An investigation of the impact of social media brand communication on brand equity for young Chinese consumers: a study of international high street fashion brands in China

YUNA KAN

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DEDICATION

This doctoral research is dedicated to my mother, Qichuan Tan, my father, Yiguang Kan, and my husband, Dr Min-Kai Lin, who give me infinite love, support, and courage to help me achieve my dream.

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Love you all

VITA

August 7, 1987…………………………... Born in Chengdu China

2014……………………………………. M.S. Marketing and Management, Loughborough University, UK

2013……………………………………. M.A. Mass Communication, University of Leicester, UK

2013……………………………………. M.A. Journalism, Sichuan University, China

2010……………………………………. B.A. Journalism of Broadcasting and Television, Chengdu University of Technology, China

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, YUNA KAN, declare that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis *an investigation* of *the impact of social media brand communication on brand equity for young Chinese consumers: a study of international high street fashion brands in China.* The ideas, research work, analyses and conclusions reported in this thesis are entirely my contribution, except where otherwise acknowledged. Besides, I certify that this thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma.

ABSTRACT

The media landscape has witnessed a noticeable transformation over the past decade (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Social media are playing an increasingly important role in communication. Due to the intense competition in the marketplace, nowadays, customers are exposed to numerous brands from across the world, and, therefore, building brand equity has become an important source of differentiation. According to Schema theory (Eysenck, 1984), communication stimuli can lead to a positive impact on consumers' perception of a brand. As a result, brand communication is positively related to brand equity as long as the communication stimuli contribute to a favourable attitude towards the branded product (Seo and Park, 2019). China has become the world's second largest economy since 2012, with the world's largest population of 1.4 billion (The World Bank, 2019). Understanding the behaviour of young Chinese consumers is crucial to international high street fashion brands targeting this market.

Based on the existing literature, this research aims to fill three research gaps. First, few researchers consider co-creation of social media brand communication as a dimension of social media brand communication, second, only a few researchers examine the effect of brand communication on consumer-based brand equity through social media platforms instead of traditional mass media, and third, few researchers investigate the communication about international high street fashion brands through Chinese social media among young Chinese consumers. Accordingly, five research questions were posed: first, from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are consumers' motivations to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, second, from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of social media brand communication affect each dimension of consumer-based brand equity, third, from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions, fourth, from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of consumer-based brand

equity affect purchase intention, and fifth, from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does brand country-of-origin affect consumer-based brand equity dimensions?

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, utilising qualitative methods in the early stage and predominant quantitative methods in the following stages of the research. The conceptual framework was developed on the basis of existing literature and qualitative research. In the second phase, a self-administered questionnaire was designed, aiming to elucidate the relationship between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity, the causal relationships between dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, the relationships between consumer-based brand equity and purchase intention, and the relationship between country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. Pilot study, including reliability test and exploratory factor analysis, was conducted to reduce the items and refine the measurement scales of the questionnaire. Followed by a main survey consisted of confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling.

Based on the relevant literature, qualitative research (thirteen in-depth interviews and three focus groups, total of eighteen participants), and the statistical results, this study obtains a number of implications, which are especially valuable for marketing managers of international high street fashion brands who want to enhance brand equity among young Chinese consumers with the help of brand communication on Chinese social media. The findings identify that firm-generated social media brand communication can positively influence young Chinese consumers' brand awareness and brand loyalty. User-generated social media brand communication is found to have a positive impact on young Chinese consumers' perceived quality. Co-creation of social media brand communication is proven to have a positive effect on young Chinese consumers' brand association. Besides, the findings also identify that brand awareness can positively influence young Chinese consumers' brand association and brand loyalty. Brand association has a positive effect on young Chinese consumers' perceived quality. Perceived quality has a positive impact on young Chinese consumers' brand loyalty. Furthermore, altruism is proven to be a

motivation for young Chinese consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, which is considered to be an antecedent of this research model. Moreover, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty are found to have a positive influence on young Chinese consumers' purchase intention, which is regarded as the outcome of this research model. Finally, the results indicate that country-of-origin has a positive impact on all the hypothesised dimensions of consumer-based brand equity (brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty).

However, some unexpected outcomes appeared, comprising the following relationships: venting motivation, self-enhancement, and economic motivation were not positively related to user-generated social media brand communication. User-generated social media brand communication and co-creation of social media brand communication did not positively affect brand awareness. Firm-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication were not positively related to brand association. Firm-generated social media brand communication, co-creation of social media brand communication and brand awareness had no positive impact on perceived quality. Co-creation of social media brand communication, and brand association were not positively related to brand loyalty. Brand awareness was not positively related to purchase intention.

This research is one of the first empirical studies integrating social media brand communication, consumer-based brand equity, purchase intention, and country-of-origin into one conceptual model in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the aforementioned relationships. Besides, it is the first to investigate the relationships between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity for international high street fashion brands targeting young Chinese consumers through the Chinese social media WeChat; hence, it contributes to testing the generalisation of the brand equity theory in the setting of China. In addition, it is the first to propose the co-creation of social media brand communication as a dimension of social media brand communication. This dimension was proven to be validated by the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Furthermore, this research also contributes to the

literature in that it demonstrates that standard learning hierarchy theory can be applied in China for young Chinese consumers. Therefore, the findings are of academic and managerial relevance, since this research not only extends the existing knowledge but also provides deeper insight into the way of developing a favourable international high street fashion brand in the setting of China.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The focal constructs of this research are social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity. It focused mainly on the influences of the social media brand communication dimensions, which consist of user-generated social media brand communication, firm-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication, on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions, which comprise brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.

This chapter is divided into seven subsections. Section 1.2 introduces the research background and rationale, in which the research gaps in the literature are identified. This is followed by Section 1.3, which describes the statement of the research problem. Section 1.4 explains the research objectives and questions based on the aforementioned research gaps, while, in Section 1.5, the methodology is presented to answer the research questions and to examine the proposed hypotheses. Section 1.6 describes the significance of this study. The definitions of the constructs and concepts are outlined in Section 1.7, and, finally, Section 1.8 presents the organisation of this thesis.

1.2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The media landscape has witnessed a noticeable transformation over the past decade (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). With the number of Internet users exceeding 54 percent of the world's population (Internet World Stats, 2018), and the number of monthly active users of social media Facebook surpassing 2.4 billion (Statista, 2019), social media are playing an increasingly important role in communication. Indeed, these new opportunities seem innumerable: millions of fans declare their support and love for Coca-Cola on Facebook, and thousands of Starbucks

consumers work together to create new ideas for this popular coffee brand on the platform Mystarbucksidea.com – for free. This phenomenon of consumers becoming fans of certain brands on social media platforms and using them to acquire brand information leads to the assumption that social media have a positive influence on the success of brands (Bruhn et al., 2012). Hence, brands are rapidly using social media as new channels to connect with their customers (Swani et al., 2014).

Social media are gradually reshaping the traditional marketing communications, as they provide countless opportunities for consumers to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other consumers around the world, the traditional one-way communication is replaced by two-way, peer-to-peer, and multi-dimensional communication. Therefore, companies are no longer the sole source of communication (Berthon et al., 2008). Accordingly, marketers have become aware that not only is brand communication generated by the company, but consumers can also generate it through user-generated social media communication. Therefore, some academic researchers (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015) have conducted investigations to differentiate between user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication and have investigated the influence of these two types of social media communications.

These studies, however, consider user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication as two separate independent variables, whereas, in fact, firm-generated social media communication is able to affect consumer-to-consumer communications (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). For example, firm-generated social media communication can be utilised to spur user-generated social media brand communication: marketers can build a framework or provide a platform so that consumers have access to express their opinions, reviews, experiences, and information about a brand (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Godes and Mayzlin (2009) demonstrate that companies can motivate consumer word-of-mouth (WOM) and actively initiate consumer WOM regarding their brand by leaving desirable impressions on consumers' minds (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the co-creation of firm-generated and user-generated social media brand communication.

Additionally, one mainstream of the impact of social media brand communication is that of brand equity. Due to the fierce competition in the marketplace, as, nowadays, customers are exposed to countless brands from all over the world, building brand equity becomes a crucial source of differentiation (Khan et al., 2015). Considerable research demonstrates that marketing communication can positively affect brand equity. For example, Simon and Sullivan (1993) find that marketing communication is a driving force of brand equity. Yoo et al. (2000) identify that marketing communications positively influence brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. As previous research regarding the relationship between marketing communications and brand equity has mainly focused on traditional instruments of marketing communications (e.g. Abril and Rodriguez-Canovas, 2016; Luxton et al., 2015; Yoganathan et al., 2015), and only a few have focused on social media platforms (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Seo and Park, 2019), it is vital to identify the relationship between this new means of marketing communication and brand equity.

Furthermore, the increasingly fierce competition among international brands in different regional markets has brought about the issue of how brands should be managed in an international landscape. For the past decade China has been the focus of numerous business activities and has gained burgeoning attention from researchers and academics. With the increasing trend of globalisation and the continuous opening of China as a market, China has been developing at an alarming rate of more or less 10 percent growth rate of GDP annually for three decades (Ye et al., 2012). According to The World Bank (2019), China is the world's second largest economy, with the world's largest population of 1.4 billion. Therefore, China has become one of the most vital and attractive emerging markets, and multinational corporations have entered China with growing frequency. The Economist (2017) reports that, nowadays, China represents a new generation of consumers who are exposed to thousands of new branded products and services from all over the world. This explosion of brand choices is accompanied by a significant increase in disposable income. As a result, this younger generation of Chinese consumers has become increasingly brand-conscious (Zhu, 2013).

Moreover, because of the dramatic change in the level of economic development as well as the amount of personal income, traditional Chinese values are undergoing a transformation. Duan and Dholakia (2015) identify 'enjoy now' has become a desirable lifestyle, coupled with a growing sense of hedonism and materialism. Consequently, some conventional Chinese consumer values, such as thriftiness and restraining purchasing desire, have become less prevalent in Chinese society. In terms of traditional spending habits, they have been changed dramatically, especially among young Chinese consumers who are more willing to embrace Western consumption behaviours (Bennett and Bryant, 2010). Depending on the rising purchasing power, they have readily adopted and adapted to the Western values and lifestyles (Ye et al., 2012). Specifically, the younger generation of consumers living in urban areas, who have not experienced or been exposed to another way of life other than their urban modern lifestyle are attracted to Western brands with high brand equity (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006).

Furthermore, Chinese consumers have long been supposed to be the ones who believe that the product quality of global brands is better than that of Chinese domestic brands (Hu and Dickerson, 1997). Several studies find that Chinese consumers pay more attention to brands than their counterparts in Europe or the USA (Liang, 2018). Liao and Wang (2009) identify that Chinese consumers prefer famous international brands, especially young consumers, since a brand is not only an indicator of the consumers' personality, but also a cue for their social status. According to the McKinsey Global Institute (2012), Chinese consumers tend to emotionally use products to show their personality and sense of image. Emotional adhesion significantly influences the purchase decisions of numerous Chinese consumers, especially young consumers. Young Chinese consumers are regarded as highly active information seekers as well as highly oriented towards Western brands (O'Cass and Choy, 2008). They pay more attention to brands, especially international fashion brands (McEwen et al., 2006). Accordingly, young Chinese consumers provide market opportunities for international brands to enter and have become the most desirable consumers to target for brands from around the world (O'Cass and Siahtiri, 2014). Therefore, building brand equity is crucial for international fashion brands to compete for young Chinese consumers.

As previous researchers (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Seo and Park, 2019) demonstrate that social media brand communication has positive influence on consumer-based brand equity, it is necessary to examine whether social media brand communication has a positive effect on the consumer-based brand equity from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. Due to the remarkable economic growth, social media in China is developing at an unexpected speed. Chinese Internet users reached 854 million by 2019 of whom about 825 million are social media users, while mobile Internet users reached 847 million, of whom 821 million are mobile Internet social media users (Cnnic, 2019), which suggests that China offers the most active and dynamic soil for the development of social media. In China, however, Facebook and Twitter are forbidden, as a result of breaking Chinese laws, but many local social media platforms have developed well and gained great success. WeChat is the largest social media platform in China, which attracts more than 100 million users worldwide. WeChat is a mobile app developed by the Tencent company in China. It enables users to send text, voice, picture, and video messages and make video and voice calls, as well as post and share various kinds of information on Moments, which is similar to the Timeline of Facebook (Chen, 2017). In other words, users can create content and post it on WeChat, which is the very nature of user-generated social media communication.

In addition, WeChat also allows companies to build official accounts to generate and post information regarding brands and products to their followers, which is a kind of firm-generated social media brand communication. In terms of the fashion industry, numerous international high street fashion brands, such as H&M, ZARA, GAP, and Uniqlo have already built WeChat official accounts and started WeChat marketing to their Chinese customers who are mainly composed of young Chinese individuals. The fashion retail market is divided into three segments – luxury, high street, and out-of-town discounters/supermarket (Methanuntakul, 2010). High street fashion is considered as mass fashion, as the majority of people wear mass market fashion in daily life, which offers to a wider range of customers than ready-to-wear fashion (Meadows, 2009). Ready-to-wear fashion combines mass market and haute couture, which pays much attention to the design and creates exclusivity, therefore it is more expensive than high street fashion. High street fashion is identified as fast fashion

(Gannaway, 1999), as it aims to display clothes in the stores within the shortest possible time (Mintel, 2002).

