Brand Communication and Consumers' Brand Purchase Intention in social media: Mediator Effect of Brand Image, Brand Association/Awareness, Brand Loyalty

Liwen Zhang[1] and Fuangfa Amponstira[2]

[1,2]Management, Shinawatra University, Thailand

E-mail: [1]474775292@qq.com; [2]fuangfa.a@siu.ac.th

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Abstract

This article mainly researched the mediating effects of brand image, brand awareness, association, and brand loyalty on brand communication and purchase intention in social network brand communication. The sample group consisted of mobile phone users who used the Xiaohongshu APP. The research used SEM and mediation test to test the hypothesis. The results showed that brand image, brand awareness, association and brand loyalty played a mediating role between brand communication and purchase intention. Research also suggested that on social media, brands could still attract consumers' attention by creating a unique image and showcasing their brand's personality. Moreover, it could be done through the connection between social media platforms and consumers so that recognition, memories and associations increased purchase preferences. Finally, brands could also build and maintain brand loyalty through social media to increase product stickiness among consumers, significantly influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

Keywords: Firm-Created Social Media Communication; User-Generated Social Media Communication; Brand Image; Brand Association/ Awareness; Brand Loyalty; Purchase Intention

Introduction

Social networks are changing the traditional way of marketing. Traditional brand communications, which used to be controlled and managed by brands and marketing managers, are gradually being replaced, and the content of communications is being reshaped by consumers. Therefore, it becomes crucial for brand managers to understand consumers' consumption behavior

on the Internet (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016), traditional advertising methods are no longer the only source of brand communication (Li & Bernoff 2011), in this era, brands are able to communicate directly with consumers on these social media platforms (Jamali & Khan, 2018).

The drivers of consumer attitudes in social media campaigns are always unpredictable (Jamali, M., & Khan, R. 2018), and this unpredictability is a detriment for brands to develop communication strategies (Hutter et al., 2013). The continuous increase in the types of new media has led to the continuous exploration of effective brand communication methods by enterprises. Assessing that brand communication in the new media environment, through brand image, brand awareness/association, brand loyalty, can still influence consumers' purchase intention, which can provide enterprises with the basis and direction for formulating social media brand communication strategies.

Conceptual framework and hypothesis development

1. Brand communication

The importance of brand equity is reflected in the brand's ability to provide its customers with a good experience (Keller, 1993). If a company or brand manager wants to build a strong brand equity in the market, it is very important to understand the core dimensions of brand image (Hutter et al., 2013). It is worth noting that companies increase their capital investment in brand communication because they believe that doing so can affect consumers' perceptions of brands and consumption preferences (Hauser, 2011), which is because consumers are more inclined to choose familiar brands. or products (Coates et al., 2006). In order to further the influence of brand communication on social media on consumers' purchase intention, it can be divided into two forms according to the content source of brand communication: (a) Firm–created social media communication and (b) User–generated social media communication (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). The difference between the two is that company–created social media communications are managed by the company, while user–generated social media communications are not under the control of the company (Vanden Bergh et al., 2011).

The current research on enterprise creation mainly focuses on the research direction in word of mouth and electronic word of mouth (Chu & Kim 2011). The characteristics of word–of–mouth created by enterprises are first initiated by enterprises, but ultimately implemented by consumers (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). As a result, many companies are now realizing that they need to focus on building a two–way connection with consumers to facilitate consumer engagement in their

activities (Li & Bernoff, 2011). In this process, marketing managers hope that they can interact with loyal consumers through social media, so as to influence consumers' perceptions of products, disseminate information, learn from and understand audiences (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). It is worth noting that while corporate–created social media communications are increasing, this approach is still a new way of advertising (Nielsen, 2012).

