Brand Authenticity and Consumers' Willingness to Recommend by Word-of-Mouth: The Mediating Effect of Brand Attachment

Lu Suo and Yue Huang*

Graduate School, Stamford International University, Bangkok, Thailand

*Corresponding author. E-mail address: huangyue15877930213@gmail.com

Received: 26 July 2023; Revised: 24 October 2023; Accepted: 1 November 2023; Available Online: 15 December 2023

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of brand authenticity dimensions (namely continuity, integrity, credibility, and symbolism) on consumers' propensity to engage in word-of-mouth recommendations (RWOM) within the cell phone sector. Grounded in the Cognitive-Affective-Behavioral Theory and Self-congruity Theory, the study further probed the mediating role of brand attachment in the association between brand authenticity and RWOM. By employing quantitative methodologies and snowball sampling, the study garnered responses from 515 Chinese participants, aged 18 and above, who are users of China's top six cell phone brands. The data was critically examined using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The outcomes revealed that all dimensions of brand authenticity had a notable positive correlation with both RWOM and brand attachment, with brand credibility exhibiting the most potent influence. Moreover, brand attachment was confirmed to bolster RWOM positively. Intriguingly, brand attachment emerged as a partial mediator linking brand authenticity's dimensions with RWOM. These insights not only augment the academic discourse surrounding brand authenticity and RWOM but also furnish practical guidelines for corporations aiming to fortify authentic branding and foster consumer recommendation tendencies. Enterprises specializing in mobile phone brands should prioritize the genuineness of their branding. They should amplify the promotion of their unique brand strengths, bolstering consumers' recognition of the brand's authenticity. Simultaneously, it's crucial to tap into consumers' emotional resonance, deepening their allegiance to the brand. This strategy not only promotes a favorable brand image among consumers but also fosters positive word-of-mouth, further solidifying its esteemed reputation.

Keywords: Brand Attachment, Brand Authenticity, Cognitive-Affective-Behavioral Theory, Recommend by Word-of-Mouth, Self-congruity Theory

Introduction

In the face of escalating market competition, some enterprises have regrettably adopted deceptive advertising practices to allure consumers, or even produced and sold inferior products to optimize their profit margins. In September 2021, a revelation by China's CCTV highlighted alarming concentrations of phthalates and hexavalent chromium in high-heeled sandals from brands like 73 hours, Kisscat, and Hot Air. Excessive exposure to these chemicals can pose significant health risks upon absorption into the human system. Within the mobile phone industry, some brands have compromised on quality by using inferior materials and components in their manufacturing processes, aiming to gain a competitive edge through lower pricing. There's also a rising trend of counterfeit smartphones bearing reputed brand names, along with misleading advertising tactics like unfounded claims of 5G functionalities. Such unethical practices have culminated in a surge of disgruntled consumers experiencing below-standard performance from their devices. The malpractice of corporate counterfeiting has undermined the bond of trust between consumers and brands, leading to a deterioration in the perceived reputation of these brands as evidenced by diminished word-of-mouth quality (Morhart et al., 2015). Consequently, an increasing number of consumers are gravitating towards brands that are perceived as genuine and reliable, desiring to foster a steadfast emotional link with them (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). In the contemporary, fast-

evolving societal landscape, individuals are also striving to discover and articulate their identity through genuine brands and products (Manthiou et al., 2018).

In contemporary marketing, authenticity stands paramount, particularly in light of the evolving consumer landscape which is characterized by shifts in preferences and behaviors driven by cultural, social, and economic dynamics (Beverland et al., 2008). For optimal word-of-mouth resonance, businesses need to hone in on their product's core value and carve out an authentic and trustworthy brand persona. For instance, Toyota ardently adheres to its brand philosophy of "to the truth, to the extreme", while Dell underscores the primacy of empirical evidence and metrics. Such approaches underscore the leverage authenticity provides in bolstering a firm's competitive position. By projecting a genuine brand image, businesses can foster psychological alignment and emotive ties with consumers, engendering favorable brand interactions (Morhart et al., 2015). Furthermore, in a market saturated with counterfeit brands and products, it becomes imperative for businesses to preserve their brand's integrity and champion authenticity, not just to amplify their brand equity but also to mold a conducive market ecosystem and stimulate positive stakeholder engagements (Davis et al., 2019).

The theoretical and empirical exploration of brand authenticity has piqued the interest of numerous academic scholars. While extant literature has delved into the meaning, facets, genesis, and significance of brand authenticity (Becker et al., 2019; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2015; Newman & Dhar, 2014; Nunes et al., 2021; Wu & Hsu, 2018; Yuan et al., 2014), the majority of these investigations lean towards a qualitative approach (Alexander, 2009; Beverland et al., 2010; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). Contrastingly, there's a conspicuous paucity of empirical analyses examining the ramifications of brand authenticity on consumers' affective states and behavioral dispositions. Moreover, scholarly endeavors gauging the repercussions of brand authenticity on consumers' behavioral inclinations predominantly spotlight aspects like trust and identification (Coary, 2013; Eggers et al., 2013; Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019; Schallehn et al., 2014; Sung & Kim, 2010), often overlooking the pivotal component of brand attachment. Research has indeed delved into the intermediary function of brand attachment in various contexts. Notably, brand attachment has been identified as a significant mediator in relationships such as brand engagement and purchase intention (Kumar & Nayak, 2019b), brand image and loyalty (Diallo et al., 2020; Kumar & Nayak, 2019a), brand experience and purchasing intent (Nierobisch et al., 2017), nostalgia-driven brand positioning and brand equity (Heinberg et al., 2020), materialistic values and impulse purchasing (Lim et al., 2020), ethical considerations (deontology) and brand loyalty (Love et al., 2016), and practical (utilitarian) values and spontaneous buying behaviors (Lim et al., 2020). However, the literature seems sparse when it comes to elucidating the mediating effect of brand attachment in the nexus between brand authenticity and consumer behaviors. To address this gap, our study endeavors to unravel the influence of brand authenticity on consumers' proclivity to Recommend via Word-of-Mouth (RWOM). We employ a questionnaire-based approach, spotlighting brand attachment as the mediating construct. It is indisputable that cell phones have entrenched themselves as indispensable facets of global daily living, doubling as tools for both personal and professional use. This ubiquity makes them an apt subject for probing brand authenticity. Moreover, the mobile phone domain is continually metamorphosing due to incessant technological advancements. Grasping how authenticity is discerned and upheld in such a swift-paced environment emerges as an imperative scholarly pursuit. Furthermore, brand authenticity acts as a linchpin for fostering consumer trust and allegiance. The emotional rapport mobile phone users establish with their devices and their manufacturers intensifies the pertinence of this topic for both the consumer and corporate spectra. To encapsulate, mobile phones present

a vibrant and layered backdrop to scrutinize intersections of brand authenticity, consumer tendencies, and strategic marketing. By casting mobile phone brands under the analytical lens, our inquiry stands poised to yield pivotal revelations for the mobile phone sector and deepen the understanding of brand authenticity's role in the contemporary commercial landscape.