The impact of this new marketing communication platform is becoming increasingly significant in China. High street fashion companies have witnessed a rapid expansion since the beginning of 21st century (Caro and Martinez-de-Albeniz, 2015). For instance, the net sales of Inditex, the owner of Zara, is 26.15 billion euros in 2018, compared with 8.2 billion euros in 2006; and there are 7490 stores worldwide in 2018, compared with 3131 stores in 2006 (Inditex, 2018). The target market of high street fashion companies is young consumers, as they are more likely to choose trendy and affordable clothes than other age cohorts (Su et al., 2016). The fashionable looks, great variety, and quickness of updates make this industry attractive to young consumers (Choi et al., 2010). Young adolescents have been regarded as the 'Net Generation', as they have grown up in the Information Age (Methanuntakul, 2010). In China there are approximately 220 million people between the ages of 21 and 30, who were all born after the economic reform and with the one-child policy (Population Census Office under the State Council, 2012). China's one-child generation grew up in a dramatically different economic environment than older generations, who are more brand-conscious, more oriented towards self-expression, self-gratification, and brands.

However, to the best knowledge of the author, no researcher has investigated this impact so far. Therefore, it is worth exploring the influence of social media brand communication on the consumer-based brand equity of international high street fashion brands from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers.

1.3. STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

This research mainly focuses on the effect of the social media brand communication metrics on consumer-based brand equity metrics (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Khan et al., 2015; Rohm et al., 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Seo and Park, 2019). As discussed above, several research problems exist.

First, as China has become the world's second largest economy and has the world's largest population (The World Bank, 2019), it is the largest market and of great importance for global brands. Due to the rapid economic development as well as the increasing openness to the world, the younger generation of Chinese have become increasingly brand conscious (McEwen et al., 2006) and are more likely to be attracted by famous international brands (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006). Therefore, the importance of young Chinese consumers cannot be underestimated for multi-national corporations targeting young consumer markets. However, based on the literature search, only a few studies were found to be relevant in this research area. This is because of the lack of research conducted in China, the lack of researchers investigating young Chinese consumers' perspectives concerning the relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions, and the absence of studies that explore these relationships in the context of the international high street fashion industry in China.

As a result, it may lead to a research problem in that the widely-used conceptual frameworks and measurement items in Western countries may not be appropriate for use in China, since previous research findings were mainly generated on the basis of Western philosophies, cultures, and values. Thus, the generalisability of the theory seems to be limited to countries that share a similar cultural background. Accordingly, this study intends to bridge this research gap by selecting China.

Second, as the media landscape has witnessed a massive change over the past decade (Mangold and Faulds, 2009), traditional instruments of marketing communication seem to have been gradually reshaped by social media brand communication. Accordingly, researchers have started to pay more attention to social media research. However, little is known about brand communication through Chinese social media. As some Western social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, are banned in China, Chinese social media like WeChat have both a uniqueness and certain differences to Western social media, which may pose an issue as some marketing strategies that have been confirmed in Western countries may not be efficient in China. Therefore, this research attempts to explore some proper strategies for international high street fashion brands' managers.

Third, as social media offer opportunities for consumers to communicate with other consumers online, companies are no longer the sole source of communication (Berthon et al., 2008). Thus, some academic researchers (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015) have started to differentiate between user-generated brand communication and firm-generated brand communication in the context of social media rather than traditional mass media. These studies, whereas, consider user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication as two separate independent variables, however, another form of communication appears on social media more and more often, i.e. co-creation of social media brand communication. In short, this is a form of consumer-brand interaction in which brand-related conversations enable and stimulate consumers to integrate their thoughts and experiences into the brand story by means of social media's interactive nature (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no one has considered the co-creation of social media brand communication as the third dimension of social media brand communication. Therefore, it needs to be investigated to identify whether it has an effect on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions.

1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

Given the importance of social media brand communication to consumer-based brand equity and the young Chinese consumer market to international high street fashion brands, it is worth investigating these concepts further to enrich the existing research in this field. Therefore, this doctoral research proposes five main research objectives. First, it seeks to identify the antecedents of young Chinese consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, second, it aims to develop a conceptual model to explain the relationship among social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, third, it seeks to identify the causal relationships among the consumer-based brand equity metrics, forth, it aims to investigate the possible impact of consumer-based brand equity dimensions on the purchase intention as an outcome, and five, it aims to investigate the impact of brand country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity. This research attempts to

empirically examine the model in a non-Western context, thereby enabling researchers to test the validity and applicability of the existing theories that have been developed in Western countries with different cultures. Therefore, this research contains an evaluation of the dimensionality and operationalisation of the constructs as well as some relevant assumptions about the findings reported in the existing literature (e.g. the relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty). Based on the aforementioned research objectives, this research aims to answer the following research questions:

Question 1: From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are consumers' motivations to engage in user-generated social media brand communication?

Question 2: From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of social media brand communication affect each dimension of consumer-based brand equity?

Question 3: From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are the causal relationships among the consumer-based brand equity dimensions?

Question 4: From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of consumer-based brand equity affect purchase intention?

Question 5: From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does brand country-of-origin affect the consumer-based brand equity dimensions?

By achieving these objectives, it is expected that the investigation will contribute to the existing knowledge about the relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions and the consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers and offer pragmatic insights for marketing managers of international high street fashion brands. In the following section, the research methodology will be introduced.

1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs the two paradigms of idealism and positivism, which have become popular in marketing research over several decades. This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, utilising qualitative methods in the early stage of the research and dominant quantitative methods in the following stages of the study in order to generate law-like regularities that can be generalised to more extensive situations (Churchill, 1979; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003). Hence, it is necessary to employ some qualitative methods that serve as a minor and complementary part of the study with the aim of clarifying what happens in social reality, as well as how and why such differences appear among individuals in this social reality (Thomas and Brubaker, 2000).

First, this research starts with an idealist paradigm, which focuses on qualitative methods to obtain a deeper understanding and insights into the relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions and the consumer-based brand equity dimensions, as social media platforms are relatively newly-emerged and rapidly developing channels for marketing in both academia and industry (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). Hence, this study uses Churchill's (1979) paradigm, which integrates a qualitative paradigm to obtain relevant information in the primary stage by conducting a survey. In order to test the instrument design and generate the measurement items, this research conducted a literature search in addition to the qualitative studies, which included in-depth interviews and focus groups with the students of Sichuan University (Gupta et al., 2011), who have experience with any international high street fashion brand on WeChat. In terms of data analysis, NVivo software was employed to code and extract information from the data from the in-depth interviews and focus groups. Qualitative approaches are employed in conjunction with quantitative approaches to investigate an area that is unknown or has obtained relatively little attention so far (Deshpande, 1983).

Notwithstanding the idealism paradigm (i.e. qualitative methods) carried out in the primary stage, this research mainly employs a positivist paradigm (i.e. a quantitative approach) to validate the measurement scale and examine the research hypotheses. A pilot study was implemented to gather data in order to refine the measurement

items for the main study (Thabane et al., 2010). A self-administered mobile questionnaire was designed, with a seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree to offer satisfactory properties that are pertinent to the responses (Bagozzi, 1994). It aims to elucidate the relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions (user-generated social media brand communication, firm-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication) and consumer-based brand equity dimensions (brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty); the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions; the relationship among consumer-based brand equity dimensions and purchase intention; and the relationship among country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers.

The questionnaires were distributed to young Chinese consumers who have experience with any international high street fashion brand on WeChat through mobile phones. The respondents returned the questionnaires and their responses were used to test the conceptual model and research hypotheses of this research. For the pilot study, the reliability test and exploratory factor analysis were conducted using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) 25. Based on Churchill's (1979) recommendations, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed in the early stage to reduce the number of observed indicators and refine the measurement scales of the questionnaire (Hair et al., 2010). Next, the main survey was conducted. In this stage, structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed by means of the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) 25. SEM was employed to validate the conceptual framework and examine the hypothesised relationships among the latent constructs (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 2000).

1.6. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This current research makes theoretical and managerial contributions to the existing literature in this field. This section presents an overview of the research contributions in general. The details of the contributions of this study can be found in Chapter 8, Section 8.2.

The findings will be of academic and managerial relevance, since this research not only extends the existing knowledge but also provides deeper insight into the way of developing a favourable international high street fashion brand in the setting of China, which is the second largest economy and has the largest population in the world. To be more specific, this study focuses on the effect of social media brand communication dimensions on consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers; the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers; the motivations for users to engage in user-generated social media brand communication from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers; the influence of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers; the impact of consumer-based brand equity dimensions on purchase intention from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers.

Therefore, this research bridges the gaps identified in the literature, i.e. there is a lack of empirical research investigating the communication about international high street fashion brands through Chinese social media among young Chinese consumers; few researchers consider the co-creation of social media brand communication as a dimension of social media brand communication; only a few researchers investigate the effect of brand communication on consumer-based brand equity through social media instead of traditional mass media.

This research makes a number of academic contributions. First, it focuses on the effect of social media brand communication on consumer-based brand equity. Social media is a new platform for communication that is distinct from traditional media communication, upon which the majority of previous studies focused. Therefore, this research can deepen the understanding of the effect of social media brand communication on consumer-based brand equity. In addition, since social media offers opportunities for consumers to talk to hundreds or even thousands of other consumers around the world, companies are no longer the sole source of brand communication (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Accordingly, some academic studies differentiate between firm-generated and user-generated social media brand

communication and examine the impact of these two forms of social media communications (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Khadim et al., 2018; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). These studies, however, consider firm-generated and user-generated social media brand communication as separate independent variables, whereas, firm-generated social media communication can also be used to stimulate user-generated content. Thus, this research is the first to add the construct 'co-creation of social media brand communication' to the social media brand communication dimensions, which contributes to the existing theory.

Furthermore, while previous studies were mainly conducted in developed countries, such as the USA (e.g. Yoo and Donthu, 2001), Australia (e.g. Pappu et al., 2005), and Switzerland (Bruhn et al., 2012). Only a few studies investigated consumer-based brand equity in China (e.g. Cai et al., 2015; Filieri et al., 2019; Lu and Xu, 2015). In addition, to the best knowledge of the author, this is the first to investigate the relationships between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity for international high street fashion brands targeting young Chinese consumers through the Chinese social media WeChat; hence, it contributes to testing the generality of the brand equity theory in the setting of China.

This research is also expected to yield some managerial contributions to company managers. First, it provides some insights into a proper way for international high street fashion brands to increase their brand equity and sales in China, as it can help managers set up appropriate strategies and directions in terms of social media brand communication. To be more specific, the firm-generated social media communication and the co-creation of social media brand communication are in full or partial charge of companies. Therefore, this research can identify and distinguish the possible different advantages of these two kinds of social media brand communication and their influence on different consumer-based brand equity dimensions.

In addition, as the researcher is the first to propose the co-creation of social media brand communication as a dimension of social media brand communication, this research can identify its impact on consumer-based brand equity dimensions, which enables managers to create a better social media environment for the stimulation

and development of the co-creation of social media brand communication in order to strengthen the brand equity. Moreover, as user-generated social media brand communication is outside of the control of companies, this research provides some suggestions to reduce the negative user-generated social media brand communication and convert the negative to the positive.

In addition, this study enables us to identify the motivation of young Chinese consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, which may be widely different from Western consumers, and would be beneficial to the managers' promotion strategy making. Furthermore, this study also identifies the impact of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity dimensions, which can provide insights into the role of country-of-origin from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers' for international high street fashion brands' managers.

1.7. DEFINITIONS OF CONSTRUCTS AND CONCEPTS

Social media brand communication is a creation and exchange of brand-related information between users and companies through Internet based applications and tools that build on the foundations of Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

Firm-generated social media brand communication is a way of communicating that the information is brand-related, created by firms for the purpose of developing and maintaining one-on-one relationships with existing and potential customers by means of social media's interactive features (Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Kumar et al., 2016).

User-generated social media brand communication is a way of communicating that the information is brand-related, publicly available, reflecting some degree of creative effort, and generated outside professional routines through personal communication and information exchange by means of the interactive nature of social media (OECD, 2007; Presi et al., 2014, p. 1600).

Co-creation of social media brand communication is a way of customer-brand interaction through which brand-related conversations enable and stimulate customers to integrate their own thoughts and experiences into the brand story by means of the interactive nature of social media (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012).

Consumer-based brand equity is the customers' familiarity with the brand and associations with its value, which is reflected by the metrics of brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Pappu et al., 2006).

Brand awareness is the strength of the presence of a brand in the consumers' memory and the ability of consumers to recognise or recall a brand in its product category (Aaker, 1996; Pappu et al., 2005).

