a good account selling reputation can trigger a psychological process of "social recognition – imitation preference – trust improvement." It makes users more likely to build emotional attachment and behavioral dependence on the account.

(5) Outcome variable—sustainable sales growth

Sales growth is measured by sales volume and sales revenue, which are commonly used indicators to reflect actual consumer behavior (Kalifa et al., 2022). Sales volume shows consumers' immediate willingness to buy. Sales revenue reflects the anchor's ability to monetize, the users' willingness to pay, and the market competitiveness of the product. The transaction indicators of the account show its ability to convert content into actual sales.

Relationship commitment is based on the commitment-trust theory, and can be divided into three dimensions: emotional, time-based, and instrumental (Zhou et al., 2020; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Gundlach et al., 1995). This study uses account follower scale, follower growth over 30 days, and fan club growth to measure relationship commitment. Follower scale reflects time commitment. It shows consumers' sustained relationship with the account over a long period, indicating stable and lasting attention to the product or account. Follower growth reflects emotional commitment. It shows voluntary attention formed by consumers based on interest, preference, or brand identity. Fan club growth reflects instrumental commitment. It shows consumers' willingness to invest more resources (such as time, attention, or interaction) to join a fan community. This indicates a higher level of relational stickiness and potential switching costs. (Specific indicators can be found in Table 1).

5 Results and findings

5.1 Measurement model results using PLS-SEM

In this paper, following the selection criteria for reflective and formative indicators summarized by Guo and Xiao (2022), the dimensions suitable for reflective and formative indicators were analyzed one by one. Overall, for the central path, formative indicators were selected for the observed variables, while for the peripheral route, reflective indicators were selected for the observed variables.

5.1.1 Multicollinearity and common method bias testing

The variance inflation factor (VIF) method was used to test the multicollinearity among the latent variables. The VIF values ranged from [1.004, 3.845], all less than 5, indicating that there is no multicollinearity issue. To avoid systematic errors caused by the indicator dataset, this paper uses the Harman single-factor method to test whether common method bias exists in the sample data. The exploratory factor analysis results show that, without rotation, there are six factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. The variance of the first common factor is 31.684%, which is below the 40% threshold. This indicates that common method bias among the variables is not significant and will not affect the subsequent data analysis results.

5.1.2 Measurement model results of reflective indicators

To use the PLS-SEM model, this study employed Smart PLS4 to test the model. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the reflective indicators to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model, with the results shown in Table 2. The standardized loadings, Cronbach α (CA), composite reliability (CR), rho_A, and average variance extracted (AVE) for each variable, according to the study by Hair et al. (2019), should each be at least 0.7, 0.7, 0.7, 0.7, and 0.5, respectively, to ensure the reliability and validity of the data in this study.

Discriminant validity was tested using the square root of the factor AVE and the correlation matrix between factors Fornell–Larcker, as shown in Table 3. The square root of the AVE for each latent variable is higher than the correlation coefficients between that variable and other latent variables, indicating that the scale has good discriminant validity. The HTMT test results are shown in Table 4. The HTMT values between all constructs are less than 0.9, further indicating good discriminant validity between the constructs (Henseler et al., 2015).

5.1.3 Measurement model results of formative indicators

For the formative measurement model, the reliability test is not crucial, while the validity test becomes particularly important. The validity is primarily tested at the indicator and construct levels (Henseler et al., 2009). For indicator validity, the indicator weights of each measurement model are all greater than 0.2, indicating that the selected observable variables have some reference value. All formative indicators are significant at the 5% statistical level, suggesting that the selected observable variables have sufficient validity. The variance inflation factor (VIF) for each indicator of the formative measurement model is below 1.068, indicating that there is no serious multicollinearity issue in the formative measurement model (see Table 5).

5.2 Hypothesis model testing

This paper used SmartPLS4 to perform the Bootstrap method for testing analysis, setting the number of resamples to 5,000. The test results are shown in Figure 2. The results show the structural model assessment and hypothesis testing of the effects of source credibility (SC), flow content experience (FC), product trust evaluation (PTE),

TABLE 1 Indicators and definitions.