RWOM represents an extra-role consumer behavior that holds substantial sway over its recipients. Its efficacy in bolstering brand equity and propelling product marketing makes it a potent tool. Consequently, discerning the ramifications of brand authenticity on RWOM emerges as pivotal for enterprise growth. This study is anchored in addressing several salient research queries: 1) How pronounced is the influence of varying facets of brand authenticity on both RWOM and brand attachment? 2) How significantly does brand attachment influence RWOM? 3) Is there a mediating role of brand attachment in the relationship between brand authenticity and RWOM?

Outlined below are the three core objectives that structure this research. First, the study seeks to ascertain if the authenticity associated with cell phone brands sways consumers towards endorsing these brands via word-of-mouth. Second, it delves into identifying which among the quartet of cell phone brand authenticity dimensions - continuity, integrity, credibility, and symbolism - wields the most pronounced impact on RWOM. Third, the research aims to test the hypothesis that brand attachment acts as an intermediary, shaping the relationship dynamics between brand authenticity and RWOM. The findings from this research are anticipated to not only deepen the theoretical underpinnings relating to brand authenticity and the propensity for RWOM but also offer strategic insights to firms on cultivating genuine brands, subsequently augmenting consumers' inclination to engage in RWOM.

Literature Review

Brand Authenticity

Grayson and Martinec (2004) state that brand authenticity is a consumer perception and assessment of the degree of authenticity of a brand, and that brands with deep historical traditions and corporate culture are more likely to be perceived as authentic. Fritz et al. (2017) argue that a brand is authentic if it is driven by a commitment to quality, ethical beliefs, and an intrinsic love for the product. Scholars' definitions of brand authenticity place more emphasis on consistency, and brands choose to remain true to themselves even in the midst of evolving trends. Morhart et al. (2015) classified brand authenticity into four dimensions: continuity, integrity, credibility, and symbolism, and developed a brand authenticity scale containing 15 measurement items. After that, Akbar and Wymer (2017) refined brand authenticity into two dimensions, authenticity and originality, based on collecting and reviewing the existing information about authenticity and brand authenticity, and formed a brand authenticity scale containing eight measurement items. In this research, we refer to Morhart et al.'s (2015) approach to classifying the dimensions of brand authenticity in four dimensions: continuity, integrity, credibility, and symbolism.

Brand Attachment

In marketing, the concept of attachment was first introduced by Schultz et al. (1989), who defined attachment from a self-concept perspective as the degree of connection between an individual and everything that encompasses three aspects: personalization, integration, and temporal orientation. Some scholars take a brand relationship perspective and argue that brand attachment is the emotional connection that people form with a brand during their consumption experience (Lacoeuilhe & Belaïd, 2007).

Park et al. (2010) state that brand attachment is the cognitive and emotional self-association that consumers themselves form with a brand. The authors point out that brand attachment affects consumers' demand share and

purchase share for a brand, and the deeper a person's attachment to a brand, the more likely he or she is to see the brand as part of the self and be willing to invest more resources, including social, financial and time resources, to ensure that the relationship between the brand and the self is not broken. Park et al. (2006) elaborated on the formation basis and results of brand attachment from the perspective of resource exchange theory. The authors argued that brands establish a strong connection between consumers and brands by providing them with hedonic, functional and symbolic resources, and cultivate consumers' emotional attachment to brands.

Willingness to Recommend by Word of Mouth (RWOM)

Word of Mouth (WOM) is an informal communication between consumers about their experience with a brand or product. In terms of communication methods, word-of-mouth can be divided into traditional WOM and electronic-WOM (EWOM). Traditional WOM is a way for consumers to talk about a brand's products or services through face-to-face communication, while EWOM is a new form of communication in which consumers use online platforms such as social media and shopping websites to share information. According to Zeithaml et al. (1996), RWOM is the behavioral tendency of consumers to actively convey positive brand information to others in order to facilitate the formation of brand preferences of other consumer groups. Liu and Fan (2020) point out that as a direct and active individual behavior, RWOM is more authentic and credible than advertising and has a greater impact on the attitudes and behaviors of others, making it an important strategic tool for corporate marketing. In essence, word-of-mouth referrals are the act of sharing positive information about a brand or product with the goal of helping others or presenting yourself. As an important way of brand information dissemination, word-of-mouth recommendation can attract the attention of new consumers and stimulate potential consumers' curiosity about products or services, while consumers' willingness to purchase is further enhanced by positive word-of-mouth information (Liang et al., 2021).

Self-congruity Theory

Self-Congruity theory was proposed by Sirgy (1982), which suggests that when consumers perceive a high degree of match between their self-concept and the image of a brand or product, they will develop a positive attitude toward that brand or product and form an intimate relationship. Sheng et al. (2018) argue that under the influence of Eastern culture, individuals may focus more on interdependent relationships and people want to construct their selves through emotions and connections outside the society. Therefore, in the process of consumer experience, if a brand or product exhibits a certain trait or personality that satisfies consumers to gain an expression of their self-identity and self-image, consumers will prefer that brand and become emotionally connected to the brand.

Cognitive-Affective-Behavioral Theory

Psychology argues that attitude is not a unidimensional concept, but a multidimensional concept that includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral intentions. According to Qiu (2001), cognition is an important source of affection, and affection will in turn promote the development of cognition; affection is an important source of willingness to act, and willingness to act will in turn promote the development of affection, and the three are mutually dependent and interpenetrating. According to Yang et al. (2017), the different influential relationships between cognitive, affective, and behavioral intentions depend on the type of behavioral decisions consumers make. Cognitive-affective-behavioral has been widely used in the study of consumer-brand relationships. The cognitive processing of brand-related information by consumers may trigger their emotional responses and lead to the establishment of an emotional connection between consumers and the brand, thus stimulating the generation of

consumers' behavioral intentions. As a result, this study argues that consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity may lead to a willingness to RWOM by prompting attachment feelings between them and the brand.