On the other hand, the rapid development of the Internet and Web 2.0 has allowed consumers to become active in the process of acquiring information and purchasing (Kozinets et al. 2008), and in the process, the number of online brand communities has grown rapidly Promotes an increase in user–generated branded content (Nielsen, 2012). Today, UGC has become a tool for corporate or brand managers to gain insight into consumer behavior, needs and psychology (Christodoulides et al., 2012). In general, research on UGC has focused on the process of content creation rather than its dissemination process, conceptualizing it in a manner similar to eWOM (Kozinets et al., 2008). There is now a consensus in the literature that social media communication, UGC and eWOM are all associated with consumer self–awareness without any commercial intent and outside the company's control (Berthon et al., 2012). But brand managers can use UGC to collect and analyze consumers' thoughts in a way that keeps communication costs low compared to traditional channels (Krishnamurthy & Dou 2008). Furthermore, consumers are more likely to accept and trust UGC content, which makes this type of communication more impactful than traditional advertising (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009).

2. Purchase intention

The task of brand communication is to inform, persuade and remind consumers, directly or indirectly, of their valuable products (Aghaei et al., 2014). Therefore, brand communication is an important way for companies and their products to establish dialogue and connection with consumers (Keller, 2009). Brand communication creates consumer experience, builds consumer community and contributes to the increase of brand equity by building brand image in consumers' memory (Luo & Donthu, 2006). In this process, a high level of brand awareness and a positive brand image have specific effects on brand–related pricing, distribution, and promotions. Consumers with a high level of brand loyalty are more likely to pay a premium for a brand (Aghaei et al., 2014). Likewise, a positive image should lead to increased consumer searches (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). Therefore, Aaker (1991) believed that consumer brand loyalty can reduce the marketing cost of enterprises, and at the same time can make the relationship between enterprises and channels more stable, thereby increasing their competitiveness. Aghaei et al., (2014) pointed out that consumers'

perceptions can increase or decrease brand loyalty. Chi et al., (2009) pointed out that customers' perception of product or brand quality will affect their trust in the brand, which in turn affects their brand attitude and purchasing behavior.

Consumers' purchase intention is regarded as a subjective tendency towards products and can be used as an important indicator for predicting consumer behavior (Kotler, 2003). Zeithaml (1988) used purchase likelihood, purchase intention, and purchase consideration as measurement items to measure purchase intention. Engel et al. (1995) proposed the most recognized consumer purchase decision model; Mowen and Minor (2001) believed that consumer decision-making is a series of processes from perceiving a problem, finding a solution, evaluating alternatives, and making a decision Results; Engel et al. (1995) further argued that purchase intentions can be divided into unplanned purchases, partially planned purchases and fully planned purchases. Unplanned purchases can be seen as an impulse buying behavior, meaning that consumers make purchase choices on an ad hoc basis; partial planned purchases refer to the category and size of the product that consumers only decide before purchasing the product, but the brand and size of the product are not. Type is a decision made at the store; a fully planned purchase is one where the consumer has a clear purchase goal before entering the store. In addition, Kotler (2003) argues that an individual's attitude towards a brand or product, and the unpredictable environment in which they have been placed, can have an impact on purchase intention, for example, when the price is higher than expected (Dodds et al., 1991).

3. Brand image

Brand image is composed of functional and symbolic brand beliefs, it is defined as the rational or emotional perception of a specific brand by consumers (Dodds et al., 1991), to a certain extent, brand image refers to a specific product category, And unique customization for specific brand categories (Luo & Donthu, 2006). In other words, different brand image is actually the unique personality of different brands, which is an important concept of brand differentiation, which can also be called brand personality (Aaker, 1997). The personality of the brand reflected by the differentiated brand image will affect consumers' purchase intention to a certain extent. The more positive the brand personality, the higher the willingness of consumers to buy the brand (Wang & Yang, 2008). Personality in a brand, like a person's personality, is enduring because of its uniqueness (Aaker, 1996). Therefore, marketing practitioners need to be aware of the importance of establishing a clear and unambiguous brand personality (Kotler, 2003).