Brand association is anything in the consumers' memory that can be linked to a brand, including attributes of the product/service, reputation of the company, and characteristics of the brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Wang and Li, 2012).

Perceived quality is the consumers' perception and evaluation of the overall quality or excellence of a product/service according to some desired objectives (Aaker, 1991; Bhuian, 1997; Moradi and Zarei, 2012).

Brand loyalty is a favourable relationship between the consumer and the brand and is a commitment held by consumers to repatronise or rebuy a certain brand constantly in the future as well as treat it as the first choice to purchase (Aaker, 1996; Oliver, 1997; Wang and Li, 2012).

Purchase intention is the personal preference of consumers towards a certain product or service or the likelihood to purchase a certain brand (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Payal et al., 2013).

Country-of-origin is not only the tangible cues, such as the packaging, logo, and labelling concerning which country the product originates from, but also the intangible cues, such as emotion, feelings, and perception about the country the product comes from (Roth and Romeo, 1992; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999).

Motivation to engage in user-generated social media brand communication is in the context of brand communication on social media platforms; it comprises the drive, urge, willingness, interest or desire to engage in brand-related information processing among consumers (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989; Rubin, 2002).

Altruism is a motivation based on wanting to help other social media users without anticipating any reward in return as well as wanting to do so due to having benefited from the help of other users previously (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Presi et al., 2014).

Venting motivation is a motivation based on releasing negative feelings or emotions after a negative consumption experience in order to reduce anger, tension, or frustration (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sundaram, Mitra and Webster, 1998).

Vengeance is a motivation based on retaliating against the company due to a negative consumption experience (Bechwati and Morrin, 2003; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Self-enhancement is a motivation based on enhancing self-image among other consumers by interacting with other users on social media (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sedikides and Gregg, 2008).

Economic motivation is stimulated by winning rewards through engaging in social media brand communication (Arnhold, 2010; Sundaram, Mitra and Webster, 1998).

1.8. ORGANISATION OF THIS THESIS

The researcher presents this thesis via seven chapters, as follows:

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The first chapter discusses the research background and rationale, research problem, research objectives and questions, methodology, significance of this research, and definitions of the constructs and concepts.

Chapter 2. Literature review

This chapter first provides the research background by discussing the research context – China – which nowadays, is regarded as a transitional society in terms of its economy and social values. A review of the literature on social media brand communication, including user-generated social media brand communication, firm-generated social media brand communication and co-creation of social media brand communication, and its effects on marketing outcomes is presented. It commences with a discussion on the evolution of WOM, followed by a review of the concept and influence of social media brand communication and its dimensions. Subsequently, the motivation for user-generated social media brand communication is reviewed, and a review of the literature on consumer-based brand equity, including brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, is presented. The concept and relationship among these metrics of consumer-based brand equity are reviewed. In addition, the concept of purchase intention and its relationships with the consumer-based brand equity metrics are reviewed. Finally, the concept of country-of-origin and its relationships with the consumer-based brand equity metrics are reviewed.

Chapter 3. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

This chapter illustrates the relationships among the motivations to engage in user-generated social media brand communication. User-generated social media brand communication is discussed first, followed by the discussion concerning the impacts of the social media brand communication dimensions on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions. The role of country-of-origin on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions is discussed. Finally, the effects of the consumer-based brand equity dimensions on purchase income, which is the outcome of the model, are presented.

Chapter 4. Methodology and research design

In this chapter, first, the research philosophy is introduced. The two general approaches – qualitative approach and quantitative approach – to theory construction are discussed. In addition, the research design comprising the research setting and the development of the measurement items are elaborated. Regarding the development of measurement items, the employment of the literature search, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and a pilot study, which is conducted by EFA, are discussed in detail.

Chapter 5. The qualitative findings

This chapter reports the findings from the qualitative methods employed in this research.

Chapter 6. Data analysis

This chapter presents the findings from the quantitative methods employed in this research. It elaborates upon the results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) based on the data from the main survey, including the evaluation of the reliability and validity of the constructs. In addition, it presents the outcomes of the tests on the model and hypotheses by using SEM.

Chapter 7. Results and discussion

This chapter focuses on the explanation of the research findings, in conjunction with the relevant literature and some aspects of the qualitative study including the in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted in the exploratory analysis stage.

Chapter 8. Conclusion and implications

This chapter summarises the implications of this research in terms of both the theoretical and managerial aspects. Also, it discusses the research limitations and provides some possible research directions for future study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The stated research questions require a deeper insight into the relationship between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity. Therefore, this thesis explores two streams of existing literature: first, studies regarding the influence of consumer-to-consumer communication (i.e. electronic word-of-mouth) on marketing outcomes and, second, studies focusing on the effect of marketing communications on the marketing outcomes. With regard to the first stream, there is a general consensus that consumer-to-consumer communication is an effective way of information transmission (Dellarocas, 2003). The advent of social media facilitates consumer-to-consumer communication, especially among unknown consumers (Duan et al., 2008), as they offer opportunities for consumers to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other consumers from around the world. Godes and Mayzlin (2004) contend that social media are a cost-effective way to access and collect consumer-to-consumer communication. Previous research demonstrates that consumer-to-consumer conversations can bring favourable outcomes for companies. For example, Dellarocas et al. (2007) find that online movie ratings lead to an increase in the predictive power of revenue-forecasting model, and Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) confirm the impact of book reviews on relative sales.

The second stream is in respect of the influence of marketing communications on marketing outcomes. Yoo et al. (2000) demonstrate that marketing communications have a positive influence on brand equity dimensions. However, previous research regarding the relationship of marketing communications and brand equity mainly focus on the traditional media of marketing communications (Aaker, 1991; Yoo et al., 2000). Marketing communications on social media are a comparatively new research topic, and, to the best of the author's knowledge, only a few papers have studied on this research topic. For example, Bruhn et al. (2012) differentiate the effect of user-generated social media communication and firm-generated social media communication on consumer-based brand equity and marketing outcomes. They

identify that firm-generated social media communication has a positive influence on brand awareness, while the positive relationship between user-generated social media communication and brand awareness is not confirmed. The findings of Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), who investigate how firm-generated social media communication and user-generated social media communication affect consumer-based brand equity dimensions, show that firm-generated social media brand communication has positive relationships with brand awareness and brand associations but has no direct influence on brand loyalty and perceived quality, while user-generated social media brand communication has a positive influence on each dimension of consumer-based brand equity.

This chapter reviews a range of relevant literature as a critical analysis of marketing research in order to support the concepts, conceptual model and proposed hypotheses of this research. Section 2.2 illustrates the definition of word-of-mouth. Section 2.3 outlines the definition of social media brand communication and the definitions of its elements. Section 2.4 discusses the definitions of the motivations to engage in user-generated social media brand. Section 2.5 illustrates the definition of consumer-based brand equity and the definitions of its elements. Section 2.6 outlines the definition of purchase intention. Section 2.7 discusses the definition of country-of-origin. Finally, a summary of this chapter is presented in Section 2.8.

2.2. DEFINING WORD-OF-MOUTH

Before the concept of social media brand communication is presented, this section first provides some general information about WOM by discussing and comparing the different definitions regarding distinct facets. Then, it discusses the meaning of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which is a new version evolving from WOM as a result of the advent of information technology and the Internet. After this, social media brand communication is discussed in the next section.

2.2.1. Word-of-mouth

In the literature of consumer socialisation, peer influence is investigated through interpersonal communication occurring between the learner and socialisation agent (Payal et al., 2013). Socialisation agent in this research is specified as being the

peers who "transmitted norms, attitudes, motivations and behaviours to the learners" (Moschis, 1976, p. 600). The learning process is an approach in which learners draw up values and behaviours from the socialisation agent through the interactions with them (Churchill and Moschis, 1979). Hence, the consumer-oriented way of learning, which is under peer effect, involves obtaining values and behaviour from peers by interpersonal communication (Wang et al., 2012; Payal et al., 2013).

According to Lueg and Finney (2007, p. 27), interpersonal peer communication is a way of "encouragement or approval of certain behaviours and intentions through either spoken or unspoken messages that peers send to each other." Interpersonal communication exists in both spoken and non-spoken form. The spoken form refers to the enhancement of peer values and behaviours (Lueg and Finney, 2007; Payal et al., 2013). Enhancement includes the expression of oral reward and punishment. To be more specific, reward is expressed by positive conversations and opinion sharing while punishment is expressed by negative conversations and opinion sharing (Lueg and Finney, 2007). The spoken form of interpersonal communication is also known as WOM (Chen et al., 2011), while the non-spoken form means the modelling of peer behaviours (Lueg and Finney, 2007; Payal et al., 2013). Modelling is a process in which peer behaviour is imitated and observed (Lueg and Finney, 2007).

WOM is a spontaneously occurring phenomenon in consumer behaviour (Kozinets et al., 2010). WOM is a multi-dimensional construct, and the majority of definitions in the literature mainly focus on at least one of the following dimensions: flow/exchange of conversation, non-commercial, informal/formal communication, or post-purchase behaviour (Goyette et al., 2010). WOM initially refers to person-to-person conversation relating to a product between consumers (Sen and Lerman, 2007). According to Gronroos (1990, p. 158), WOM refers to "the message about an organisation, its credibility and trustworthiness, its way of operating and its services, communicated from one person to another". These definitions highlight the involvement in exchanging marketing information among consumers. Based on traditional communications theory, WOM is considered as having a significant impact on behaviour, particularly on consumers' information search, assessment, and the following process of decision-making (Money et al., 1998; Silverman, 2001).

According to Eccleston and Griseri (2008), there are three main WOM behaviours: product information gathering, product recommendation, and product evaluation sharing/discussion (Eccleston and Griseri, 2008), and four key aspects of WOM behaviours: favourableness/positiveness, unfavourableness/negativeness, intensity/frequency, and content/detail (Goyette et al., 2010). Previous research has shown that WOM has an impact on consumers' attitude and behaviour (e.g. Sen and Lerman, 2007; Xia and Bechwati, 2008).

In addition, according to Westbrook (1987, p. 261), WOM refers to "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their seller." It is the definition that emphasises the communications are informal, which is different from professional firm-initiated communications. Consumers share experiences and evaluations regarding the product or service they have had before (Westbrook, 1987). Silverman (2001, p. 19) defines WOM as "the communication about products and services between people who are perceived to be independent of the company providing the product and service, in a medium perceived to be independent of the company," which stresses that the actions of communication between people are non-commercial. That is why WOM is regarded being more reliable, credible, and trustworthy by consumers compared to firm-initiated communications (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2000). Several empirical researches demonstrate that WOM is more effective than mass media advertising (e.g. Smith et al., 2005; Trusov et al., 2009), since it is considered as being more reliable and trustworthy (Gruen et al., 2006). For example, according to Day's (1971) study, WOM is nine times more effective than mass media advertising in changing a consumer's attitude from a negative to a positive brand attitude. Therefore, it is widely acknowledged that WOM is a more trustworthy way than traditional mass communications (Harrison-Walker, 2001).

While some definitions regard WOM as non-commercial, Goyette et al. (2010) define it as all kinds of interpersonal communications (positive or negative) about a brand or product between a communicator and a receiver who are considered to be non-commercial. In a similar vein, it is defined as a brand-related interpersonal communication between a communicator and receiver in which the receiver does not

perceive the communication as being for commercial purposes (de Matos and Rossi, 2008). However, some authors claim that WOM is not completely non-commercial and that it has a certain degree of relationship with firm-initiated communications. For example, Haywood (1989, p. 56) defines WOM as "a process that is often generated by a company's formal communications and the behaviour of its representatives," which indicates that WOM may be an outcome of a company's marketing activities, such as public relations and advertising. According to the Two-Step Flow Theory, advertising (or any other kind of media communication) has an influence on brand-related interpersonal communication among consumers, where the opinion leaders share brand-related information originating from mass media (Keller and Fay, 2009). Thus, the sources of WOM can be impersonal or personal (Goyette et al., 2010). In the next section, the new version of WOM – eWOM, which was born in the Internet era, is reviewed.

2.2.2. Electronic word-of-mouth

With the advent of information technology and the Internet, WOM has evolved into a new version termed eWOM. Despite the conceptual similarity between WOM and eWOM, eWOM has its unique characteristics in the social media context. Compared to WOM, eWOM is less personal but more ubiquitous (Davis and Khazanchi, 2008) and is considered to be more effective than WOM due to its wider reach and higher accessibility (Chatterjee, 2001). In other words, social media services allow consumers to communicate fast as well as respond immediately to others (Jansen et al., 2009). Social media provides an option to spread WOM as well as expose consumers to WOM. While the speed of oral WOM communication is by and large slow, social media with their almost unlimited approaches to innumerable consumers from across the world largely enhances the diffusion of WOM (Hutter et al., 2013). The Internet not only offers consumers more opportunities for acquiring non-commercialised brand information from other consumers, but also enables consumers to share their opinions and experiences with other consumers. Therefore, eWOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.

39), and "Internet-mediated written communications between current or potential consumers" (You, et al., 2015, p. 19).