Brand Authenticity and RWOM

Continuity specifically refers to the historical heritage and stable consistency of the brand, which conveys to consumers that the brand is of reliable quality and enduring. Xu and Feng (2018) point out that long-established brands with reliable quality and sincere service can effectively enhance consumers' identification with the brand and promote positive WOM communication about the brand. Integrity specifically refers to a brand's adherence to good ethics and genuine concern for consumers. Yao (2019) shows that a brand with business ethics and active social responsibility enhances consumers' sense of security and leads to positive brand attitudes, which makes consumers willing to recommend the brand to others. Credibility refers to the transparency and reliability of a brand's information and whether the brand has the will and ability to deliver on its promises. Transparency and reliability of brand information allows consumers to spend less effort to get information about the brand and strengthen their trust in the brand. Yan et al. (2011) pointed out that relationship commitment and brand trust are important factors that drive consumers' willingness to generate word-of-mouth recommendations. Symbolism specifically refers to a brand's ability to provide reference cues that represent consumers' values, reflect their social roles and social relationships, and help consumers construct their own identities in social groups. An authentic brand image satisfies consumers' need to maintain and enhance themselves, inspires positive emotions, and actively recommends the brand to others. Zhang (2019) confirms that the symbolic nature of brand image can satisfy the social interaction needs of consumers to express themselves and show themselves, prompting them to develop fit behaviors for the brand, such as continuous transactions and RWOM. Therefore,

H1a: brand continuity significantly and positively affects RWOM.

H1b: brand integrity significantly and positively affects RWOM.

H1c: brand credibility significantly and positively influences RWOM.

H1d: brand symbolism significantly and positively affects RWOM.

Brand Authenticity and Brand Attachment

Assiouras et al. (2015) found that brand authenticity significantly and positively influences consumers' brand attachment. Continuity reflects the history and heritage of a brand, and it encourages consumers to form positive brand associations as they get to know and understand the brand, thus making it possible to build emotional connections between consumers and the brand. Thomson et al. (2005) state that the more associations consumers have with a brand, the higher the degree of cognitive and emotional connection between consumers and the brand. Integrity reflects a brand's adherence to good values, fulfillment of social responsibility, and concern for consumers. Sun (2020) confirms that for companies that disregard business ethics for their own benefit, it not only reduces consumers' trust in the brand, but also inhibits the creation of consumer brand attachment. Credibility reflects the honesty and sincerity of the brand, and honest brands satisfy people's sense of security, which leads to attachment to the brand. Wu et al. (2016) confirmed that security is a fundamental motivation leading to attachment. Symbolism reflects values that people consider important, and consumers communicate to others who they were, who they are, and who they want to be in the future by establishing a cognitive and emotional connection between the brand and their selves. The satisfaction of consumers' symbolic value needs can lead to self-association with the brand and consequently to attachment to the brand (Park et al., 2006). Hence,

H2a: Continuity significantly and positively affects consumer brand attachment.

H2b: Integrity significantly and positively influences consumer brand attachment.

H2c: Credibility significantly and positively influences consumer brand attachment.

H2d: Symbolism significantly and positively affects consumer brand attachment.

Brand Attachment and EWOM

Fan and Tang (2017) confirmed that tourists' attachment to cities and tourist attractions significantly enhances their RWOM intention. Ludwig et al. (2013) state that attachment is a relatively stable emotion and that consumers' attachment to a brand motivates them to consistently share positive information related to the brand. Zhang and Hou (2013) suggest that when attachment arises, consumers may help others make purchase decisions by sharing positive experiences related to a brand or product, or by sharing information to seek emotional resonance with others and gain support and approval from them. Therefore, whether from an altruistic or self-interest perspective, brand attachment may trigger consumers to actively share and spread positive brand-related information to other groups and promote positive attitudes of others to purchase or participate. Hence,

H3: Brand attachment significantly and positively influences RWOM.

The Mediating Role of Brand Attachment

The cognitive-affective-behavioral theory suggests that consumers' cognitive, affective and behavioral attitudes toward brands are interrelated, i.e., consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity may influence their willingness to make word-of-mouth recommendations through brand attachment. Liu (2020b) found that the higher the degree of brand authenticity, the stronger the consumers' trust in the brand and their purchase intention. In studying the relationship between brand personality and consumer WOM, Liu (2020a) pointed out that brand personality provides an effective way for consumers to present themselves, and brands with qualities such as sincerity, excitement, and sophistication tend to promote brand attachment, while consumers will actively share positive information about the brand and their own positive emotional experiences to others in order to reinforce such positive emotions. Jiang et al. (2021) also pointed out that tourists' perceptions of authenticity of film and television tourism places would affect their willingness to recommend by word of mouth and to revisit by influencing their place attachment. Based on this,

H4a: brand attachment mediates between brand continuity and RWOM.

H4b: brand attachment mediates between brand integrity and RWOM.

H4c: brand attachment mediates between brand credibility and RWOM.

H4d: brand attachment mediates between brand symbolism and RWOM.

Drawing from the cognitive-affective-behavioral theory coupled with the self-congruity theory, this research posits that consumers' inclination towards word-of-mouth recommendations stems from the cognitive component of brand authenticity intertwined with the emotive facet of brand attachment. Specifically, it postulates that the way consumers perceive brand authenticity acts as a precursor, modulating their RWOM tendencies, with brand attachment functioning as the conduit. Consumers form perceptions of brand authenticity based on four pivotal axes: continuity, integrity, credibility, and symbolism. These perceptions underpin their alignment and association with a brand, fostering a robust attachment. This engendered bond, imbued with positive emotions towards the brand, propels consumers to disseminate their experiences, advocating for the brand in their social circles. To encapsulate this intricate interplay of perceptions, emotions, and behaviors, we have delineated a theoretical framework. This model, visually represented in Figure 1, elucidates the pathways connecting brand authenticity, brand attachment, and RWOM.