Constructs	Indicators	Interpretation of indicators
Source Credibility (SC)	Marketing Index (MI)	The account's level of average order value, livestream frequency, and user reputation within the agricultural product category over the past 30 days.
	Conversion Index (CI)	The account's level of average viewership and viewing time within the agricultural product category over the past 30 days.
	Popularity Index (PI)	The account's level of standing in follower size within the agricultural product category over the past 30 days.
Flow Content Experience (FC)	Danmaku Interaction (DI)	Number of danmakus/duration of the host's product presentation (Per session)
	Like Interaction (LI)	Number of likes/duration of the host's product presentation (Per session)
	Average Online Viewers (OV)	The average number of online viewers during a single livestream featuring the product.
	Average Watch Duration (WD)	The average watch duration per viewer during a single livestream featuring the product.
Product Trust Evaluation (PTE)	Brand Authorization Status (BA)	Indicates whether the product has been officially authorized by the brand.
	Quality Review Ratio (QRR)	The proportion of positive reviews related to product quality among all reviews for the product.
	Number of Associated Top Influencers (ATI)	The number of industry-leading influencers (with over 5 million followers) who have recommended the product.
	Repurchase Review Ratio (RRR)	The proportion of reviews indicating repurchase intention among all reviews for the product.
Account Trust Evaluation (ATE)	Store Operation Duration (SOD)	The operational duration of the store associated with the account.
	Official Self-Operated Status (OSO)	Indicates whether the account is directly operated by a brand or official entity.
	Logistics Shipping Time (LST)	The average time promised by the account to complete order shipment after a purchase.
	Account Selling Reputation (ASR)	The overall rating of the account based on consumer feedback on service, products, and logistics. This is calculated by the platform considering return rates, negative review rates, positive review rates, complaint rates, on-time pickup rates, and delivery times. Reflects consumer trust in account reputation evaluation.
Sales Growth (SG)	Sales Volume (SV)	Sales volume/duration of the host's product presentation (Per session)
	Sales Revenue (SR)	Sales revenue/duration of the host's product presentation (Per session)
	Account Marketing Level (AML)	(30-day) total sales revenue + canceled order amount + rejected order amount + returned order amount
Relationship Commitment (RC)	Follower Growth (FG)	Follower growth volume over the past 30 days.
	Fan Club Growth (FCG)	The volume of fan club growth during a single marketing livestream.

and account trust evaluation (ATE) on sales growth (SG) and relationship commitment (RC). The R^2 values for sales growth (SG) and relationship commitment (RC) are 0.532 and 0.531, respectively, indicating moderate to significant explanatory power (Leguina, 2015). The results show (Table 6) that source credibility (SC) ($\beta = 0.367$, $p < 0.001$), flow content experience (FC) ($\beta = 0.218$, $p < 0.01$), account trust evaluation (ATE) ($\beta = 0.191$, $p < 0.01$), and product trust evaluation (PTE) ($\beta = 0.155$, $p < 0.05$) all positively affect relationship commitment (RC), and hypotheses H2, H4, H6, and H8 are supported. Source credibility (SC) ($\beta = 0.330$, $p < 0.01$), flow content experience (FC) ($\beta = 0.193$, $p < 0.05$), and product trust evaluation (PTE) ($\beta = 0.311$, $p < 0.001$) all positively affect sales growth (SG), and hypotheses H1, H3, and H5 are supported. Account trust evaluation (ATE) ($\beta = 0.92$, $p = 0.324$) positively affects sales growth (SG), but is not significant, thus H7 is not supported (see Table 7).

The account trust evaluation did not have a significant impact on sales growth (H7). This result is inconsistent with the expected hypothesis and needs to be explored further from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Based on the ELM theoretical model, account trust evaluation is a cognitive cue from the central route. In theory, it should significantly influence consumer purchase behavior. However, in content marketing channels, the audience of local specialty green agricultural products is often more driven by the peripheral route. Especially under low-involvement conditions, peripheral cues have a stronger effect on purchase behavior. According to the path coefficients of each hypothesis, the coefficients of peripheral route factors are mostly higher than those of central route factors (see Figure 2). In addition, under the non-contact environment of content marketing, although consumers may recognize the professionalism of the anchor and the credibility of the content at the cognitive level, they may not internalize this trust into immediate purchase decisions due to real-world concerns. These concerns include transaction risks, product availability, logistics assurance, and price perception (Nuttavuthisit and Thøgersen, 2015). This reflects a typical Attitude-Behavior Gap phenomenon (Dhir et al., 2021). Therefore, at the theoretical level, account trust evaluation may stimulate trust perception in consumers' minds. However, without emotional bonding or shared value resonance, its ability to convert into actual consumption behavior is limited. This results in a clear disconnection in the trust-to-action path.