In addition, the textual form of communication makes eWOM information permanently available to consumers and marketers. With the help of social media, marketers can collect consumer's insights and needs, which is hard to gather in WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). According to Lee and Youn (2009), social networking sites, brands' websites, online retailers' websites, product review websites, personal blogs and message boards are all forums of eWOM. There is a consensus that eWOM has become a key source of information dissemination (Dellarocas et al., 2007). The eWOM occurs among people who may be somewhat or completely unknown to each other, thereby leading to more honest opinions. Studies have demonstrated that eWOM is more trustworthy and credible compared to advertising (Gruen et al., 2006).

In the following sections the definitions of the social media brand communication and its elements (firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication) are provided.

2.3. DEFINING SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION

What is social media brand communication? The advent of social media offers numerous opportunities for users to access online information and enable them to communicate with numerous consumers around the world. Therefore, social media are changing traditional marketing communication since companies are no longer the sole source of brand communication (Bruhn et al., 2012). Prior academic research differentiated between user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication and investigated the influence of these two kinds of social media communications (e.g. Khadim et al., 2018; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Although these studies consider firm-generated and user-generated social media brand communication as two separate independent variables, firm-generated social media communication has a certain ability to influence consumer-to-consumer communications (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Thus, it is vital to investigate the co-

creation of user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication. The following sections discuss the meanings of social media brand communication, firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and the co-creation of social media brand communication, respectively.

2.3.1. Social media

The advent of Web 2.0 offers the opportunity for Internet users to access unlimited online information, with social media being the most important (Chen et al., 2012). The term Web 2.0 was first proposed by O'Reilly and has been used since 2005 (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). Constantinides and Fountain (2008, p. 232) define Web 2.0 as "a collection of open-source, interactive and user-controlled online applications expanding the experiences, knowledge and market power of the users as participants in business and social processes. Web 2.0 applications support the creation of informal users' networks, facilitating the flow of ideas and knowledge by allowing efficient generation, dissemination, sharing and editing/refining of the informational content."

The rudiment of social media is something like "Open Diaries", which was an online form of diary that linked users with one online community (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 60). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) define social media as a "group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." According to Strauss and Frost (2009, p. 326), social media are "online tools and platforms that allow Internet users to collaborate on content, share insights and experiences, and connect for business or pleasure". Mangold and Faulds (2009) define it as a platform that enables consumers to generate and publish online information regarding brands, products, services, and general issues to educate others. Chung and Austria (2010) explain social media as the media that allow Internet users to create, publish, and share texts, photos, videos, and other online tools and platforms, which enable Internet users to share experiences and insights and connect for pleasure or business. According to the Interactive Advertising Bureau (2008, p. 5), social media is "the convergence of user commentary with

video, photos, and music sharing, all presented in a simple, user-friendly format," which provides consumers with the channel for mass dissemination. Based on Edosomwan et al. (2011), social media is defined as a digital communication medium that supports Internet users in terms of sharing information and ideas by means of various kinds of inter-connected communities. According to Ellison et al. (2011), social media represent virtual places that enable people from across the world to interact with others, create and share content, and discuss their ideas.

The commonality between all the aforementioned definitions is the creation and exchange of information via the platforms that are based on the technological foundations of Web 2.0. However, the dissimilarity exists in respect of the creator of information, as some authors consider the content as being only created by consumers (e.g. Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Mangold and Fauld, 2009), while others consider the content generated by Internet users – both consumers and companies (e.g. Chung and Austria, 2010; Strauss and Frost, 2009).

In terms of the forms of social media, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) categorise social media into social networking sites, blogs, collaborative projects, virtual social worlds, virtual game worlds, and content communities, which are based on existing media theories: social presence, media richness, self-disclosure, and self-presentation (Payal et al., 2013). Kietzmann et al. (2011) create a model depicting seven functions of social media, namely, presence, sharing, conversations, identity, relationships, reputation, and groups. For example, Facebook, a social networking site, has the functions of relationship, conversations, and reputation in sequence (Payal et al., 2013). The difference between traditional media and social media can be summarised in respect of the growing interactivity, responsiveness, reciprocity, and richness of content (Johnson et al., 2006). Gillin (2007) summarises several factors to explain this transformation towards social media:

Demographic shifts – The acceptance of the Internet is increasing constantly, especially among young people who are familiar with Internet use, and, accordingly, the use of traditional media has declined.

Customer preference – The interactive feature of social media enables users to communicate with their friends and other Internet users. Research has proven that consumers consider social media more trustworthy than traditional marketing communication platforms (Karakaya and Barnes, 2010).

Low cost – Compared with traditional media advertisements, it costs much less to launch a campaign through social media.

Declining response rates – Traditional online marketing approaches, such as e-mail advertisements and banners, have become increasingly ineffective and even intrusive for consumers due to the fact of spam and disinterest.

Market research – Social media provide opportunities for companies' market researchers to gain deep insights into customers by collecting information about their opinions, evaluations, needs, desires, and preferences, and so on (Kozinets, 2002).

Social media provide new platforms for eWOM to associate with online consumer-to-consumer interactions regarding brands (Muntinga et al., 2011). Social media are ideal instruments for eWOM, as consumers create and share brand-related information with their friends, acquaintances, and other peers, out of companies' control (Kim and Ko, 2012). Therefore, social media brand communication is a specific form of eWOM, which is conducted on social media platforms and the content is brand-related. In the following section, the definitions of social media brand communication and its elements are discussed.

2.3.2. Social media brand communication

In respect of online brand-consumer relationships, social media enable the brand-consumer relationships to be consolidated by motivating consumers to engage in interactions with brands (Verhoef et al., 2010) and by cultivating online brand communities (Libai et al., 2010). Social media provide consumers a wide variety of online services to communicate with other consumers, which empowers consumers to contact each other and participate actively in brand communication (Jahn and Kunz, 2012). Researchers have proven that social media have a higher level of

interactivity between consumers and brands than traditional media, since social media increase the involvement and engagement (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010) as well as enhance the interaction frequency and satisfaction (Labrecque, 2014). For instance, Trusov et al. (2009) find that referrals on social media platforms have significantly longer carryover effects on consumers and produce a considerably higher response rate than traditional media advertising. Since companies always hope to spread information as wide as possible, engage with more customers, impress customers with their brands, products and services and obtain feedback from them (Brodie et al., 2013), social media connect people from all over the world with little-to-no upfront costs (Keitzmann et al., 2011), facilitate communication between companies and customers (Brodie et al., 2013), and enable companies to learn about the needs and opinions of their customers (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008), which makes them increasingly popular among companies (Keitzmann et al., 2011).

As a result, recent studies indicate that the marketing investment towards social media is developing increasingly and companies are becoming more involved in online communities (Berthon et al., 2012), in order to establish relationships with existing and potential customers (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). With regard to brand community, it refers to "a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Companies, such as Apple and Whole Foods, keep an eye on social media to gather brand-customer information that can help make marketing decisions (Bolton et al., 2013). LaPointe (2012) finds that immersive or compelling firm-generated content as well as promotions and incentives are likely to attract consumers' attention. According to Fournier and Avery (2011), however, firm-generated content that is intended to boost intimate brand-consumer relationships is not always acceptable and welcomed by consumers on social media, and, as a result, the strategies tend to be ineffective in the long term. Similarly, Weinberg and Pehliyan (2011) find that if consumers are unwilling to interact with brands or they are not properly motivated to engage with brands on social media, the firm-generated content is considered intrusive and less likely to work.

On the other hand, social media offer platforms for Internet users to create and share information with others (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012). The user-generated content contains different topics, including products/services, brands and companies, and, therefore, is no longer the sole source of brand communication (Berthon et al., 2008). Previous studies demonstrate that consumers believe that social media is more trustworthy than traditional instruments of marketing communications (Karakaya and Barnes, 2010).

In summary, drawing on the literature above, social media brand communication can be defined as a creation and exchange of brand-related information between users and companies through Internet based applications and tools that build on the foundations of Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 6; Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

In the following sections the definitions of social media brand communication dimensions (firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication) are presented in detail.

2.3.3. Firm-generated social media brand communication

The main academic area of firm-generated social media brand communication originated from WOM and eWOM studies (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Firm-generated WOM is perceived to be a compound of traditional mass media advertising and consumer WOM, which is characterised by firm-initiated but consumer-implemented communication (Godes and Mayzlin, 2009). The firm-generated content on social media refers to the brand information, such as the pictures, specifications, and prices posted by companies on their social media pages, with the purpose of developing and maintaining one-on-one relationships with existing and potential customers and promoting their products (Kumar et al., 2016). Previous studies contend that it is effective to reduce information asymmetry when customers are seeking product information, as it helps them to make purchase decisions (Goh et al., 2013). Investing in building and developing a social media

brand community can reinforce firm-customer relationships as well as positively affect firms' profits and revenues (Kumar et al., 2016).

Unlike traditional media, the interactive feature of social media makes customers and firms mutually beneficial (Lea, 2012). Firstly, similar to the role of traditional media advertising in disseminating product information and driving sales (Vakratsas and ambler, 1999), social media firm-generated communication enables firms to inform their customers of products, services, and promotions and so on and so forth (Kumar et al., 2016). Furthermore, customers can like or comment on the firm-generated content posted on social media platforms, which offers an evaluation for other consumers to refer to (Kumar et al., 2016).

Concluding this discussion, the concept of the firm-generated social media brand communication can be defined as follows:

Firm-generated social media brand communication is a way of communicating that the information is brand-related, created by firms for the purpose of developing and maintaining one-on-one relationships with existing and potential customers by means of social media's interactive features (Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Kumar et al., 2016).

2.3.4. User-generated social media brand communication

User-generated social media brand communication has become increasingly popular due to the rapid growth of social network sites and online brand communities (Gangadharbatla, 2008). User-generated content originated from a niche activity motivated by long-tail distribution (Daugherty et al., 2008), characterised by participatory inequality that content creation only occurred among a few users (Ochoa and Duval, 2008). By means of the democratic feature of the Internet, however, it empowers more and more users to express their opinions publicly. Therefore, the influence of user-generated content becomes increasingly powerful, shifting from firm-generated content to opinion leaders among consumers (Daugherty et al., 2008).

User-generated content is defined as the content that users create, share and exchange with others and that is available publicly through social media (Payal et al., 2013). Similarly, user-generated content is the content that is generated, designed, published, or edited through the Internet by Internet users (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). According to the Interactive Advertising Bureau in the United States (2008, p. 45), user-generated content is defined as "any material created and uploaded to the Internet by non-media professionals." However, the description of 'non-media professionals' is controversial, and is considered flawed, since media professionals can take advantage of their expertise and experience to create user-generated content as consumers rather than working for their paid jobs (Christodoulides et al., 2012). Therefore, a wider notion of user-generated content defines users as ordinary people who represent the consumers of products/services (Cheong and Morrison, 2008). The widely acknowledged definition of user-generated content is derived from the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, p. 9), which, in 2007, defined user-generated content as "content that is made publicly available over the Internet; content that reflects a certain amount of creative effort; and content created outside professional routines and practices."

However, even the most cited OECD definition of user-generated content, is considered to contain a few flaws. For instance, not all user-generated content is publicly accessible, as some is only available in specified communities. Moreover, the OECD definition of user-generated content describes the Internet as the sole disseminative platform, which limits its effective range, as user-generated content is also driven by a number of other media-emerging and converging media, such as mobile applications, game consoles, satellite navigation services, and so on (Christodoulides et al., 2012). Thus, Christodoulides et al. (2012, p. 55) refines the OECD definition as "the consumer-created content that is made available through publicly accessible transmission media such as the Internet; reflects some degree of creative effort; and is created for free outside professional routines and practices." Therefore, user-generated content can be characterised by public accessibility; and at least partly the creative effort outside of users' professional routines (Christodoulides et al., 2012). Based on this definition, an existing advertisement shared on a user's Facebook timeline would not be considered user-generated

content, but the parody of an original advertisement by means of remixing images and sounds would be. In addition, user-generated content is the information uploaded and dissimilated online, which means that a parody of the advertisement stored on a user's personal laptop would not be regarded as user-generated content.

User-generated content is a crucial means through which consumers express themselves, communicate, and exchange information with other consumers online (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). According to Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2007), the content ranging from consumer comments, reviews, ratings, remix of brand information, to even artistic work, may contain both customer complaints and fan dedication. It can be visualised by various kinds of form, such as text, image, audio or video; for example, Facebook status updates, Twitter tweets, YouTube videos, and consumer-generated product reviews (Dhar and Chang, 2009). In addition, it is published not only through Web 2.0 platforms, such as review sites, blogs, video websites, and social networking sites, but also through mobile devices. These features make user-generated content a convenient and proper means of collecting brand-related conversation and customer insights (Payal et al., 2013). Marketers can figure out how consumers perceive their brands by constantly monitoring user-generated content regarding their brands, and, in turn, utilise this information to reinforce them (OECD, 2007). On the other hand, it also makes user-generated content a potential threat to consumer product companies, as user-generated content is outside of a company's direct control in terms of helping to establish, manage and protect their brands. In addition, user-generated content is perceived as being a more trustworthy and less biased source of information than firm-generated content and advertisements (Bergh et al., 2011). As a result, social media and user-generated content offers consumers the opportunity to damage the brands that they dislike.