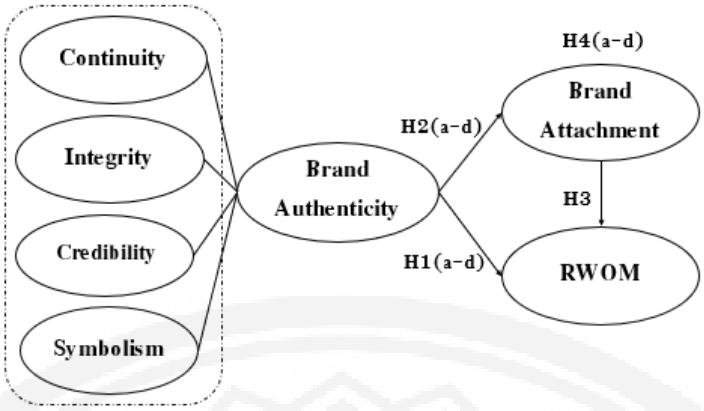

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework.

Methodology

Participants and Data Collection

The focus of this research is centered on Chinese adult consumers aged 18 and above who have acquired and employed cell phones from the top six premier brands in the Chinese market. As of June 2023, the latest statistics on the most popular smartphone brands in China reveal that the top six brands are Huawei (comprising the Honor sub-brand), Apple, Xiaomi (including the Redmi sub-brand), Oppo, vivo (with the iQOO sub-brand), and Samsung (Statista, 2023). The rationale for gravitating towards these six paramount brands to explore the notion of cell phone brand authenticity is twofold. First, these top cell phone brands in China dominate the market share. By studying these brands, we can gain valuable insights into the most influential players in the industry. Moreover, the popularity of these top brands reflects consumer preferences and trends. By studying them, we can gain a better understanding of what features and qualities are most sought after by Chinese consumers. For this research, the data collection method employed was an online questionnaire, disseminated using a snowball sampling technique. Specifically, the questionnaire was hosted on the 'Questionnaire Star' platform. The link to this questionnaire was then shared across prominent Chinese social media and messaging platforms including WeChat, QQ, and Weibo. In order to bolster participation, family members, friends, and colleagues were invited to partake in the survey. As an added incentive to boost engagement and ensure quality responses, participants were offered the opportunity to win 'red packets' upon completion of the questionnaire. The data collection spanned two months, from June to July 2023. Given the inherent challenges associated with accurately gauging the exact size of the target demographic, we leaned on Cochran's formula (1977) to determine an appropriate sample size for the quantitative component of the study. Aiming for a 95% confidence interval, the formula suggested a sample size of 385 respondents. However, to enhance the robustness and accuracy of the study, we aimed to overreach this number and successfully garnered 548 questionnaire responses. Post a rigorous filtering process, where 33 questionnaires were discarded due to inconsistencies or patterns suggestive of random answering (for instance, questionnaires where every item received an identical value), a total of 515 questionnaires were deemed valid and included in the final analysis.

Measurement

The research instrument employed was a structured questionnaire divided into three distinct sections. The initial section presented respondents with the six predominant cell phone brands in the current market, prompting them to proceed based on their chosen brand. The subsequent segment focused on capturing basic demographic details,

encompassing attributes such as gender, age, and income. The final section concentrated on assessing the parameters of brand authenticity, brand attachment, and RWOM. For the formulation of the questionnaire, this study leaned heavily on previously established scholarly works pertaining to the relevant constructs, ensuring the utilization of tried and tested scales. Specifically, the dimensionality of brand authenticity, encompassing continuity, integrity, credibility, and symbolism, was measured through 14 items adapted primarily from Morhart et al. (2015). In parallel, the scale capturing brand attachment was derived from seminal works by Wu (2017); and Park et al. (2006), culminating in 7 distinct items. Lastly, the assessment of RWOM was conducted based on three items, as proposed by Zeithaml et al. (1996). To facilitate ease of response and enable a nuanced understanding of the respondent's perceptions and attitudes, a 7-point Likert scale was employed. Participants were asked to register their comprehension and sentiment towards each item, grading them on a scale spanning from 1 to 7, grounded on their brand affiliation.

Results

Demographic Analysis

The sample's demographic distribution paints a comprehensive picture of its composition. Gender representation is almost evenly split, with males constituting 47.4% and females at 52.6%. A significant portion of the sample, 83.41%, falls within the 21-40 age bracket. Education-wise, a majority of 78.73% hold a Bachelor's degree. When considering occupation, about 66.35% are associated with private enterprises and institutions. In terms of income, a notable 75.45% earn a monthly income exceeding 5,000 yuan. In relation to brand preferences, Huawei + Honor, Apple, and Xiaomi + Redmi emerge as the dominant choices, collectively representing 78.52% of the user base. In conclusion, the sample offers a representative cross-section of the Chinese smartphone market, ensuring findings have robust validity and relevance.

Reliability and Validity

To ascertain the internal consistency reliability, both Cronbach's alpha values and Composite Reliability (CR) were assessed for each construct, in line with Heale and Twycross (2015). A reliability score is deemed satisfactory if it is 0.7 or higher (Hair et al., 1995). As delineated in Table 1, all constructs satisfy this benchmark with factor loadings surpassing 0.7. Convergent validity was gauged by computing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), convergent validity is achieved when the AVE for a construct is 0.5 or higher, indicating that over half of the variance in its indicators is accounted for by the construct. In our dataset (Table 1), all constructs surpass this threshold, signifying robust convergent validity. To determine discriminant validity, we applied Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria, which revealed (as evidenced in Table 2) that the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its respective correlations. Furthermore, Table 2 presents the Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for every variable under consideration. Overall, each variable's mean surpasses 5 on a 7-point scale, suggesting predominantly elevated values. It's noteworthy that RWOM records the most elevated mean value, registering at 5.342, which underscores its significance among the variables studied.