From a practical perspective, the purchasing context of local specialty green agriculture products is highly complex and involves multiple trade-offs. This weakens the direct influence of account trust evaluation on actual purchasing behavior. First, in content marketing of agricultural products, problems such as "false green labels" and misleading marketing are common. This makes it hard for account trust to fully offset consumer concerns about product authenticity and safety, leading to hesitation. Second, agricultural products are non-daily and planned purchases. Consumers need to consider

TABLE 2 Construct reliability and validity.

Constructs	Reflective indicators	Loadings	CA	rho_A	CR	AVE
SC	MI	0.820	0.817	0.831	0.891	0.731
	CI	0.857				
	PI	0.887				
FC	DI	0.778	0.812	0.816	0.876	0.639
	LI	0.820				
	OV	0.794				
	WD	0.804				
SG	SV	0.762	0.754	0.870	0.834	0.63
	SR	0.771				
	AML	0.841				
RC	FG	0.946	0.858	0.874	0.933	0.875
	FCG	0.925				

TABLE 3 Measurement model results of formative indicators.

Constructs	SC	FC	SG	RC
SC	**0.855**			
FC	0.714	**0.799**		
SG	0.671	0.537	**0.792**	
RC	0.803	0.611	0.549	**0.936**

Bold values on the diagonal represent the square root of the AVE for each construct. These values are higher than the inter-construct correlations, indicating good discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion).

TABLE 4 Discriminant validity using HTMT ratio.

Constructs	SC	FC	SG	RC
SC				
FC	0.890			
SG	0.736	0.627		
RC	0.839	0.710	0.561	

seasonality, family needs, and delivery convenience when making decisions. This extends the decision cycle from trust formation to purchase behavior. Lastly, local specialty green agriculture products are high-attention and low-frequency goods. Consumer decisions are influenced by product price, food safety, and quality stability. These factors go beyond trust in the anchor or account. Together, these factors explain why even when accounts win consumer trust, their effect on purchase behavior may be weakened or disrupted due to the complexity of the real environment.

5.3 The findings of fsQCA

This study uses standardized construct scores as inputs, which are generated using PLS-SEM, for fsQCA. fsQCA employs partial membership, meaning a variable can partially belong to a set, with its membership degree being a continuous value between 0 and 1, representing the degree to which the variable belongs to the fuzzy set (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). In this study, the 95 and 5% percentiles of the sample data are selected.

Before analyzing the complex interaction nature between multiple conditions, it is necessary to conduct a "necessity" test to determine whether a single condition can improve the effectiveness of new media social platform content marketing. In fsQCA, when a condition is always present when the outcome occurs, that condition becomes a necessary condition for the outcome. When consistency is greater than 0.9, the condition becomes a necessary condition for the outcome of sustainable sales growth. This study does not have any structures have a sufficiently high consistency (greater than 0.9) and coverage (greater than 0.9) value, making it impossible to be a necessary condition for sustainable sales growth.

The sufficiency analysis of condition configurations reveals the sufficiency of outcomes caused by different configurations composed of multiple conditions. The consistency threshold ultimately determined in this study is 0.80, with a frequency threshold of 1 and a PRI no lower than 0.6 (Ding, 2022). A total of 232 samples are included (as shown in Tables 6, 8).

Table 6 presents four configurations of conditions that support high levels of sales growth for content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products, with each column representing a potential configuration of conditions.

Table 8 presents three sufficient causal configurations that support high levels of relationship commitment in content marketing for local specialty green agricultural products, with each column representing a potential configuration of conditions.

The top three configuration paths for high-level sales growth and relationship commitment are consistent. This study identifies cases that can achieve sustainable income growth by selecting the intersection of supporting cases.

A high level of "SC + FC + PTE" can achieve high-level sustainable income growth. For example, the TikTok account kejiaxiaoying, with a rural origin and ecological planting background. The anchor showcases a positive and simple rural life through singing, which has created a high popularity index and marketing index, increasing the consumers' source credibility. The process of planting, fertilizing, and other farming activities brings consumers closer to the land, immersing them in the experience. The content phrases such as "freshly picked," and "safe fertilization" reflect the product's legitimacy, safety, and freshness, enhancing consumers' trust evaluation of the product. Against this backdrop, although the credibility of the account

TABLE 5 Measurement model results of formative indicators.