Drawing on the above discussion, it is concluded the user-generated social media brand communication refers to a way of communicating that the information is brand-related, publicly available, reflecting some degree of creative effort, and generated outside professional routines through personal communication and information

exchange by means of the interactive nature of social media (OECD, 2007; Presi et al., 2014, p. 1600).

2.3.5. Co-creation of social media brand communication

User-generated content and firm-generated content are not absolutely separate, as, nowadays, the brand environment is a co-created one where marketers can interact with consumers (Fournier and Avery, 2011). Social media are considered excellent platforms for co-creation of brand communication due to the interactive characteristics; therefore, customers are encouraged to engage in co-creation of social media brand communication and are likely to be influenced by the brand perceptions of other consumers (Kamboj et al., 2018). Firm-generated content is able to elicit user-generated content by encouraging consumer creating, sharing, replying, and commenting on the firm-generated content. Therefore, some user-generated content is directly stimulated by marketers and is a sign of brand engagement (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010), which gives birth to a new form of brand-related content, i.e. the co-creation of brand-related content.

Based on Dichter's (1966) research on product- and message-involvements, it suggests that the product-related messages generated by a firm could motivate consumers to create and share WOM with others. In a similar vein, Ding et al. (2014) argue that product-related firm-generated content may stimulate customers to generate product-related content, because when consumers see product-related firm-generated content, such as product photos, feature or function introduction, they may be stimulated to share this information by adding their own feelings, suggestions or expectations about the product or the brand. For consumers who have used the product, seeing the product-related firm-generated content may motivate them to share their usage experience and evaluation with others.

According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), firm-generated social media brand communication can be used to motivate the user-generated content: marketers can build a framework or provide a platform so that consumers have access to express their opinions, reviews, experiences, and information about a brand, which contributes to building consumers' brand awareness, associations, recognition, and

empathy (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). Social media offer brands an approach to co-create brand stories with consumers through a higher level of brand-consumer interaction (Gensler et al., 2013). In other words, it is a way of customer-brand interaction that brand-related conversations can stimulate customers to integrate their own experiences and thoughts into the brand story by means of the interactive nature of social media (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). Such interactive communications can play a significant role in creating collaborative product innovation opportunities (Kozinets et al., 2010) and value co-creation (Gensler et al., 2013).

In the context of social media, it enables consumers to interact with brands quickly, and on a real-time basis, which facilitates value co-creation by communicating, providing feedback, interacting with the brand, and thus cooperating with the brand on the social media platform (Sashi, 2012). Companies can facilitate consumers' WOM about their brands by leaving and strengthening unforgettable impressions in consumers' minds (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Some examples for companies to motivate consumers to engage in social media brand communication are actions, such as regular updates of company websites, brand information, brand activity and so on in order to create indelible brand impressions (Bruhn et al., 2012).

In terms of the definition of co-creation, it is defined as "an active, creative, and social process based on collaboration between organisations and participants that generates benefits for all and creates value for stakeholders" (Ind et al., 2013, p. 9). Co-creation here is viewed as a collaboration with high creativity and involvement that leads to shared value. According to Vargo and Lusch (2004), co-creation refers to the consumer's participation in the whole process of value creation in the value chain. As Muniz and Schau (2007) suggest, providing access to the value production process and offering encouragement for consumers to create brand-related content may deepen the insight into co-creation. Co-creation involves all situations in terms of any kind of collaboration between consumers and companies for creating value, such as online content (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). The increasingly rising number of brand-related communications occurring online discloses that consumers have an interest in the co-creation of brand-related content (Wipperfurth, 2005).

Since consumers have become unsatisfied with the experience fabricated by companies, they would like to share experiences by means of the co-creation of content (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000).

In summary, the co-creation of social media brand communication can be defined as follows:

Co-creation of social media brand communication is a way of customer-brand interaction through which brand-related conversations enable and stimulate customers to integrate their own thoughts and experiences into the brand story by means of the interactive nature of social media (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012).

The following section reviews the motivations for users to engage in user-generated social media brand communication. As this study aimed to investigate the research topic from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers rather than the perspectives from the companies, the motivations for companies to engage in firm-generated social media brand communication and the motivations to engage in co-creation of social media brand communication are not investigated in this study.

2.4. MOTIVATIONS TO ENGAGE IN USER-GENERATED SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION

In the consumer behaviour literature, motivation means "the drives, urges, wishes or desires which initiate the sequence of events known as behaviour" (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989, p. 4). According to the motivation opportunity ability theory, the more motivation an individual has, the greater the amount of information the individual will process (Gruen et al., 2006). Furthermore, the amount of information that an individual processes depends on the individual's ability, motivation and opportunity to process it (Gruen et al., 2006; Payal et al., 2013). Hence, motivation, is defined as "the readiness, willingness, interest, and desire to engage in information processing" (Gruen et al., 2006, p. 452). In respect of eWOM, the motivation is to share brand-related information among consumers through the Internet (Gruen et al., 2006). In the context of social media brand communication, it is the motivation to create or

exchange brand-related information with other consumers through social media platforms.

Katz's (1960) functional theory is considered to be a necessary understanding of the sophisticated motivational sources and functions of attitude (Abelson and Prentice, 1989). Functional theory suggests that any given attitude provides one to four different personality functions, i.e. knowledge, utilitarian, value-expressive, and ego-defensive (Katz, 1960). The knowledge function acknowledges that individuals are stimulated by the need to acquire information to understand their environment. In other words, people are driven by the need to understand and make sense of their experiences. Therefore, the consumer's engagement in social media brand communication is to enable them to figure out their situation and the environment (Daugherty et al., 2008).

In contrast, the utilitarian function suggests that individuals are stimulated to obtain rewards from their environment (Katz, 1960). To be more specific, this function reveals the attitudes on the basis of self-interest. In terms of social media brand communication, this function serves as a driver for consumers to pursue personal benefits. In addition, the value-expressive function suggests that people are motivated by the need to show their values and self-concepts, which helps enhance one's image in the eyes of others by matching the information with social morality (Kumar et al., 2016). Therefore, it fulfils consumers' need for of self-esteem as they generate content so that they become members of an online community in which they share information that they consider important. As a result, it helps them feel good and confident about who they are in the world and what they believe. Finally, the ego-defensive function reveals the motivations for defending one's self-image, which serves as a safety measure to prevent people forming inner insecurities and exterior threats (Kumar et al., 2016). Therefore, consumers engage in social media brand communication to minimise their self-doubts and strengthen their sense of belonging.

In addition, the uses and gratifications theory is also considered helpful for exploring consumer motivations. It elaborates upon the motives and reasons behind an

individual's media choice and use, which is adopted to examine how and why people use the media to gratify their needs, to figure out the motivations of the behaviour, and to identify the consequences of the behaviour, as it assumes that individuals are active and selective in choosing the media that can fulfil their needs, and that they have awareness of the reasons for making media choices (Katz et al., 1973). Thus, it is widely accepted when investigating the Internet or social media use (Ruggiero, 2000). Previous studies demonstrate the applicability of the uses and gratifications theory in the research of social media. For example, Logan et al. (2012) contend that information and entertainment are both motivations for consumers' interaction with regard to advertisements on social media. Katz et al. (1973) identify a total of 35 needs that can motivate people to use certain media to meet their needs and divide them into five categories: personal integrative needs, cognitive needs, affective needs, social integrative, and tension release needs. McQuail (1983) verifies four motivations of media use: personal identity, integration and social interaction, information, and entertainment.

Furthermore, the expectation confirmation theory is also employed to explain the fundamental motive to engage in WOM, as WOM is motivated when consumers feel that their expectations are unconfirmed (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In conjunction with the utility typology identified by Sundaram et al. (1998), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) find that altruism, vengeance, self-enhancement, anxiety reduction, and social benefit are motivations to engage in WOM. Engel et al. (1995) identify four motivations for consumers to engage in WOM, namely, involvement, concern for others, self-enhancement, message intrigue, and dissonance reduction. In the context of social media, Presi et al. (2014) identify altruism, self-enhancement, vengeance, and economic motivation as drivers for user-generated content creation after a negative service experience. Payal et al. (2013) find that the motivations of consumers to exchange brand-related information with others on social media are altruism, vengeance, social benefit, advice seeking, and anxiety reduction.

Based on the existing literature, some widely acknowledged motivations for consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication (e.g. Azar et al., 2016; Payal et al., 2013; Presi et al., 2014) are summarised as follows:

Altruism – This is widely acknowledged as an intrinsic motivation for WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ho and Dempsey, 2010). According to Smith and Kollock (1999), altruism is a motivation that occurs spontaneously from wanting to help others. Altruistic acts are considered selfless actions that are based on affection and love, which may be the most relevant indicator of the need for affection (Ho and Dempsey, 2010).

Venting motivation – This refers to an expression of negative emotions and feelings, which help to reduce anger, tension, or frustration (Presi et al., 2014). Venting is different from altruism in that although the content a consumer shares may be helpful to others, venting is derived from an individual's need to express negative feelings as an approach to seeking consolation and releasing their own frustration, which does not necessarily indicate a desire to help others (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Vengeance – This is "the retaliatory feelings that consumers feel towards a firm, such as the desire to exert some harm on the firm, typically following an extremely negative purchase experience" (Bechwati and Morrin, 2003, p. 996). According to Zourrig et al. (2009), vengeance is considered to be a problem-focused strategy, in which consumers find solutions by means of vengeance, and create user-generated content to release the anger caused by the company. Although vengeance is closely related to venting, it is different, since venting is merely a way of releasing one's negative feelings or emotions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) or to 'blow off steam' (Bushman, 2002, p. 724) without aiming to do harm to a company purposefully, while vengeance is an individual's desire to seek revenge on a company that causes anger.

Self-enhancement – This refers to "enhancing images among other consumers by projecting themselves as intelligent shoppers", which drives users to engage in WOM so that they can project a desirable image of themselves (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Payal et al., 2013). Self-enhancers are more likely to exhibit success and deny responsibility for failures (Campbell and Sedikides, 1999). Generating

consumption-related WOM enables them to show connoisseurship, gain attention and imply superiority to others (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Economic motivation – This refers to "the degree to which the community members want to gain utilitarian rewards (e.g., monetary rewards, time savings, deals or incentives, merchandising and prizes) through their participation in the community" (Baldus et al., 2015, p. 981). Most economic motivations are described as economic incentives (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). According to Arnhold (2010), economic rewards usually incorporate monetary and signalling rewards which can motivate consumers to engage in social media brand communication, such as rating a product or writing a good review online.

In the following sections the definitions of the consumer-based brand equity and its elements (brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty) are provided.

2.5. DEFINING CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY

Due to the fierce competition in the marketplace nowadays, consumers are exposed to countless brands from all over the world, and, accordingly, building brand equity has become a vital source of differentiation. With the progressive opening of China as a market in keeping with the growing trend of globalisation, multinational companies have entered China increasingly frequently, and the rapidly growing number of brands and imported goods largely enhance Chinese consumers' brand consciousness, especially that of the young Chinese consumers (McEwen et al., 2006). Hence, in China, as it is the young consumers who have a higher inclination to spend (Stanat, 2006), it is necessary for businesses to target this segment to understand the behaviour of young Chinese consumers.

2.5.1. Brand equity

The term brand is defined as a combination of names, symbols, signs, packages, and designs through which consumers can identify the offerings of a certain company and distinguish these offerings from those of other competitors (American Marketing Association, 1960). A brand is considered an aggregation of emotional

and functional values, which are distinctive and unique and can offer consumers a favourable experience (De Chernatony et al., 2006). The emergence of brand equity has contributed to the significance of the marketing strategies and presented a focus for researchers and managers (Keller, 2003). Brand equity is a pivotal sign of the state of health of a brand, which is believed to be a crucial point in effective brand management (Aaker, 1991), and is a valuable source of competitive advantage (Khan et al., 2015). Creating and strengthening brand equity is a significant strategy for differentiating products in the marketplace, as it can offer sustainable competitive advantages (Bagozzi et al., 1998).

To be more specific, strong brand equity can lead to high consumer preferences and purchase intentions (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995), offer opportunities for resilience against competitor's promotional actions, and lead to successful brand extensions (Farquhar, 1989). Companies with high brand equity are more likely to have high stock returns (Aaker and Jacobson, 1994). Brand equity cannot be built in the short term but in the long term by means of elaborately designed marketing activities. Therefore, brand equity is durable and plays a crucial role in the development of companies (Yoo et al., 2000).

There is considerable debate with regard to the definition of brand equity (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). A basic idea of brand equity is that the strength of a brand is formed through what consumers have experienced and learned about the brand and is embedded in their minds over time (Bagozzi et al., 1998).