According to Aaker (1996), a product's packaging, price, attributes and categories, and even the socioeconomic class of a product's target population, can affect its personality. Beyond that, advertising style, logos, time–to–market, country of origin, the image of the company and its president, celebrity endorsements, sponsorships, and user image that have nothing to do with a product's role and function all have an impact on its brand personality. Keller (2013) believes that a person's behavior will affect other people's views on his personality, and the information content, communication method and promotion method of a brand in the process of communication will also affect the brand's personality image in the minds of consumers, thereby affecting the brand's relationship with the brand. customer relationship. In addition, even with the passage of time or the interference of competitors, a strong and distinct brand personality can still strengthen consumers' memory associations with the brand (Wang & Yang, 2008). In other words, consumers who do not consume or buy brands do not actually build relevant brand memories or strengthen associations (Aaker, 1996). Based on research on brand image, the following assumptions are made:

H1a: Brand image has a positive impact in the process of firm–created social media communication influencing consumers' purchase intentions;

H2a: Brand image positively influences the process of user–created social media communication influencing consumers' purchase intention;

4. Brand awareness/association

Brand awareness refers to the brand's "reputation" in the minds of consumers (Aaker, 2010). Brand awareness is the result of brand–related exposure and experience accumulated by consumers. In other words, what attracts consumers to a brand or product ultimately increases consumer awareness of its brand. Gerber et al. (2014) argue that what needs to be established before building brand awareness is a strong brand association process. Well–known brands often allow consumers to associate in many different directions and different types. This is similar to the findings of Dodds et al., (1991). Consumer perceptions of prestige brands differ from functional brands because prestige brands are more closely related to consumers' self–concept (Wang & Yang, 2008). Keller (2013) defines brand association as an information memory node associated with a brand node, which is important to both marketers and consumers. Brand associations are used by marketers to differentiate, position, and expand brands, creating positive brand attitudes and feelings; consumers can use brand associations to process, organize, and retrieve remembered brand information and help them make purchasing decisions (Aaker, 2008).

5. Brand loyalty

Research has found that brand loyalty has a huge impact on marketing costs. Attracting new customers costs more than five times the cost of maintaining loyal customers (Moorman et al., 1992), so a brand's loyal users can serve as a set of free communication channels, even more reliable than any known channel. Because these users are real, vivid examples and intuitive spokespeople. If there are influential KOLs or stars among these people, the effect will be more obvious. In particular, a highly loyal consumer base can generate predictable sales and profit streams. In other words, a brand is only valuable if it has the potential to create a loyal consumer base (Dowling, 2001).

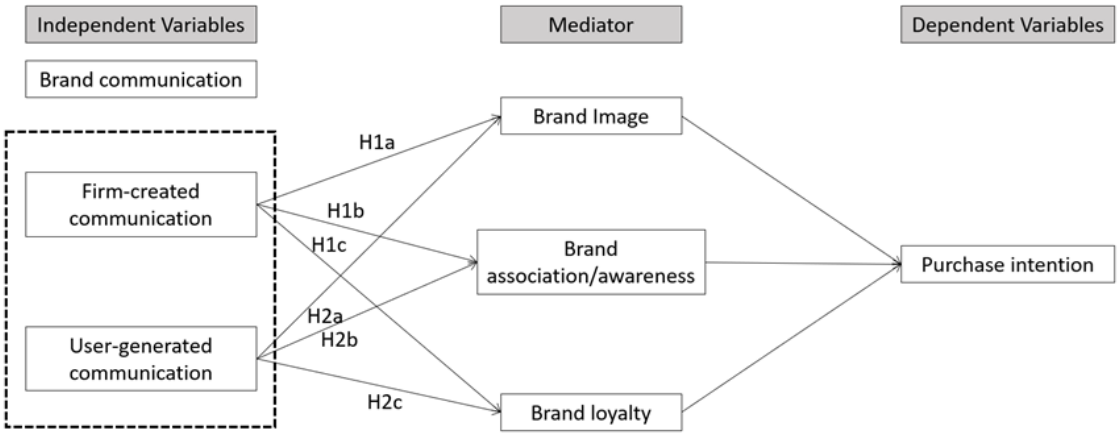

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research methodology

In this research, SEM (Structural Equation Modelling) was used to assess the mediating effect of consumers' brand image, brand association/ awareness brand loyalty in the process of influencing consumers' purchase intention in social media brand communication. First of all, the survey method is used, and the sample population is consumers who use XHS (Xiaohongshu) and Florasis at the same time. In addition, according to Cochran formula confirmed that a total of 400 questionnaires were distributed throughout the process; then a snowball method is used to collect the questionnaires; finally, the collected data will be analyzed by SPSS and AMOS. data analysis.