Constructs	Formative indicators	Weight	*T*-Values	*p*-Values	VIF
PTE	BA	0.342	3.090	0.002	1.022
	QRR	0.277	2.879	0.004	1.059
	ATI	0.443	3.605	0.000	1.055
	RRR	0.706	6.598	0.000	1.058
ATE	SOD	0.551	5.733	0.000	1.067
	OSO	0.375	3.373	0.001	1.068
	LST	0.473	3.682	0.000	1.004
	ASR	0.423	3.693	0.000	1.041

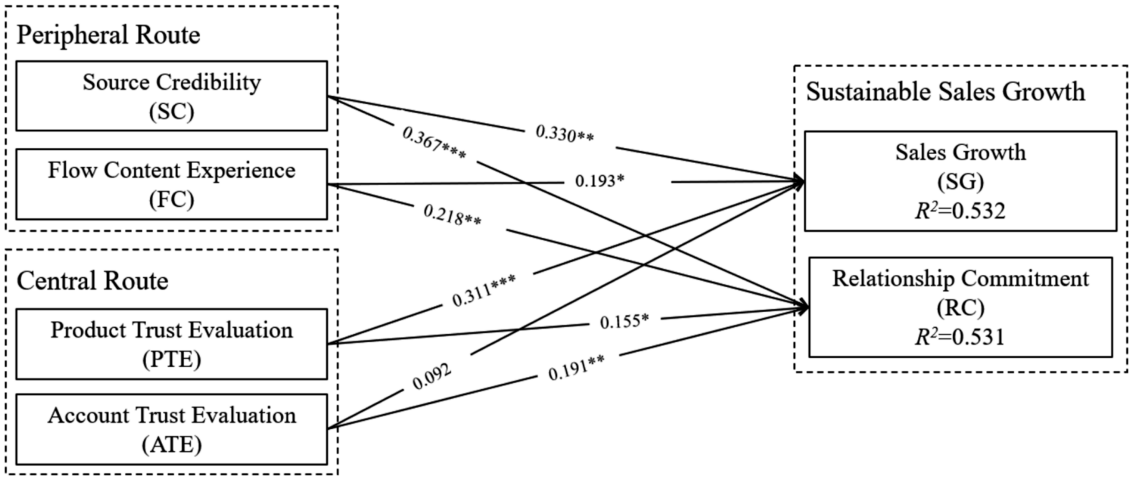

FIGURE 2
Results of structural model. *$p < 0.05$.

TABLE 6 Sufficient causal configurations for Sales Growth.

Configurations	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency
High Sales Growth of Local Specialized Green Agricultural Products through Content Marketing on Social Platforms SG = *f (SC; FC; PTE; ATE)*			
SC * FC * PTE	0.600053	0.039823	0.888877
SC * FC * ATE	0.682175	0.121946	0.902831
SC * PTE * ATE	0.622592	0.062362	0.920202
FC * PTE * ATE	0.571334	0.011104	0.916914

Solution coverage: 0.795465.
Solution consistency: 0.860864.

was not demonstrated, there was still a high level of sales growth and relationship commitment.

A high level of "SC + FC + ATE" can achieve high levels of sustainable sales growth. For example, the TikTok account qingyin141319, focuses on authentic eating experiences in its content marketing, with 1.1 million followers. The large follower base, the anchor's simple language, and comfortable image contribute to the consumers' perception of source credibility. The anchor's actions of enjoying large amounts of food live immerse consumers, with a live-stream interaction rate as high as 18.68%. Although it is not an official self-operated account, the 4.9 out of 5 rating for product sales reflects the credibility of the account in terms of logistics, products, and services. Based on this, although the product's geographical and green attributes are not highlighted, it still demonstrates a high level of sales growth and relationship commitment.

A high level of "SC + PTE + ATE" can achieve high-level sustainable sales growth. For example, the TikTok account 98540872077, which belongs to a Chinese state-owned enterprise, adopts a content format of product recommendation type, introducing basic information such as product characteristics, price, and logistics. The endorsement by the state-owned enterprise creates source credibility for the account, placing its marketing,

TABLE 7 Path coefficients and confidence interval.