The most common view on brand equity seems to depart from Farquhar's (1989, p. 24) definition: "the added value with which a given brand endows a product." Most researchers have proposed similar definitions since then (e.g. Aaker, 1991; Ailawadi et al. 2003; Keller, 1993; Srivastava and Shocker, 1991). According to Aaker (1991), brand equity refers to "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers." Based on Keller (1993, p. 2), brand equity is defined as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand." Srivastava and Shocker (1991) propose a similar but more

output-orientated definition as "a set of associations and behaviours on the part of a brand's consumers, channel members and parent corporations that enable a brand to earn greater volume or greater margins than it could without the brand name and, in addition, provides a strong, sustainable and differential advantage." A more formal definition of brand equity is put forward by Ailawadi et al. (2003, p. 1), "the outcomes that accrue to a product with its brand name compared with those that would accrue if the same product did not have the brand name."

In terms of the measurement of brand equity, there is no consensus regarding the best measures to explain this multi-dimensional construct (Raggio and Leone, 2007). One main reason for the different approaches utilised to measure this construct is due to the financial perspective of brand equity (e.g. Haigh, 1999; Simon and Sullivan, 1993) and consumer-based perspectives (e.g. Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010). In terms of financial perspective, this is termed as firm-based brand equity, which refers to "the incremental cash flows which accrue to branded products over and above the cash flows which would result from the sale of unbranded products" (Simon and Sullivan, 1993, p. 29). From this perspective, it is based on the financial value that the brand creates for a company (Simon and Sullivan, 1993) and focuses on the financial influence of marketing activities on firm performance (Baldauf et al., 2003).

Although consumer-based brand equity highlights the conceptualisation and measurement on consumers (Leone, et al., 2006), according to Feldwick (1996), there are three different ways in which the construct 'brand equity' has been used. First, to indicate the total value of a brand; second, to signify the association and loyalty a consumer has to the brand; third, to measure the level of consumers' attachment to a brand. The first one concerns firm-based brand equity, while the other two are associated with consumer-based brand equity (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010). Although there are different research streams and approaches, an agreement is reached that brand equity refers to "the added value endowed by the brand to the product" (Farquhar, 1989, p. 7). This value can play a role in combining what happened to the brand in the past with what should happen to the brand in the future (Keller, 2003).

As this research focused on brand equity from the consumer-based perspective rather than financial perspective, the following sections review the definitions of consumer-based brand equity and its elements (brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty).

2.5.2. Consumer-based brand equity

Consumer-based brand equity becomes increasingly crucial in building brand equity due to the tendency for globalisation (Kim et al., 2009). Furthermore, with the expansion of global consumer cultures that share similar consumption-related values and symbols, it provides companies with the opportunity to expand brand equity to competitive international markets (Zou and Cavusgil, 2002). Consumer-based brand equity plays a significant role in brand management. It contributes to higher profits, lower costs, greater revenues (Keller, 1993), enhances the effectiveness of the company's communication campaigns, decreases the company's vulnerability to competition (Bendixen et al., 2004), and provides a trade leverage (Pouromid and Iranzadeh, 2012). Therefore consumer-based brand equity has received considerable attention from academics and industries for decades.

Consumer-based brand equity research is mainly rooted in the area of information economics and customer psychology (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010). The information economics perspective mainly focuses on the asymmetrical and imperfect nature of markets (Erdem and Swait, 1998), in which economic agents are required to convey information about certain attributes of a brand through signals. For example, brand name is one of the signals that can transmit information to consumers (Erdem et al., 2006). As asymmetrical and imperfect market information triggers uncertainty in consumers' minds, brand signal can bring about consumer value by creating desirable attribute perceptions, lowering perceived risk, and reducing information search cost (Erdem and Swait, 1998). Under this approach, Erdem and Swait (1998) define consumer-based brand equity as the value of a brand signal to consumers. Lassar et al. (1995) define it as "the enhancement in the perceived utility and desirability a brand name confers on a product" (p. 10). Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010, p. 8) define it as "a set of perceptions, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours on the part of consumers that results in

increased utility and allows a brand to earn greater volume or greater margins than it could without the brand name." Vazquez et al. (2002, p. 28) define it as an "overall utility that the consumer associates to the use and consumption of the brand; including associations expressing both functional and symbolic utilities."

From the consumer psychology perspective, there are two main conceptual frameworks of consumer-based brand equity from the existing literature. One is proposed by Keller (1993, p. 2) who defines it as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand." Based on this conceptualisation, a brand has a positive or negative value from consumers' perspectives in that consumers react more or less favourably to the marketing mix for a product or brand the name of which they know than to an unbranded product having an identical marketing mix. Consumers' reaction to the marketing mix of a brand can be interpreted at different phases of the process of a consumer's purchase decision-making, such as purchase intention, preference, or final purchase. Furthermore, brand knowledge is a key antecedent of consumer-based brand equity and it is descriptive and evaluative information about a brand, product/service kept in the consumer's mind (Keller, 1993). He further explains that it is only when consumers are aware of the existence of a brand and have knowledge about the brand that they may recognise or recall the brand image. Therefore, brand awareness alone cannot fully measure brand equity, but only when combining it with brand image (Das et al., 2012). As a result, brand knowledge is decomposed into two separate constructs: brand awareness (recall and recognition) and brand image (a combination of the strength, favourability, and uniqueness of brand associations) (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995).

The other conceptual framework that is considered to be a widely accepted conceptualisation of consumer-based brand equity is that put forward by Aaker (1991, p. 15), who defines it as "a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers." These assets are brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and other proprietary assets. Aaker is one of the few authors to encompass both attitudinal and behavioural

metrics in the definition (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995). According to Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995), there are some advantages to incorporating both consumer perceptions and actions into a single marketing measure of brand equity. It is widely acknowledged that attitude alone is an unconvincing predictor of consumer behaviour. On the other hand, perception is always a precursor to behaviour. As is demonstrated by Biel (1992, p. RC7-RC8), "consumer behaviour is, at root, driven by perceptions of a brand. While behavioural measures of purchase describe the existence of equity, they fail to reveal what is in the hearts and minds of consumers that is actually driving equity."

With respect to Aaker's (1991) five core brand equity metrics, the first four metrics, namely, brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty, and perceived quality are related to consumer-based brand equity, while the last metric, other proprietary assets, is not pertinent to a consumer's perspective (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Some empirical research supports that the aforementioned four metrics consist of consumer-based brand equity (Pappu et al., 2006). Therefore, Pappu et al. (2006, p. 698) adapted Aaker's (1991) definition of brand equity and defined consumer-based brand equity as "the value consumers associate with a brand, as reflected in the dimensions of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty." This study uses the consumer-based brand equity measure that consists of four constructs: brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty to investigate how social media brand communication impact consumer-based brand equity from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. These brand equity metrics are widely used by numerous researchers (e.g. Kim and Hyun, 2011; Pappu et al., 2005; Yoo et al., 2000).

Concluding this discussion, consumer-based brand equity can be defined as the customers' familiarity with the brand and associations with its value, which is reflected by the metrics of brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Pappu et al., 2006).

2.5.3. Brand awareness

Brand awareness is defined as the "strength of a brand's presence in the consumers' mind" (Aaker, 1991, p. 10) and "the ability of the potential buyer to recognise and recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category" (Aaker, 1991, p. 61). There are two main purposes in branding: labelling a product through marketing also makes consumers aware of this label (Hutter et al., 2013). The recognition and recall of a brand results from the consumer's prolonged exposure to the brand (Keller, 2003). Similarly, Keller (1993) defines brand awareness as the strength of a consumer's ability to recall and recognise the favourable attributes of a brand. On the basis of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), Pappu et al. (2006, p. 21) define it as "the ability of a potential buyer to recognise or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category. A link between product class and brand is involved."

According to Aaker (1991), brand awareness has different levels including 'non-brand recognition', 'recall a brand', 'brand recognition', and culminating in 'top of mind'. The level of 'non-brand recognition' refers to a brand for which consumers have no impression. The level of 'recall a brand' refers to the case that consumers do not recognise a brand spontaneously, but they will be aware of the brand after being reminded (Aaker, 1991). For example, brand name is one of the most important elements of brand awareness (Davis et al., 2008). It provides a symbol that helps consumers to identify product or service providers and to predict product or service results (Janiszewski and Osselaer, 2000). At the level of 'brand recognition', consumers can recognise the brand when it is associated with a particular product. A brand in the category of 'top of mind' is one in which the brand name can be automatically recollected due to a consumer's quick association of the brand with the product category (Aaker, 1991).

According to Keller (2001), building brand awareness is the first step to make a brand identifiable to consumers and the first step in building brand equity, as it can influence the development and depth of brand association, which is a higher level of cognition than brand awareness. In other words, it can create association with a brand in a consumer's memory with a certain product category. Building brand awareness can assist customers to understand the brands competing in a certain

product category and to link products with brand names. As a result, brand awareness can affect the formation and strength of brand associations. According to Keller (2008), the presence of the brand in consumers' minds is a necessary premise for consumers to form associations with the brand and the strength of the presence determines how easily different kinds of information can build consumers' awareness of the brand. Brand awareness originates from anything that leads consumers to experience the brand such as advertisements, publicity, promotion, public relations, and so on. Social media plays an important role in exposing consumers to the information regarding the brand and then forming brand awareness. As a result, the more actively consumers engage in the brand activities on social media, the higher the awareness of the brand (Hutter et al., 2013).

In summary, it is concluded that brand awareness refers to the strength of the presence of a brand in the consumers' memory and the ability of consumers to recognise or recall a brand in its product category (Aaker, 1996; Pappu et al., 2005).

The following section reviews another dimension of consumer-based brand equity – brand association – which is closely related to brand awareness, since both dimensions are derived from consumers' exposure to a brand (Fournier, 1998).

2.5.4. Brand association

Brand association can contain the profile of the product, corporate image, symbols and signs, consumer's conditions, and brand characteristics (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). In other words, it means "anything linked to the memory of a brand" (Aaker, 1991, p. 109), which plays a crucial role in creating meaning for the brands in consumers' minds (Aaker, 1991). Memory refers to an accrual of knowledge formed in an associative network of connections (Hintzman, 1986). Based on this notion of memory, brand associations are supposed to act like a series of information neurons connected to the main neuron that involves the network of brand knowledge in memory (Keller, 2008).

Brand associations can be associated with product performance, such as attributes, features, or benefits through which consumers can build a connection to a brand or

differentiate it from other competitive brands (Dillon et al., 2001). Therefore, it is closely related with brand awareness, as both dimensions originate from consumers' contact with the brand (Fournier, 1998). However, consumers must first be aware of the brand before they can have a set of associations about the brand (Aaker, 1991). In other words, brand associations result in brand awareness (Yoo et al., 2000). According to Yoo et al. (2000), brand associations comprise multiple ideas, experiences, events and facts that consist of a reservoir of brand knowledge. Therefore, they are significant in brand differentiation and positioning, developing favourable consumer attitudes towards the brand (Low and Lamb, 2000), and stimulating consumers' purchase behaviour (Osselaer and Alba, 2000). As Keller (1998) suggests, "to create brand equity, the uniqueness, desire and power of brand associations is necessary."

In addition, brand associations will become stronger and stronger due to the accumulation of experiences and exposures to communications (Aaker, 1991). Each new experience regarding the brand generates, enhances, or modifies individual relationships (Keller and Moorthi, 2003), as well as builds a wide variety of classifications with regard to product features and attributes, consumer types, lifestyles, and so on and so forth (Aaker, 1991). Therefore, brand associations enable consumers to obtain and process information, distinguish between brands, and form perceptions about brands, which may lead to consumers' purchase behaviour (Aaker, 1991).

Drawing on the above discussion, brand association can be defined as follows:

Brand association is anything in the consumers' memory that can be linked to a brand, including attributes of the product/service, reputation of the company, and characteristics of the brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Wang and Li, 2012).

The next section reviews another dimension of consumer-based brand equity – perceived quality – which has a close relationship with brand association, as it is another brand association, but also has special significance for the establishment of brand equity (Aaker, 1991).

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2.5.5. Perceived quality

Perceived quality is a key dimension of consumer-based brand equity, since it can influence brand choice and purchase intention (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993). Perceived quality is defined as the "customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose relative to alternatives" (Aaker, 1991, p. 85). According to Aaker (1991), perceived quality is not merely another brand association, but an association regarded as having special significance, and, thus, it becomes a separate dimension of brand equity. Zeithaml (1988, p. 3) defines perceived quality as "the consumer's (subjective) judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority." Zeithaml regards perceived quality as an essential element of brand value (Yoo et al., 2000). Similarly, Bhuian (1997) defines perceived quality as consumers' judgment concerning the added value of a product. Perceived quality is not only a requirement of satisfaction (Syzmanski and Henard, 2001), but also a requirement of perceived value (Boo et al., 2009). High quality perception occurs when consumers recognise the benefits and advantages of a certain brand compared to other brands (Yasin et al., 2007), which can positively influence their purchase decisions and motivate them to select this brand over other competing ones (Murtiasih et al., 2014).