Results and analysis

400 research papers were issued in total, and 388 valid questionnaires were recovered, with a 97% recovery rate. In order to analyze the collected data more scientifically and obtain more

accurate research hypothesis verification results, this research used SPSS to conduct reliability and validity analysis of the collected data, followed by structural equation models with mediation effects using Amos.

1. Demographic characteristics

Analysis of the collected questionnaire data that 388 respondents were mostly women (78.35%) and 21.65% were men. Among them, 3.09% were under the age of 18, and the rest were 18–25 (13.92%), 26–30 (32.99%), 31–35 (21.1%) and older than 35 (8.25%). Regarding the range of funds that the respondents can use for shopping and consumption per month, most people can use 1501–2000(CNY) (30.67%) per month, less than 1500(CNY) accounts for 24.23%, 2011–2500(CNY) accounts for 22.42%, 2501–3000(CNY) accounts for 13.14%, higher than 3000(CNY) accounts for 9.54%. It can be found that most people can use the funds for shopping every month in the range of 0–2500(CNY). Regarding the time spent on social media every day, only 4.64% had less than 1 hour, 7.22% had more than 8 hours, and the rest were distributed as 1–3 hours (31.96%), 3–5 hours (40.98%), 5–8 hours (15.21%), most people spend 1–5 hours a day on social networks.

2. Reliability and validity

This article used Cronbach's alpha and CFA analysis to test the reliability and validity of the scale. In this research, the average α of the Cronbach scale was above 0.70, and the reliability coefficient of the research data was higher than 0.8, which indicates that the data has good reliability and can be used for further analysis. After that, the CFA method was used to explore the validity of the scale. In this research, KMO, Bartlett's spherical test, common degree value, variance interpretation rate value, factor loading coefficient were performed on the data through SPSS. From the research, the common degree values for all research items are higher than 0.4, indicating that the information about the research items can be extracted effectively. In addition, the KMO value is 0.874, which is greater than 0.6, and the data can be effectively extracted. In addition, the variance explanation rate values of the six factors are 15.030%, 14.422%, 12.037%, 11.750%, 11.421%, and 8.494%, respectively, and the cumulative variance explanation rate after rotation is 73.153%> 50%. It means that the information about the research item can be extracted effectively.

3. Scale confirmatory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis is used to test the convergent validity of the items within each variable. The main purpose is to test the degree of fit between the actual measurement data and the theoretical framework. Using Amos to test the model, it can be found that Factor loadings greater

than 0.7 indicates that each loading is statistically significant; composite reliability greater than 0.7 indicates high internal consistency of the facet questions; Average Variance Extracted greater than 0.5 indicates high reliability. It is suggested that the standard value should be greater than 0.5. Overall model fit indicator. When using confirmatory factor analysis validity tests, it is necessary to evaluate the fit of the model.

It can be seen from the Table1. below that CMIN/DF is 1.386, which is less than 3, GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, IFI, and CFI all reach the higher than 0.9, and RMSEA is 0.032, which is less than 0.08. Most of the fitting indicators are in line with general SEM research. Therefore, it can be considered that this model has a good fit.

Table 1 Model fit

Fit metrics	acceptable range	Measurements
CMIN	–	189.839
DF	–	137
CMIN/DF	<3	1.386
GFI	>0.8	0.952
AGFI	>0.8	0.934
RMSEA	<0.08	0.032
NFI	>0.9	0.946
IFI	>0.9	0.984
TLI(NNFI)	>0.9	0.980
CFI	>0.9	0.984

As can be seen from Figure 2 and Table 2 below, the standardized factor load of each item is greater than 0.5, the residuals are all positive and significant, and it is obvious that there is no violation of the estimation. The compositional reliability of FC, UG, BL, BI, BA, and PI were 0.851, 0.839, 0.813, 0.780, 0.844, and 0.832, which were all greater than 0.7, and the average variation extraction was 0.590, 0.636, 0.592, 0.642, 0.575, and 0.623, respectively; are all greater than 0.5, all meet the standard of convergent validity, and the degree of fit is also within an acceptable range, so all items are reserved for follow-up analysis.