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	p-Values	CI0.95 Bias Corrected	Results
H1	SC → SG	0.330	0.003	[0.127, 0.555]	Yes
H2	SC → RC	0.367	0.000	[0.179, 0.544]	Yes
H3	FC → SG	0.193	0.010	[0.026, 0.316]	Yes
H4	FC → RC	0.218	0.006	[0.059, 0.372]	Yes
H5	PTE → SG	0.311	0.000	[0.141, 0.444]	Yes
H6	PTE → RC	0.155	0.025	[0.026, 0.298]	Yes
H7	ATE→SG	0.092	0.324	[−0.077, 0.297]	No
H8	ATE→RC	0.191	0.002	[0.070, 0.307]	Yes

TABLE 8 Sufficient causal configurations for Relationship Commitment.

Configurations	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency
High Relationship Commitment of Local Specialized Green Agricultural Products through Content Marketing on Social Platforms RC = *f (SC; FC; PTE; ATE)*			
SC * FC * PTE	0.596582	0.053376	0.903166
SC * FC * ATE	0.650603	0.107398	0.879980
SC * PTE * ATE	0.601723	0.058517	0.908912

Solution coverage: 0.762494.
Solution consistency: 0.862940.

conversion, and popularity index at a medium-to-high level. Brand authorization and quality assurance are the baseline for state-owned enterprises, making it easier to gain consumer trust in the product. Against this backdrop, although the product's geographical and green characteristics are not highlighted and not much effort is invested in content creation, it still achieves a high level of sales growth and relationship commitment.

A high level of "FC + PTE + ATE" can only result in high sales growth, but sustainable relationship commitment is not reflected in this configuration. For example, the TikTok account 194238172 uses origin tracing content marketing. The filming location is typically at the agricultural product cultivation site, providing consumers with a more direct product perception and enhancing the content experience. However, due to the large proportion of origin tracing content marketing, which can lead to visual fatigue, consumers find it difficult to develop sustainable relationship commitment.

6 Research conclusion

This study explores the mechanisms and pathways through which local specialty green agricultural products achieve sustainable sales growth through content marketing on social platforms.

The PLS-SEM analysis results show that source credibility, flow content experience, and product trust evaluation significantly impact sales growth and relationship commitment. This is supported by Rose et al. (2012) and Chiu et al. (2018), who suggest that source credibility reduces consumers' perceived risk regarding local specialty green agricultural products through high-quality content, professional and authoritative content accounts, thereby enhancing purchasing decision confidence and making consumers more willing to establish long-term purchasing relationships and loyalty. As supported by Wu et al. (2020), the immersive experience of real scenes and real-time interaction enhances consumers' sensory perception and immediate purchase impulses. The long-term sensory resonance and emotional connection drive the establishment of long-term relationship commitment. As supported by Jiang et al. (2021) and Luo et al. (2022), a good product trust evaluation brings significant advantages to the sales growth of local specialty green agricultural products.

A good account trust evaluation brings significant advantages to consumers' commitment to the relationship with local specialty green agricultural products. Stable, highly interactive, and reputable accounts enhance consumers' sense of reliance, making them more willing to establish long-term relationships. However, although high-reputation accounts can enhance consumer trust, if the product quality or content appeal is insufficient, the account's reputation alone is unlikely to directly drive purchase conversion. This is consistent with the study by Lee and Koo (2012), which found that in social platform marketing, consumers' purchasing behavior is more influenced by content quality and product experience rather than solely by the account's reputation. Therefore, account trust evaluation in the content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products cannot drive sustainable sales growth.

The results of fsQCA can provide a deeper understanding of the implementation path and key factor combinations in the content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products via social platforms, redefining the results of PLS-SEM (Mikalef and Pateli, 2017). PLS-SEM identifies how antecedents affect the research outcomes, while fsQCA addresses the various combinations of antecedents that can lead to higher results.