Generally, the perceptions of product quality in consumers' minds are formed by their direct experience of product usage, and when there is uncertainty concerning the quality of a product, consumers tend to perceive the quality of brands through external cues, such as product design, packaging, consumption environment, and advertisements (Kirmani and Rao, 2000), which indicates that perceived quality is not only the real quality or performance of a product but also consumers' subjective assessments of the product (Zeithaml, 1988). According to Aaker (1996), perceived quality is different from real quality; the reasons being as follows: first, it is hard for consumers to hold sufficient information about product quality, as they may lack the time or motivation to do further investigation, and, therefore, they can only make judgment on the basis of limited information; second, a previous unfavourable impression of a product will affect consumers' judgement on product quality in the future, and even when the quality has improved, consumers will still not trust the quality of the product. Besides, perceived quality is a relative concept that contains

comparative, individual, and situational attributes. Perceived quality is likely to be influenced by various factors, such as perceived risk, previous experience, and educational level, and situational variables, such as purchase purpose, purchase situation, social background and time pressure (Holbrook and Corfman, 1985).

According to Zeithaml (1988), consumers rely on two categories of cues to evaluate the product quality. First, intrinsic cues, which can reveal the product's physical attributes and features, which can be perceived by consumer's previous experiences and feelings. Second, extrinsic cues that are not part of the physical product itself but the information obtained from the environment, such as advertisements, WOM, and so on. Regarding the measures of perceived quality, there are a number of factors to consider, such as durability, reliability, performance, appearance, and so on (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Garvin (1983) argues that perceived quality is based on consumers' recognition while objective quality is based on product orientation. The major difference between objective quality and perceived quality lies in the fact that perceived quality is affected by the internal and external product attributes, which can be assessed by consumers, while objective quality has a pre-design standard to the product (Zeithaml, 1988).

Based on the theories of consumer memory, especially the expectancy value theory and the means-end chain model, they formulate useful frameworks to elaborate how perceived quality judgments are formed. Quality judgments can be deduced from direct experience with a brand, and the judgments from direct experience tend to be stronger and more accessible in consumers' memories (Fazio and Zanna, 1981). Consistent with the expectancy value theory, Keller (1993) suggests that brand associations exist in different levels of abstraction where brand attributes, benefits, and overall affective brand attitude indicate the levels with hierarchy. The overall affective brand attitude can be manifested by the core consumer-based brand equity dimension perceived quality, as it is an incremental function of the attributes and benefits supported in the expectancy value theory (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). The means-end chain model suggests that consumers' cognitive structures possess brand-related information in their memory at different levels of abstraction (Zeithaml, 1988). At the simpler levels, brand attributes indicate quality benefits, such as

practical and functional benefits that contribute to an overall value of using the brand (Netemeyer et al., 2004).

Drawing on the argument above, in this research perceived quality refers to consumers' perception and evaluation of the overall quality or excellence of a product/service according to some desired objectives (Aaker, 1991; Bhuian, 1997; Moradi and Zarei, 2012).

The following section reviews another dimension of consumer-based brand equity – brand loyalty – which is closely related to perceived quality, as many researchers demonstrate that perceived quality has a positive impact on brand loyalty (e.g. Girard et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2015; Kim and Lee, 2018).

2.5.6. Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is generally acknowledged as being a key dimension of brand equity (Torres et al., 2015). It is acknowledged to be the company's most enduring asset as well as the primary goal of relationship marketing (Pan et al., 2012). According to Jacoby and Kyner (1973), brand loyalty is a form of consumers' reflection or attitudes and a psychological process. Similarly, Deighton et al. (1994) define brand loyalty as the attitudes of consumers towards a specific brand that they prefer. These authors define brand loyalty from the perspective of attitude while others define it from the perspectives of both attitude and consumer behaviour. For example, Aaker (1996) defines brand loyalty as a profound relationship between the consumer and the brand, which is manifested by re-purchasing or re-patronising a preferred product/service and, invariably, in the future.

Brand loyalty is also defined as the consumer's commitment to a favourable evaluation of the brand and repeated purchases (Mustafa, 1999), and it provides a simplifying heuristic way of choosing a certain brand from among other competing ones (Netemeyer et al., 2004). According to Yoo and Donthu (2001, p. 3), it refers to "the tendency to be loyal to a focal brand, which is demonstrated by the intention to buy the brand as a primary choice." In a similar way, Oliver (1997, p. 392) describes brand loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronise a preferred

product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour." According to Oliver (1999), brand loyalty contains both behavioural factors and attitudinal factors, as behavioural loyalty represents repurchase behaviour, and attitude loyalty refers to the psychological commitment to a brand (Oliver, 1999). Therefore, purchase frequency is not identical to loyalty, for example, consumers may repurchase a product not because they like it but due to the factor of convenience (Tseng et al., 2004). According to Jones and Sasser (1995), loyalty can be divided into short-term loyalty and long-term loyalty. They argue that short-term loyalty is not real brand loyalty as a real loyal customer will keep buying this brand in the long term and will not switch to other brands even if there is a better choice. In a similar vein, Bloemer and Kasper (1995) argue that real brand loyalty should contain brand preference and repurchase behaviour, which are presented in the long term.

Based on these definitions of brand loyalty, it is easy to see that loyalty is measured by attitude or behaviour. Attitudinal loyalty contains a degree of dispositional commitment to a brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001), which arouses consumers' willingness to purchase products of preferred brands at a higher price than similar products of other brands as well as motivates consumers to overcome obstacles to purchase (Bandyopadhyay and Martell, 2007), while behavioural loyalty is typically characterised by repeat purchase (Grassl, 1999). Although one is not absolutely superior to the other, it is obvious that these two kinds of measure are distinct (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973), and both aspects of brand loyalty are significant, especially for young consumers (Lazarevic, 2012). For example, young consumers may reveal behavioural loyalty by purchasing an Apple iPhone when there is a lack of alternatives on the market, but, on the other hand, the attitudinal loyalty will lead young consumers not to purchase alternatives even if they are available on the market or if the iPhone is not available. This is because attitudinal loyalty is psychological and assessable, which builds the relationship and congruency with a brand (Lazarevic, 2012). According to Oliver (1999), it is the attitudinal loyalty that leads to loyal behaviours and guarantees the re-purchase over time. However, some authors argue that not all repeated purchases are the result of attitudinal loyalty, as

some behavioural loyalty can exist without attitudinal loyalty, such as habit (e.g. Dick and Basu, 1994; Liu-Thompkins and Tam, 2013).

In terms of consumer preferences, brand loyalty plays an important role in many markets, since it creates switching costs, which makes consumers unwilling to try other brands (Aaker, 1991). As Hansen and Hem (2004) find, if consumers are fully committed to a certain brand, it could motivate them to maintain the relationship between the brand and themselves. If customers are loyal to a brand, although other brands having similar characteristics may be cheaper or superior, consumers will still maintain loyalty to their preferred brands (Atilgan et al., 2005). Yoo and Donthu (2001) claim that brand loyalty indicates the motivation of consumers to be loyal to a brand, and that it can be demonstrated when consumers select a certain brand as their first choice. Besides, maintaining existing customers is less expensive than acquiring new ones (Oliver, 1999). Profit rises over time as companies do not need to spend as much per customer on maintaining the relationship with them, and loyal customers spend more money than the non-loyal ones (Rundle-Thiele and Bennett, 2001).

According to Aaker (1996) and Keller (2003), brand loyalty aims at building long-term firm relationship between consumers and the brand, which can be proved by consumer's repeated purchase intentions. From Keller and Moorthi's (2003) perspective, consumers who are loyal to a brand do not evaluate the attributes of product, but simply choose the brand they are loyal to as a result of positive feelings or attitude towards the brand. The overall positive assessment emerges from previous experience with the product. In addition, loyal customers are more likely to accept product extensions, and be immune to competing product's price cutting or switch to new products in the same category (Farquhar, 1989). Therefore, brand loyalty is desirable for companies.

In summary, it can be concluded that brand loyalty can be defined as a favourable relationship between the consumer and the brand and is a commitment held by consumers to repatronise or rebuy a certain brand constantly in the future as well as

treat it as the first choice to purchase (Aaker, 1996; Oliver, 1997; Wang and Li, 2012).

The following section reviews the definitions of purchase intention, which is related to the above discussed consumer-based brand equity dimensions, as purchase intention is considered to be a consequence of consumer-based brand equity dimensions (e.g. Hutter et al., 2013; Sasirekha and Sathish, 2017; Yoo and Donthu, 2001).

2.6. DEFINING PURCHASE INTENTION

Engel et al. (1995) propose the most widely acknowledged model of consumer purchase decision-making, which contains five phases: (1) problem recognition, (2) information search, (3) alternative evaluation, (4) purchase decision, and (5) post-purchase behaviour. When consumers need or want to have a certain product, they usually begin to search for information about the product, and then try to assess available alternative brands before making a final decision to purchase the product (Engel et al., 1995). Purchase intention is considered as a personal preference of consumers towards a certain product, which is demonstrated to be a significant predictor of consumer behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Zeithaml et al. (1996) define purchase intention as the likelihood of consumers regarding purchasing products/services in the same shop and sharing their experience of usage with others. Similarly, it is defined as a mental stage in the purchase decision-making process where consumers become willing to purchase the product (Wells et al., 2011). Kimery and McCord (2000) claim that it is difficult to measure consumer purchase behaviour, but that it can be predicted by the variable of purchase intention. According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2000), purchase intention can be measured by the probability of consumers buying a product, and, the higher the purchase intention is, the higher the probability of purchasing the product. According to Zeithaml (1988), purchase intention can be measured by the possibility to buy, considering to buy, and intending to buy.

Purchase intention has long been utilised as a predictor of consumer-based brand equity studies (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Khan et al., 2015), such as studies exploring the roles of various dimensions of consumer-based brand equity (e.g. Aaker, 1996;

Wang and Li, 2012). Thus, purchase intention is encompassed in the conceptual framework to represent the outcome of consumer-based brand equity.

Drawing on the argument above, in this study purchase intention is defined as the personal preference of consumers towards a certain product or service or the likelihood to purchase a certain brand (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Payal et al., 2013).

The next section reviews the definition of country-of-origin, which is also related to the consumer-based brand equity dimensions, as country-of-origin is a secondary association to brand associations, and, thus, could affect brand equity (Keller, 1993).

2.7. DEFINING COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN

Country-of-origin effects have been of interest among researchers worldwide for more than five decades. Several constructs with similar definitions can be found in the literature, such as 'country-of-origin', 'country image', 'made-in country image', and 'product country image' (Tseng, 2012). Early studies define country-of-origin as the picture, stereotype and reputation that consumers and business people associate with a product from a certain country (Nagashima, 1970). According to Roth and Romeo (1992), country-of-origin refers to consumers' overall perceptions and feelings about products from a particular country, which are based on their previous perceptions and evaluations of this country's production advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, with the growing trend of globalisation, 'made in…' no longer merely means manufactured-in, it can also mean invented-, designed-, or assembled-in a certain country (Tseng, 2012). For example, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (2005) defined product country-of-origin as any packaging, labelling, logo or advertising that can state, claim or indicate which country products originate from.

In order to make this research as precise as possible, it is vital to clarify the concept of country-of-origin in this thesis. It refers to the brand-specific country-of-origin image rather than the product-specific country-of-origin image, or assembly-specific country-of-origin image. As this research concerns the branding of international high street fashion companies, it is proper to use the concept of country of brand rather than country of assembly, or country of manufacture.

The influence of country-of-origin on consumers' perceptions of products is called the 'country-of-origin effect' (Samiee, 1994). It is generally accepted by consumer behaviour researchers that the country-of-origin effect is one of the important factors affecting brand equity (Knight, 1999; Pappu et al., 2006). According to Aaker (1991), country-of-origin is able to form an association embedded in consumers' minds. This association is derived from consumers' stereotypes about a country, which, in turn, influence consumers' perceptions of the brand. Keller (1993) argues that associations of country-of-origin are secondary associations to brand associations, and, hence, could impact brand equity. Paswan and Sharma (2004) demonstrate that consumers' awareness of country-of-origin of a brand has an influence on brand image. If consumers do not know the country-of-origin of the brand, their evaluation of the brand will be reduced. Leclerc et al. (1994) find that even a foreign-sounding name of a brand may have an influence on brand equity.

Country-of-origin is not only a cognitive indicator for the quality of a product, but is also related to identity, emotions, and pride (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). Some researchers argue that consumers in developing countries, especially in emerging markets have become increasingly interested in status-conscious and materialistic consumption (Sharma, 2011; Wong and Ahuvia, 1998), as purchasing and using well-known foreign brands can manifest the consumers' achievement in terms of wealth (Wang and Yang, 2008). According to Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001), and Batra et al. (2000), there are several reasons that the country-of-origin image is stronger in developing countries than in developed countries.