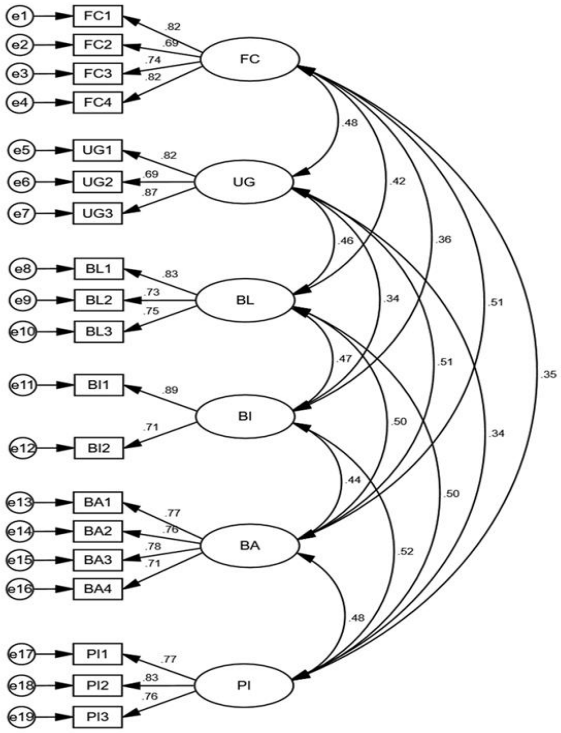

Figure 2 Confirmatory factor analysis

Table 2 Confirmatory factor analysis results

Factor	Items	Unstandarized estimates	S.E.	C.R. (t–value)	P	Standarized estimates	CR	AVE
FC	FC1	1				0.82	0.851	0.59
	FC2	0.862	0.062	13.844	***	0.686		
	FC3	0.949	0.063	15.086	***	0.738		
	FC4	1.035	0.061	16.898	***	0.82		
UG	UG1	1				0.818	0.839	0.636
	UG2	0.923	0.066	13.924	***	0.693		
	UG3	1.157	0.069	16.785	***	0.871		
BL	BL1	1				0.825	0.813	0.592
	BL2	0.983	0.071	13.79	***	0.729		
	BL3	0.887	0.063	14.132	***	0.751		
BI	BI1	1				0.885	0.78	0.642
	BI2	0.879	0.088	10.008	***	0.708		
BA	BA1	1				0.774	0.844	0.575
	BA2	1.043	0.071	14.645	***	0.762		
	BA3	1.06	0.07	15.056	***	0.784		

Factor	Items	Unstandarized estimates	S.E.	C.R. (t–value)	P	Standarized estimates	CR	AVE
	BA4	0.934	0.069	13.607	***	0.71		
PI	PI1	1				0.773	0.832	0.623
	PI2	1.05	0.07	15.066	***	0.828		
	PI3	1.11	0.078	14.296	***	0.764		

4. Correlation analysis and discriminant validity

It can be seen from Table 3 below that the correlation coefficients of FC, UG and BL are 0.353 and 0.376 respectively, and the P values all reach the current level of 0.01, indicating that there is a significant positive correlation between FC, UG and BL; The correlation coefficients of FC, UG and BI are 0.287 and 0.281 respectively, and the P values all reach the current level of 0.01, indicating that there is a significant positive correlation between FC, UG and BI; the correlation coefficients of FC, UG and BA were 0.432 and 0.433, respectively, and the P values all reached the current level of 0.01, indicating that there was a significant positive correlation between FC, UG and BA; the correlation coefficients of BL, BI, BA and PI were 0.408, 0.411, 0.405, and the P values all reached the current level of 0.01, indicating that there is a significant positive correlation between BL, BI, BA and PI.