Table 1 Results of Validity and Reliability Analysis

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE	Alpha
Brand Continuity (BCO)	BCO1	0.756	0.838	0.564	0.839
	BCO2	0.769			
	BCO3	0.778			
	BCO4	0.698			
Brand Integrity (BI)	BI1	0.782	0.845	0.579	0.845
	BI2	0.815			
	BI3	0.787			
	BI4	0.649			
Brand Credibility (BCR)	BCR1	0.724	0.830	0.622	0.829
	BCR2	0.757			
	BCR3	0.876			
Brand Symbolism (BS)	BS1	0.855	0.893	0.736	0.896
	BS2	0.844			
	BS3	0.874			
Brand Attachment (BA)	BA1	0.871	0.958	0.763	0.955
	BA2	0.852			
	BA3	0.885			
	BA4	0.866			
	BA5	0.878			
	BA6	0.863			
	BA7	0.898			
Willingness to Recommend by Word-of-Mouth (RWOM)	RWOM1	0.847	0.899	0.747	0.898
	RWOM2	0.861			
	RWOM3	0.885			

Table 2 Descriptive Statistic and Discriminant Validity

	M	SD	BCO	BI	BCR	BS	BA	RWOM
BCO	5.106	1.090	**.751**					
BI	5.098	.920	.682	**.761**				
BCR	5.328	.815	.463	.385	**.858**			
BS	5.055	.974	.616	.572	.481	**.789**		
BA	5.006	1.457	.404	.426	.448	.391	**.873**	
RWOM	5.342	1.236	.513	.472	.547	.488	.231	**.864**

Note: BCO = Brand Continuity; BI = Brand Integrity; BCR = Brand Credibility; BS = Brand Symbolism; BA = Brand Attachment; RWOM = Willingness to Recommend by Word-of-Mouth

Structure Model

Utilizing AMOS 23.0 for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) yielded the following fit indices: $\chi 2/df$ = 1.108, indicating an acceptable model fit as it's less than 3; GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, CFI, and IFI values were 0.948, 0.901, 0.925, 0.972, 0.975, and 0.975 respectively, all surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.9 (Kline, 2011). Additionally, the RMSEA was 0.046, which is below the suggested 0.05 limit. Collectively, these indices attest to the commendable fit of the model under scrutiny.

Hypothesis Testing

As illustrated in Figure 2, the study robustly supports all proposed hypotheses, underscoring the pivotal role of brand authenticity in influencing both brand attachment and consumer behavior. More precisely, our findings revealed a noteworthy positive association between brand authenticity dimensions—namely continuity ($\beta = 0.506$, $p < 0.001$), integrity ($\beta = 0.468$, $p < 0.001$), credibility ($\beta = 0.552$, $p < 0.001$), and symbolism ($\beta = 0.496$, $p < 0.001$)—and RWOM, confirming hypotheses H1a, H1b, H1c and H1d. In a parallel vein, there was a discernible positive linkage between brand attachment and the facets of brand authenticity: continuity ($\beta = 0.376$, $p < 0.001$), integrity ($\beta = 0.396$, $p < 0.001$), credibility ($\beta = 0.425$, $p < 0.001$), and symbolism ($\beta = 0.363$, $p < 0.001$), reinforcing hypotheses H2a to H2d. In relation to H3, our analysis established a significant positive correlation between brand attachment and RWOM ($\beta = 0.356$, $p < 0.001$).

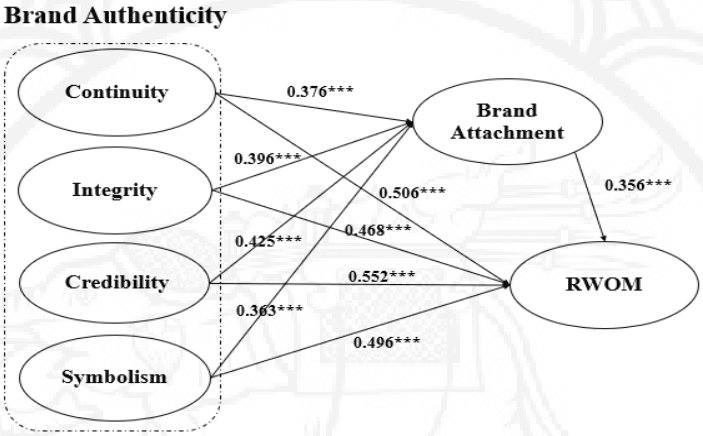

Figure 2 Results of Analysis of Structural Modeling with Hypotheses.

Note: RWOM = Willingness to Recommend by Word-of-Mouth; *P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001

Mediation Effect of Brand Attachment

In the present research, we explored the mediating role of brand attachment utilizing the AMOS 23.0 software with the Bootstrapping method over 5000 iterations. The detailed outcomes are delineated in Table 3. Assessing the first pathway, the bootstrapped 95% Confidence Interval (CI) registers at (0.020, 0.124), which notably excludes the value of 0. This suggests a significant mediation effect of brand attachment in the relationship between brand continuity and RWOM, thereby confirming hypothesis H4a. In a similar vein, the second path reveals a Bootstrap 95% CI of (0.021, 0.118), without encompassing 0, endorsing the mediating influence of brand attachment between brand integrity and RWOM, thus verifying H4b. Delving into the third path, the Bootstrap CI stands at (0.014, 0.134), absent of 0, underlining the notable mediating effect of brand attachment bridging brand reputation and RWOM, subsequently affirming H4c. Lastly, the evidence from the fourth path, with a Bootstrap 95% CI spanning (0.026, 0.141) and eschewing 0, ascertains the substantive mediation effect of brand attachment connecting brand symbolism to RWOM, corroborating H4d.

Table 3 Analysis of Mediating Effect

Paths	Effect	Bootstrap 95% CI		Whether Mediating?
		Lower	Upper	
H4a: BCO ⟶ BA ⟶ RWOM	0.134	0.020	0.124	Yes
H4b: BI ⟶ BA ⟶ RWOM	0.141	0.021	0.118	Yes
H4c: BCR ⟶ BA ⟶ RWOM	0.151	0.014	0.134	Yes
H4d: BS ⟶ BA ⟶ RWOM	0.129	0.026	0.141	Yes

Discussion

Drawing upon the foundations set by the cognitive-affective-behavioral theory and the self-congruity theory, this study delves into the nexus between brand authenticity and RWOM, as well as the mechanisms underpinning its influence. The ensuing conclusions can be summarized as:

Firstly, each dimension of brand authenticity, namely continuity, integrity, credibility, and symbolism, exerts a significant positive impact on RWOM. Arranged by the magnitude of their effects, credibility emerges as the foremost influencer, followed by continuity, symbolism, and lastly, integrity. Notably, brand credibility stands out as the pivotal driver of RWOM. This observation is consistent with the findings from prior research by Xu and Feng (2018); Yao (2019); Yan et al. (2011); and Zhang (2019).