The results of fsQCA indicate that there are three paths for promoting sustainable income growth of local specialty green agricultural products through content marketing: "SC + FC + PTE,"

"SC + FC + ATE," and "SC + PTE + ATE." It is evident that source credibility is fundamental. The core of sustainable sales growth lies in the establishment of trust. Whether it is source credibility, product trust evaluation, or account trust evaluation, only when consumers are convinced that the information source is trustworthy and the product quality is reliable will they form stable purchase intentions and long-term consumer relationships. Through immersive content marketing, such as real-life scenarios, interactive content, and storytelling, consumers can more deeply perceive product characteristics, lower the cognitive threshold, enhance purchase intentions, and build brand loyalty through long-term engagement. Additionally, the combination of factors helps avoid the issue where relying solely on account and product trust evaluation cannot achieve sustainable sales growth.

7 Research implication

7.1 Theoretical implication

First, this study confirms the effectiveness of the ELM in understanding consumer behavior in content marketing for local specialty green agricultural products. Previous studies have successfully applied ELM in the field of agricultural content marketing, focusing on consumer attitude formation (Filieri and McLeay, 2014), adoption intention (Wang et al., 2020), online review usefulness (Wang et al., 2021), and interactive sharing behavior (Huang and Yang, 2025). However, there has been no systematic investigation using ELM to explore the key factors influencing content marketing for local specialty green agricultural products on social platforms. Therefore, the findings of this study introduce a new perspective by applying ELM to local specialty green agricultural products. By examining the relationship between the central route (product and account trust evaluation) and the peripheral route (source credibility and flow content experience), this study provides valuable insights for improving sustainable sales growth and further confirms the adaptability and explanatory power of the ELM in the fields of agricultural communication and green consumption.

Second, this study innovatively introduces relationship commitment as a variable to explore the sustainable role of consumer loyalty and dependence in content marketing for local specialty green agricultural products. In previous studies, consumer behavior mostly focused on short-term purchase intention, while long-term relationship building based on social platform interactions has been overlooked. Therefore, this study incorporates relationship commitment into content marketing, emphasizing the key role of emotional attachment driven by trust and interaction. It reflects how long-term trust among followers, fan clubs, and the account can be transformed into stable consumption relationships. This two-way interaction and feedback mechanism helps local specialty green agricultural products overcome regional limitations. It enables timely understanding of consumer needs and allows for marketing adjustments to meet those needs. This ensures continuous market appeal and sustainable sales growth of local specialty green agriculture products. The findings provide forward-looking insights for content marketing strategies of local specialty green agricultural products, highlighting the necessity of building long-term trust and commitment in content marketing.

Third, this study integrates multiple pathway factors and reveals the linkage mechanism of the central route and peripheral route. Although existing studies have discussed the marketing effects of source credibility, flow content experience, product trust evaluation, and account trust evaluation separately (Zhang et al., 2024), few have examined the integration of these four elements as antecedents to verify the sustainable sales growth of content marketing for local specialty green agricultural products. Therefore, this study, using the fsQCA method, incorporates these four key factors into the model as combined antecedents for the first time. It explores their configurational effects on sustainable sales growth. The results show that different combinations of factors form multiple effective paths to achieve sustainable sales growth, confirming the synergistic logic of "1 + 1 > 2." This expands the limitations of single-variable research and provides personalized and diversified practical references for content marketing strategies.

Fourth, this study also reflects theoretically on and further explains the insignificant result of the "account trust evaluation–sales growth" path in content marketing of local specialty green agricultural products. Although this study hypothesized that account trust evaluation would positively influence consumer purchase behavior (H7), the empirical result did not support this path. This finding suggests that the "account trust evaluation–sales growth "path in social platform content marketing for local specialty green agricultural products is not direct or linear. Instead, it is influenced by multiple cognitive filtering and behavioral delay mechanisms. On the one hand, local specialty green agriculture products are planned and infrequently purchased rational goods. Buying behavior is constrained by seasonality, family structure, and logistics availability. On the other hand, account trust is more likely to indirectly promote repeated interactions and future purchase intention by enhancing emotional attachment and long-term relationship recognition. Therefore, this study takes the insignificant result of H7 as an opportunity to expand the academic understanding of the complexity of trust variable pathways. It also provides a theoretical foundation for future research to introduce more contextual variables and phased consumer behavior analyses.