Table 3 Correlation analysis and discriminant validity

	FC	UG	BL	BI	BA	PI
FC	**0.768**					
UG	.399**	**0.797**				
BL	.353**	.376**	**0.769**			
BI	.287**	.281**	.393**	**0.801**		
BA	.432**	.433**	.427**	.362**	**0.758**	
PI	.295**	.286**	.408**	.414**	.405**	**0.789**

**. The correlation is significant at a confidence level (two tests) of 0.01.

*. The correlation is significant at a confidence level (two tests) of 0.05.

5. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

In this research, several indicators were selected to evaluate the fitness of the overall model, including CMIN test, CMIN/DF ratio, GFI, AGFI, RMSEA, NNFI, IFI, and CFI. When evaluating the degree of fit between the model and the data, each factor should be considered comprehensively. When most of the indicators meet the requirements, the model can be considered to have a good

fit with the data. It can be seen from the table below that CMIN/DF is 1.689, which is less than 3 or less, GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, IFI, and CFI all reach the standard of 0.9 or more, and RMSEA is 0.042, which is less than 0.08. Most of the fitting indicators are in line with general SEM research. Therefore, it can be considered that this model has a good fit.

Table 4 Model fit

Fit metrics	acceptable range	Measurements
CMIN	–	239.787
DF	–	142
CMIN/DF	<3	1.689
GFI	>0.8	0.938
AGFI	>0.8	0.917
RMSEA	<0.08	0.042
NFI	>0.9	0.931
IFI	>0.9	0.971
TLI(NNFI)	>0.9	0.964
CFI	>0.9	0.970

It can be seen from Figure 3 below that the standardized coefficient of FC on BL is 0.271, and P<0.05, indicating that FC has a significant positive correlation effect on BL; the standardized coefficient of UG on BL is 0.355, and P<0.05, indicating that UG It has a significant positive correlation effect on BL; the normalization coefficient of FC on BI is 0.277, and P<0.05, indicating that FC has a significant positive correlation effect on BI; the normalization coefficient of UG on BI is 0.223, and P<0.05, It shows that UG has a significant positive correlation effect on BI; the normalization coefficient of FC on BA is 0.348, and P<0.05, indicating that FC has a significant positive correlation effect on BA; the normalization coefficient of UG on BA is 0.367, and P<0.05 0.05, indicating that UG has a significant positive correlation effect on BA; the standardized coefficient of BL on PI is 0.270, and P<0.05, indicating that BL has a significant positive correlation effect on PI; the standardized coefficient of BI on PI is 0.322, and P<0.05, indicating that BI has a significant positive correlation effect on PI; the standardized coefficient of BA on PI is 0.239, and P<0.05, indicating that BA has a significant positive correlation effect on PI.