Secondly, each facet of brand authenticity – continuity, integrity, credibility, and symbolism – has a significant and positive bearing on consumer brand attachment. In terms of potency, credibility emerges as the dominant influence, trailed by integrity, continuity, and symbolism. Of these, brand credibility exhibits the most pronounced impact on forming consumers' brand attachment. This study's outcomes align with prior investigations by Thomson et al. (2005); Sun (2020); and Wu et al. (2016). These findings underscore the paramount importance of brand credibility in shaping both emotional and behavioral attitudes of consumers. A brand with heightened credibility bolsters consumer confidence and identification, catalyzing emotional brand attachment and fostering a propensity to recommend the brand to peers.

Furthermore, there exists a pronounced positive correlation between brand attachment and RWOM. A deep-seated attachment to a brand signifies consumers' heightened sense of affiliation. As this affinity intensifies through brand interactions, consumers cultivate a richer appreciation and affection for the brand, consequently driving RWOM. This study's conclusions harmonize with the findings presented by Fan and Tang (2017); Ludwig et al. (2013); and Zhang and Hou (2013).

Finally, brand attachment serves as a partial mediator between the four facets of brand authenticity and RWOM. This outcome substantiates the validity of the proposed model grounded in the cognitive-affective-behavioral theory. A heightened consumer perception of brand authenticity tends to foster deeper emotional ties with the brand, subsequently inclining them towards RWOM. The results resonate with findings from Liu (2020b); Jiang et al. (2021); and Liu (2020a). Among the dimensions, brand attachment exhibits the most pronounced mediating impact between symbolism and RWOM, succeeded by credibility and RWOM. The least mediating influence is observed between continuity, integrity, and RWOM. This suggests that symbolism and credibility wield a more substantial influence on RWOM via brand attachment than the other dimensions. Therefore, firms aiming to bolster RWOM by fortifying emotional bonds should prioritize accentuating brand symbolism and credibility.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The pivotal theoretical contribution of this research lies in its incorporation of brand attachment as an intermediary variable, assessing its mediating role between brand authenticity and RWOM. Current literature predominantly explores the impact of brand authenticity on consumers' behavioral intentions through the lenses of trust and identification, largely overlooking the nuanced role of brand attachment. By delving into the influence of brand authenticity on RWOM through the prism of brand attachment, this study proffers a novel theoretical framework. It posits the four dimensions of brand authenticity as the predictor variables, brand attachment as the mediator, and RWOM as the outcome variable. This enriches and expands the extant theoretical landscape, providing an innovative perspective on the nexus between brand authenticity and consumer behavior.

This study also holds considerable practical implications for marketers and corporate decision-makers. Primarily, firms should prioritize the elucidation and development of brand authenticity elements to bolster consumer perceptions of genuine brand authenticity. Throughout the brand evolution process, it's imperative that corporations emphasize the cultivation of brand continuity, integrity, credibility, and symbolism, with a particular focus on engendering brand trustworthiness. Strategically, businesses can manifest their brand's commitment to promises by offering high-caliber, dependable products complemented by meticulous customer service, thereby augmenting consumers' trustworthiness perceptions. Concurrently, firms can proactively publicize product performance assessments to enhance transparency, bridging the informational divide between brands and consumers. Such endeavors, when aligned with industry standards, can foster a robust foundation of trust between the company and its clientele.

Second, Companies must prioritize the emotional engagement of consumers, intensifying their bond with the brand. Achieving this requires a multifaceted approach. Firstly, businesses should amplify the socio-emotional experience of their brand. For instance, Huawei's smartphone branding strategy embraces its 'Made in China' identity, resonating with feelings of national pride and catering to consumers' need for social imagery, bolstering their affiliation and emotional connection with the brand. This strategy extends to the establishment of brand-centric communities, serving as platforms for consumers to share experiences. By encouraging consumer participation in ideation for new products, businesses can foster closer brand-consumer relationships and gain insights into evolving consumer needs, heightening brand loyalty and augmenting word-of-mouth endorsements. Concurrently, consistent investments in product and service innovations are vital. By enhancing the overall brand experience, companies elevate consumer satisfaction and allegiance. Pre-sale engagements should revolve around understanding consumer preferences and aiding in product selection. Post-sale interactions focus on product assurances, routine product usage check-ins, and diligent feedback management, establishing an iterative feedback mechanism for continuous product and service refinement. Above all, maintaining ethical market practices is imperative. Genuine care for consumers and a dependable emotional bond motivates organic dissemination of positive brand narratives and recommendations, solidifying the brand's position in today's hyper-competitive marketplace.

Finally, it is imperative for companies to strategically promote their brand advantages, aligning them with the specific needs of their target consumer groups. By placing innovative posters and advertisements in high-traffic areas such as subways, bus stations, and major shopping malls, they can effectively communicate their brand's culture, value, and narratives. This not only captures consumer attention but also kindles their recollection and associations related to the brand's authenticity. By enhancing consumers' recognition and appreciation in this

manner, businesses can foster positive conversations among consumers. This strategic approach cultivates a favorable word-of-mouth effect, instrumental in shaping a brand's image in today's discerning market landscape.

In light of the significant contributions this research provides, it is important to acknowledge the inherent limitations present. To start with, our focus primarily centers around cell phone brands, which, while offering valuable insights for their marketing strategies, might not necessarily translate seamlessly to other sectors like apparel, food, or beauty. Thus, the universality of our findings across various industries remains a subject for further exploration. Furthermore, while this study emphasizes RWOM as the primary dependent variable to discern the influence of brand authenticity on consumer attitudes, it is evident that multiple intermediary factors, including the environment and modes of word-of-mouth recommendation, play a role in bridging the gap between the intent to recommend and the act of recommendation. In future, it would be beneficial to delve deeper into how brand authenticity affects consumers' tangible behaviors, offering a more holistic understanding that can be strategically employed in brand development. Lastly, it is plausible that the influence of brand authenticity on RWOM could be moderated by variables such as brand familiarity or the degree of consumer engagement with the brand. By integrating these potential moderating variables, subsequent studies can enhance the research model, enriching the understanding and application of brand authenticity in the ever-evolving landscape of marketing.