7.2 Practical implications

First, strengthen source credibility by emphasizing the public trust of local specialties. For example, brands can collaborate with agricultural experts, local agricultural cooperative leaders, or anchors with practical farming experience to create "professional" or "direct origin supply" accounts, making them an important source of authentic agricultural information for consumers. At the same time, brands should maintain the consistency of the account's content style, continuously providing high-quality content related to agricultural products, such as farming knowledge, product introductions, and consumer feedback, to avoid trust gaps caused by short-term or random operations. In addition, the application of certification systems can enhance the credibility of the anchor and account. Brands can apply for official Blue V certification, industry association certification, or collaborate with local governments to promote specialty agricultural products with geographic indications, thereby granting the account higher authority.

Second, create a flow content experience to amplify the sensory value of local specialty green agricultural products. Brands can use short videos and live streaming to take consumers on a "virtual tour" of unique production areas such as farmland, orchards, and ranches. By combining high-definition visuals, ASMR, and slow-live streaming

technology, they can amplify the freshness, texture, and environmental characteristics of the agricultural products. In addition, live streaming interactions can incorporate "mukbang" displays, where the anchor authentically tastes the product, provides detailed descriptions, and engages in interactive Q&A with the audience. This allows consumers to "virtually experience" the flavor and texture of the product, reducing the psychological distance of online purchases.

Third, enhance product trust by establishing a comprehensive quality assurance system. For example, they can adopt a "planting diary" model, regularly updating the growth process, climate changes, and harvest conditions of the agricultural products on social platforms. This allows consumers to feel the natural growth trajectory of the products, increasing authenticity. Additionally, a "live product inspection" segment can be introduced, where the anchor randomly unboxes agricultural products during a live stream, tests the quality, weighs them, and even invites followers to choose the unboxing items, creating a transparent and visual quality certification process. In addition, brands can offer after-sales guarantees such as "bad fruit compensation" and "instant return upon unboxing" to allow consumers to try the products in a low-risk environment, eliminating purchase concerns, building trust, and encouraging repeat purchases.

Fourth, optimize account trust and build a long-term community ecosystem for local specialty agricultural products. For example, brands can adopt a "private domain community + fan economy" strategy by creating fan groups for local specialty agricultural products, regularly sharing planting knowledge, agricultural live streams, and exclusive discounts for followers to enhance consumers' sense of belonging. Additionally, a "content IP strategy" can be developed, such as focusing on a specific farmer anchor or production area, consistently delivering content related to local specialties, allowing consumers to form emotional dependence on the brand.

Fifth, build a "multi-dimensional combination" to optimize the marketing pathway. The combination of SC + FC + PTE can enhance consumer trust in the product by relying on authoritative certifications, expert endorsements, and authentic stories from the production area. At the same time, short videos and live streams showcasing cooking processes, field management, and other details can enhance the immersive experience and deepen user understanding. Under the SC + FC + ATE pathway, brands can create long-term, stable accounts, maintain consistency in content output, and strengthen consumer trust in the account through KOL recommendations and community interactions. The SC + PTE + ATE strategy is suitable for marketing scenarios that emphasize product quality and brand image. Brands can leverage authoritative certifications, product traceability systems, authentic user reviews, and long-term, reputable accounts to establish deeper trust relationships.

8 Limitations and future research

We believe that our work contributes to exploring the factors and pathways through which local specialty green agricultural products can achieve sustainable sales growth via content marketing on social platforms. However, there are still certain limitations and suggestions for future development:

Firstly, the data in this study is sourced from user comments and interaction information on social platforms such as TikTok, which may not fully reflect consumers' true attitudes and purchasing decisions. Future research can incorporate methods such as surveys and in-depth interviews to obtain more comprehensive consumer behavior data, verify the applicability of the research conclusions, and further explore the deeper motivations behind consumer purchasing decisions.

Secondly, the data in this study were collected during a specific period. Consumer preferences, social platform algorithms, and marketing strategies may change over time. Therefore, the research findings may only apply to the current content marketing environment and may not remain valid in the long term. Future studies can adopt longitudinal research to analyze the evolving trends of content marketing for local specialty green agricultural products across different time periods. This will help assess the long-term validity of the findings. Based on changes in platform ecology and consumer behavior, future research can further explore the dynamic mechanisms that influence sustainable sales growth.

Data availability statement

Publicly available datasets were analyzed in this study. This data can be found at: https://www.chanmama.com/douyin/tftwo?BDPC&PP&3152805483002&bd_vid=10881085524687010102.

Author contributions

MF: Data curation, Writing – original draft. CZ: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Publisher's note

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