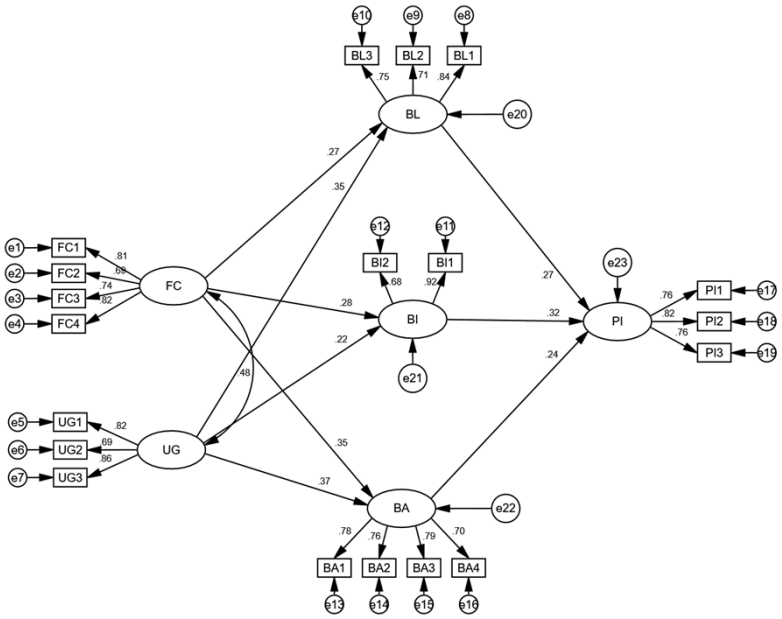

Figure 3 Structural Equation Modeling

6. Mediation effect

This article adopts the bootstrap method. Set the bootstrap sample size to 5000, and perform the mediation effect test. According to the research of Preacher Z et al., if the bootstrap confidence interval does not contain 0, the corresponding mediating effect exists.

Table 5 Mediation effect

p	Indirect Effects	Bias-Corrected		Percentile	
		95%CI		95%CI	
	value	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
1FC_BL_PI indirect effect	0.073	0.028	0.147	0.022	0.133
2UG_BL_PI indirect effect	0.096	0.038	0.184	0.031	0.169
3FC_BI_PI indirect effect	0.089	0.03	0.18	0.02	0.164
4UG_BI_PI indirect effect	0.072	0.01	0.172	0.005	0.161
5FC_BA_PI indirect effect	0.083	0.034	0.168	0.023	0.147
6UG_BA_PI indirect effect	0.088	0.035	0.177	0.025	0.156

From the above Table 5, it can be found that the confidence interval of the Percentile method does not include 0, indicating that the mediation effect exists, and the estimated value of the mediation effect is 0.073,0.096,0.089,0.072,0.083,0.088 respectively. Therefore, the analysis results show that BI, BA, BL has a mediating effect in the FC and UG–PI structural model, and the hypothesis is true.

Discussion and conclusions

Research has found that brand image mediates the relationship between brand communication and purchase intention, indicating that consumers will buy familiar and well–known products (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). In addition, brand awareness/association plays a mediating role between brand communication and purchase intention, which means that well–known brands and brands with high association are more able to influence consumers' purchase intention (Lin, 2006). Finally, brand loyalty can also play a mediating role in the process of brand communication affecting purchase intention, that is, that is, brand loyalty represents the repurchase commitment of consumers. This means that consumers will not change brand loyalty in different situations and will still buy their favorite brands (Oliver, 1997). The findings can help companies and brand managers formulate brand communications on social media to influence consumers' purchase intentions.

Aaker (1996) believes that brand awareness refers to the strength of a brand's existence in the minds of consumers. In other words, brand awareness refers to the ability of consumers to identify or recall the brand in their product category (Pappu et al., 2005). In addition, brand association can be understood as anything related to a brand in the eyes of consumers, which can include product profiles, consumer conditions, corporate awareness, brand characteristics, signs and symbols, etc. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).Brand awareness and brand association can be combined into a specific dimension called brand awareness/association (Yoo et al., 2000). Finally, it is worth noting that brand loyalty, as a commitment of consumers, will not lead to conversion behavior due to contextual influences within a certain range, but it still needs to be maintained (Oliver, 1997). Only when consumers always choose The potential of brand loyalty can only be realized when the brand is their first choice (Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

In the digital age, new media has affected people's consumption habits and choices, and brand communication is an important part of brand management strategies. In new media, it mainly motivates consumers to buy products by providing them with a good product experience. Companies must face this challenge to develop new brand communication strategies, because this new situation of word–of–mouth marketing is more powerful than traditional word–of–mouth marketing (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012). Therefore, it is very important to research the influence of brand communication on consumers' purchase intention in social media. With the rise of social media, it is difficult for companies to effectively establish or maintain consumers' brand loyalty and associations in social media. The drivers of consumer attitudes in social media campaigns are always unpredictable (Jamali, M., & Khan, R. 2018). This unpredictability is a disadvantage for brands to develop

communication strategies (Hutter et al., 2013). The continuous increase in the types of new media has led to the continuous exploration of effective brand communication methods by enterprises.

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