References

Akbar, M. M., & Wymer, W. (2017). Refining the Conceptualization of Brand Authenticity. *Journal of Brand Management*, *24*(1), 14-32. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-016-0023-3

Alexander, N. (2009). Brand Authentication: Creating and Maintaining Brand Auras. *European Journal of Marketing*, *43*(3/4), 551-562. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560910935578

Assiouras, I., Liapati, G., Kouletsis, G., & Koniordos, M. (2015). The Impact of Brand Authenticity on Brand Attachment in the Food Industry. *British Food Journal*, *117*(2), 538-552. https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-03-2014-0095

Becker, M., Wiegand, N., & Reinartz, W. J. (2019). Does It Pay to Be Real? Understanding Authenticity in TV Advertising. *Journal of Marketing*, *83*(1), 24-50. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242918815880

Beverland, M. B., & Farrelly, F. J. (2010). The Quest for Authenticity in Consumption: Consumers' Purposive Choice of Authentic Cues to Shape Experienced Outcomes. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *36*(5), 838-856. https://doi.org/10.1086/615047

Beverland, M. B., Farrelly, F., & Quester, P. G. (2010). Authentic Subcultural Membership: Antecedents and Consequences of Authenticating Acts and Authoritative Performances. *Psychology & Marketing*, *27*(7), 698-716. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20352

Beverland, M. B., Lindgreen, A., & Vink, M. W. (2008). Projecting Authenticity Through Advertising: Consumer Judgments of Advertisers' Claims. *Journal of Advertising*, *37*(1), 5-15. https://doi.org/10.2753/JOA0091-3367370101

Coary, S. P. (2013). *Scale Construction and Effects of Brand Authenticity* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California.

Cochran, W. G. (1977). *Sampling Techniques* (3rd ed.). New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Davis, R., Sheriff, K., & Owen, K. (2019). Conceptualising and Measuring Consumer Authenticity Online. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *47*, 17-31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.10.002

Diallo, M. F., Moulins, J.-L., & Roux, E. (2020). Unpacking Brand Loyalty in Retailing: A Three-dimensional Approach to Customer-Brand Relationships. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, *49*(2), 204-222. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-03-2020-0115

Eggers, F., O'Dwyer, M., Kraus, S., Vallaster, C., & Güldenberg, S. (2013). The Impact of Brand Authenticity on Brand Trust and SME Growth: A CEO Perspective. *Journal of World Business*, *48*(3), 340-348. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2012.07.018

Fan, Z. Y., & Tang, X. W. (2017). Service Remediation, Place Attachment and Tourists' Willingness to Spread Positive Word-of-Mouth--An Empirical Study Based on 402 Questionnaires. *Survey World*, *29*(5), 18-23.

Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating Structural Equation Models with Unobservable Variables and Measurement Error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *18*(1), 39-50. https://doi.org/10.2307/3151312

Fritz, K., Schoenmueller, V., & Bruhn, M. (2017). Authenticity in Branding-Exploring Antecedents and Consequences of Brand Authenticity. *European Journal of Marketing*, *51*(2), 324-348. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-10-2014-0633

Grayson, K., & Martinec, R. (2004). Consumer Perceptions of Iconicity and Indexicality and their Influence on Assessments of Authentic Market Offerings. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *31*(2), 296-312. https://doi.org/10.1086/422109

Hair, J. F., Anderson, R. E., Tatham, R. L., & Black, W. C. (1995). *Multivariate Data Analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Heale, R., & Twycross, A. (2015). Validity and Reliability in Quantitative Studies. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, *18*(3), 66-67. https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2015-102129

Heinberg, M., Katsikeas, C. S., Ozkaya H. E., & Taube, M. (2020). How Nostalgic Brand Positioning Shapes Brand Equity: Differences between Emerging and Developed Markets. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *48*(5), 869-890. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00637-x

Hernandez-Fernandez, A., & Lewis, M. C. (2019). Brand Authenticity Leads to Perceived Value and Brand Trust. *European Journal of Management and Business Economics*, *28*(3), 222-238. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-10-2017-0027

Jiang, Y. B., Zhang, H., Zhang, C. H., & Wang, Y. W. (2021). The Influence of Perceived Authenticity, Nostalgic Emotion and Local Attachment on Behavioral Intention of Film and Television Tourists: The Case of Bai Lu Yuan Film and Television City in Xi'an. *Journal of ZheJIang University (Science Edition)*, *48*(4), 508-520.

Kline, R. B. (2011). *Principles and Practice of Structural Equation Modeling* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Kolar, T., & Zabkar, V. (2010). A Consumer-based Model of Authenticity: An Oxymoron or the Foundation of Cultural Heritage Marketing? *Tourism Management*, *31*(5), 652-664. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2009.07.010

Kumar, J., & Nayak, J. K. (2019a). Brand Engagement without Brand Ownership: A Case of Non-brand Owner Community Members. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *28*(2), 216-230. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-04-2018-1840

Kumar, J., & Nayak, J. K. (2019b). Consumer Psychological Motivations to Customer Brand Engagement: A Case of Brand Community. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *36*(1), 168-177. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-01-2018-2519

Lacoeuilhe, J., & Belaïd, S. (2007). Quelle(s) Mesure(s) Pour L'attachement à La Marque? *Revue Française du Marketing*, *213*, 7-25.

Liang, J. P., Wu, L., & Rong, J. X. (2021). How does Internet Word of Mouth Promote Purchase Intention? --A Moderated Mediation Model Based on Consumer Inspiration. *Business Economics and Management*, *41*(2), 56-67.

Lim, X.-J., Cheah, J.-H., Cham, T. H., Ting, H., & Memon, M. A. (2020). Compulsive Buying of Branded Apparel, Its Antecedents, and the Mediating Role of Brand Attachment. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, *32*(7), 1539-1563. https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-03-2019-0126

Liu, J. X., & Fan, X. C. (2020). What's in the Heart, What's in the Mouth? A Study on the Influence of Psychological Ownership on Consumer Word-of-Mouth Recommendation. *Nankai Management Review*, *23*(1), 144-157.

Liu, M. H. (2020a). The Mechanism of Brand Personality on Word-of-Mouth Communication: The Formation and Expression of Brand Attachment. *Enterprise Economics*, *39*(3), 67-75.

Liu, Y. (2020b). *A Study on the Influence of Brand Authenticity of Newly Created Services on Consumers' Purchase Intention* (Doctoral dissertation). Shandong University, Shandong.

Love, E., Staton, M., & Rotman, J. D. (2016). Loyalty as a Matter of Principle: The Influence of Standards of Judgment on Customer Loyalty. *Marketing Letters*, *27*(4), 661-674. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-015-9371-0

Ludwig, S., de Ruyter, K., Friedman, M., Brüggen, E. C., Wetzels, M., & Pfann, G. (2013). More Than Words: The Influence of Affective Content and Linguistic Style Matches in Online Reviews on Conversion Rates. *Journal of Marketing*, *77*(1), 87-103. https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.11.0560

Manthiou, A., Kang, J., Hyun, S. S., & Fu, X. X. (2018). The Impact of Brand Authenticity on Building Brand Love: An Investigation of Impression in Memory and Lifestyle-congruence. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *75*, 38-47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.03.005

Mazutis, D. D., & Slawinski, N. (2015). Reconnecting Business and Society: Perceptions of Authenticity in Corporate Social Responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *131*, 137-150. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2253-1

Morhart, F., Malär, L., Guèvremont, A., Girardin, F., & Grohmann, B. (2015). Brand Authenticity: An Integrative Framework and Measurement Scale. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *25*(2), 200-218. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2014.11.006

Newman, G. E., & Dhar, R. (2014). Authenticity is Contagious: Brand Essence and the Original Source of Production. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *51*(3), 371-386. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.11.0022

Nierobisch, T., Toporowski, W., Dannewald, T., & Jahn, S. (2017). Flagship Stores for FMCG National Brands: Do they Improve Brand Cognitions and Create Favorable Consumer Reactions? *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *34*, 117-137. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.09.014

Nunes, J. C., Ordanini, A., & Giambastiani, G. (2021). The Concept of Authenticity: What it Means to Consumers. *Journal of Marketing*, *85*(4), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242921997081

Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., & Priester, J. (2006). Beyond Attitudes: Attachment and Consumer Behavior. *Seoul National Journal*, *12*(2), 3-36. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=961469

Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., Priester, J., Eisingerich, A. B., & Iacobucci, D. (2010). Brand Attachment and Brand Attitude Strength: Conceptual and Empirical Differentiation of Two Critical Brand Equity Drivers. *Journal of Marketing*, *74*(6), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.74.6.1

Qiu, D. H. (2001). *Mathematical and Emotional Science*. Changsha: Hunan People's Publishing House.

Schallehn, M., Burmann, C., & Riley, N. (2014). Brand Authenticity: Model Development and Empirical Testing. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *23*(3), 192-199. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-06-2013-0339

Schultz, S. E., Kleine, R. E., & Kernan, J. B. (1989). These are a Few of my Favorite Things: Toward an Explication of Attachment as a Consumer Behavior Construct. In T. K. Srull (Ed.), *NA-Advances in Consumer Research, Volume 16* (pp. 359-366). Provo, Utah: Association for Consumer Research.

Sheng, G. H., Ge, W. D., & Yue, B. B. (2018). Implementing the Spirit of the 19th National Congress and Building a Beautiful China--the Influence of Consumer Self-Concept on Green Purchasing Behavior. *Business Research*, *61*(12), 1-10.

Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-concept in Consumer Behavior: A Critical Review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *9*(3), 287-300. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2488624

Statista. (2023). *Most Popular Smartphone Brands in China as of June 2023*. Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1371012/most-popular-smartphone-brands-in-china

Sun, X. H. (2020). The Influence of Corporate Moral Hazard Behavior on Customers' Behavioral Choices - Based on the Mediating Role of Brand Attachment. *Business and Economic Research*, *39*(20), 79-82.

Sung, Y., & Kim, J. (2010). Effects of Brand Personality on Brand Trust and Brand Affect. *Psychology and Marketing*, *27*(7), 639-661. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20349

Thomson, M., MacInnis, D. J., & Park, C. W. (2005). The Ties That Bind: Measuring the Strength of Consumers' Emotional Attachments to Brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *15*(1), 77-91. http://doi.org/10.1207/s15327663jcp1501_10

Wu, J.-J., Chen, Y.-H., Chien, S.-H., & Wu, W.-K. (2016). Attachment Relationship Study of Trust and Trust Transfer. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, *26*(5), 681-695. http://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-04-2015-0095

Wu, J. Q. (2017). *Research on the Influence of Brand Experience on Brand Attachment: The Role of Brand Trust and Consumer Involvement* (Doctoral dissertation). South China University of Technology, Guangzhou.

Wu, S.-L., & Hsu, C.-P. (2018). Role of Authenticity in Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs): Determinants of Virtual Item Purchase Intention. *Journal of Business Research*, *92*, 242-249. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.035

Xu, W., & Feng, L. Y. (2018). A Study on the Mechanism of the Influence of Authenticity of Old Brands on the Intention of Word-of-Mouth Communication. *Journal of Central University of Finance and Economics*, *38*(1), 93-101.

Yan, X. Q., Zhou, T. R., & Li, Y. C. (2011). Trust, Commitment, Relationship Behavior and Relationship Performance: A Buyer's Perspective. *Management Review*, *23*(3), 71-81.

Yang, Y. W., Sun, G. H., & Tu, J. B. (2017). A Study of Country Brand Effect Under High-intervention Purchase Decision. *Journal of Management*, *14*(4), 580-589.

Yao, G. A. (2019). Mechanisms by which Experience and Corporate Reputation Affect Consumers' Trust in E-commerce Companies. *Soft Science*, *33*(7), 47-57.

Yuan, R., Liu, M. J., Luo, J., Nguyen, B., & Yang, F. (2014). A Critical Review of the Literature on Authenticity: Evolution and Future Research Agenda. *International Journal of Services, Economics and Management*, *6*(4), 339-356.

Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., & Parasuraman, A. (1996). The Behavioral Consequences of Service Quality. *Journal of Marketing*, *60*(2), 31-46. https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299606000203

Zhang, C. B., & Hou, R. J. (2013). An Empirical Study on the Influence of Self-concept Consistency on Online Brand Loyalty-The Mediating Role of Brand Identity and Commitment. *Soft Science*, *27*(4), 136-140.

Zhang, Z. (2019). *Research on the Influence of Symbolic Brand Image on Customer Fit Behavior* (Doctoral dissertation). Liaoning University, Liaoning.