First, previous studies have demonstrated that the level of economic development of a country has a positive impact on the evaluations of the product from this country, which is called 'a hierarchy of biases', and, therefore, consumers in developing countries are inclined to hold the view that the products from developed countries are of better quality than the domestic goods (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001). Second, the products imported from developed countries are usually more expensive and rarer than the domestic products in developing countries, thus consumers in developing countries tend to believe that products made in developed countries are

of better quality than the domestic products (Batra et al., 2000). Third, consumers in developing countries are likely to harbour a sense of low self-esteem and insecurity, since their living standard is lower than those in developed countries, and, hence, they admire or even envy the lifestyle of those in developed countries. As a result, they try to imitate the way of consumption in developed countries by purchasing foreign brands, especially the luxury brands (Batra et al., 2000).

In summary, drawing on the literature above, it is concluded that country-of-origin refers to not only the tangible cues, such as the packaging, logo, and labelling concerning which country the product originates from, but also intangible cues, such as emotion, feelings, and perception about the country the product comes from (Roth and Romeo, 1992; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999).

2.8. SUMMARY

Social media brand communication, as a key construct of this study, has been discussed, mainly on the basis of a review of the literature on WOM, eWOM, firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication, the concept and influences of which are discussed in order to review the development of research on this topic. Then the motivation of user-generated social media brand communication is reviewed. According to previous research (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015), social media brand communication is composed of firm-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication, which are considered to be two separate independent variables. However, another pattern of social media brand communication exists, which is the co-creation of firm-generated and user-generated social media brand communication, as firm-generated social media communication has a certain ability to affect consumer-to-consumer communications (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). For instance, firm-generated social media communication can be utilised to spur user-generated social media brand communication: marketers can build a framework or provide a platform so that consumers have access to express their ideas, opinions, experiences, and information about a brand (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). This study,

therefore, reviews the concepts, features and influences of co-creation of the social media brand communication.

Moreover, consumer-based brand equity, the other key construct of this research, is discussed, mainly on the basis of a review of the literature on brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. The concept and relationship among these dimensions of consumer-based brand equity are reviewed. In addition, the concept of purchase intention and its relationship with consumer-based brand equity dimensions are reviewed. Finally, the concept of country-of-origin and its relationship with consumer-based brand equity dimensions are reviewed.

In the next chapter, the conceptual framework of this study will be elaborated on the basis of the proposed research hypotheses. The development of the hypotheses will be presented with related supporting theories. The relationships are discussed between the social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the relationships among country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions and purchase intention, and the relationships among the dimensions of motivation of user-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed the existing literature regarding social media brand communication (user-generated social media brand communication, firm-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication), consumer-based brand equity (brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty), country-of-origin, purchase intention, and the motivations of consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication (altruism, venting motivation, vengeance, self-enhancement, and economic motivation).

This chapter depicts the proposed conceptual framework, consisting of a number of hypotheses, which are conceptually related to each other. Section 3.2 presents the research framework and hypotheses' development. Section 3.3 depicts the motivations of consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication. Section 3.4 discusses the relationships between social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions. Section 3.5 elaborates the causal relationships between the consumer-based brand equity dimensions. Section 3.6 depicts the relationships between consumer-based brand equity dimensions and purchase intention. Section 3.7 discusses the relationships between country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity dimensions. Finally, Section 3.8 offers a summary of conclusions.

3.2. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES' DEVELOPMENT

According to the research findings from the existing literature, some factors are demonstrated as the motivations of consumers to engage in social media brand communication. However, these motivations are examined in other countries rather

than China and not from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. Therefore, these proven hypotheses are reused in this study to investigate whether these relationships also exist in China.

Furthermore, based on the existing literature on social media brand communication, some researchers find that social media brand communication dimensions have a positive influence on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). These studies, however, consider social media brand communication as being composed of two separate independent variables – firm-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication. However, firm-generated social media brand communication has a certain ability to affect consumer-to-consumer communications (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Firm-generated social media brand communication is able to elicit user-generated social media brand communication by encouraging consumer creating, commenting, sharing or replying to the firm-generated content. Therefore, some user-generated social media brand communication is directly stimulated by marketers and is a sign of brand engagement (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010), which gives birth to a new form of brand-related content, i.e. the co-creation of user-generated and firm-generated content. Hence, this study attempts to investigate the relationships between the metrics of social media brand communication (user-generated social media brand communication, firm-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication) and the metrics of consumer-based brand equity (brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty).

In addition, according to Aaker (1991, p. 15), brand equity refers to "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers." Brand awareness is the foundation of the overall brand equity metrics, and, therefore, brand association relies on the existence of brand awareness, as brand associations can be shaped on the basis of the consumers' awareness of the brand name (Tong and Hawley, 2009). Perceived quality is influenced by brand awareness, because a visible brand may be regarded as being more likely to offer

superior quality (Zeithaml, 1988), while brand loyalty can be influenced by the other three dimensions, i.e. brand awareness, brand association, and perceived quality (Yoo and Donthu, 2002). Some researchers find that brand awareness and brand association positively affect brand loyalty and perceived quality (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015), and that perceived quality has a positive impact on brand loyalty (Khan et al., 2015). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the causal relationships between the metrics of consumer-based brand equity in the research setting of China.

Moreover, purchase intention has long been utilised as a predictor of consumer behaviour in marketing communication studies (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Payal et al., 2013) as well as consumer-based brand equity studies (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Khan et al., 2015), such as studies exploring the roles of various dimensions of consumer-based brand equity (e.g. Aaker, 1996; Wang and Li, 2012). According to Khan et al. (2015), both perceived quality and brand loyalty influence purchase intention. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the relationships among the consumer-based brand equity dimensions and purchase intention.

According to Roth and Romeo (1992), country-of-origin refers to consumers' overall perceptions and feelings of products from a particular country, based on their previous perceptions and evaluations of this country's production advantages and disadvantages. It is generally accepted by consumer behaviour researchers that the country-of-origin effect is one of the key factors affecting brand equity (Knight, 1999; Pappu et al., 2006). According to Aaker (1991), country-of-origin is able to form an association embedded in consumers' minds, which is derived from consumers' stereotypes about a country, and, in turn, influences consumers' perceptions of the brand. Some researchers argue that consumers in developing countries, especially in emerging markets, have become increasingly status-conscious and interested in materialistic consumption (Sharma, 2011; Wong and Ahuvia, 1998), as purchasing and using well-known foreign brands can display a consumer's wealth (Wang and Yang, 2008). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationships among country-of-origin and the metrics of consumer-based brand equity.

In this chapter, the aforementioned hypothesised relationships are based on the existing literature, and the conceptual framework of these relationships of this research is based on the literature regarding the motivations of consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication based on the uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1974), motivation opportunity ability theory (Gruen et al., 2006), functional theory (Katz, 1960), and expectation confirmation theory (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), which constitute altruism, venting, vengeance, self-enhancement, and economic motivation, and serve as the antecedents of this conceptual framework.

The framework of the relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions is adapted from the model from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), as the dimension of co-creation of social media brand communication is added into this conceptual model. Thus, the modified conceptual model differentiates among firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication in order to take account of every different kind of social media communication. The theoretical foundation of the relationship between communication and consumer-based brand equity is the Schema Theory (Eysenck, 1984), which suggests that consumers are likely to compare communication stimuli with existing knowledge of communication activities, and that the degree of compatibility influences the following treatment of stimulation and the formation of attitude of the recipients. Communication stimuli, thus, can lead to a positive impact on consumers, and the consumers' perception of the communication can positively affect their awareness and image of a brand. As a result, brand communication can positively influence consumer-based brand equity as long as the communication stimuli contribute to a favourable attitude towards the branded product compared to the equivalent non-branded product (Yoo et al., 2000). Social media brand communication therefore plays an important role in building up brand equity by raising the possibility that a brand will be involved in the consumer's consideration set, thereby simplifying the process of brand selection, and converting the choice into a habit (Yoo et al., 2000).

Moreover, this research aims to explore the causal relationships among the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity. Thus, the framework of this research indicates the causal order of consumer-based brand equity as a consumer learning process. Besides, the relationships among the consumer-based brand equity dimensions are adapted from the Schivinski and Dabrowski's (2015) framework. Based on the traditional hierarchy of effects model, also known as the standard learning hierarchy (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975), which suggests that the orders of the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity are considered to be a consumer learning process, this research aims to identify the causal relationships among the metrics of consumer-based brand equity. The learning process of the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity starts with making consumers aware of a brand and then increasing consumers' association with the brand, and, once the brand awareness and brand associations are established, the continuous communication with the brand will influence consumers' perceptions of brand quality as well as brand loyalty (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). In addition, it explores the relationships between the consumer-based brand equity dimensions and purchase intention, which is regarded as the proposed outcome of consumer-based brand equity, and the influence of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity dimensions. To the best knowledge of the author, no prior research has investigated the aforementioned relationships at one time and in the context of China. Therefore, this study will investigate the relationships among all these concepts.

Figure 3.1 (overleaf) illustrates the conceptual model of this study, which hypothesises the links among user-generated social media brand communication and the motivations of consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, which serves as the proposed antecedent factors of user-generated social media brand communication. The model also considers the impact of the social media brand communication dimensions on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions. In line with previous conceptualisations and operationalisations of Aaker's (1991) framework, which is the most accepted model among researchers (e.g. Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), this research conceptualises consumer-based brand equity as a multidimensional construct comprising four reflective first-order factors: brand awareness, brand association,

brand loyalty, and perceived quality. Different from Arnett et al. (2003), who merge the four metrics to become one index, this research specifies consumer-based brand equity as a latent model, which is the same as Schivinski and Dabrowski's (2015) model. This specification is proper not only due to the interrelated nature of the consumer-based brand equity metrics but also because the overall formative index makes it hard to represent an exact account of the relationships among the metrics from a measurement theory perspective (Arnett et al., 2003).

Figure 3.1: Conceptual model
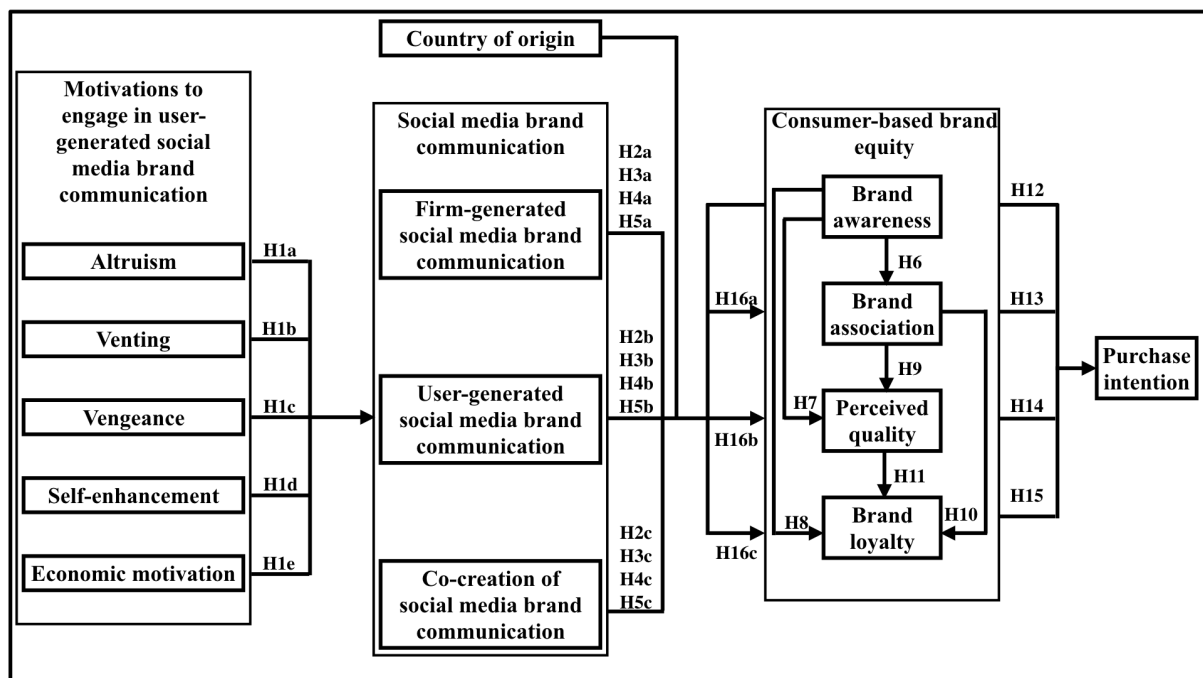
Source: developed by the researcher

The next section sequentially discusses the literature regarding the motivations of consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, the relationships between social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the relationships between consumer-based brand equity metrics and purchase intention, and the relationships between country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity metrics. The research hypotheses are presented at the end of each relationship.

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3.3. MOTIVATIONS OF CONSUMERS TO ENGAGE IN USER-GENERATED SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION

In order to explain the relationship that seems to exist between user-generated social media brand communication and the motivations of consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, the motivation opportunity ability theory is applied. According to the theory, the more motivation an individual has, the greater the amount of information the individual will process (Gruen et al., 2006). Therefore, motivation is defined as "the readiness, willingness, interest, and desire to engage in information processing" (Gruen et al., 2006, p. 452). In terms of the social media brand communication, it is the motivation to create, share, or exchange brand-related information with other consumers through social media platforms.

In addition, the functional theory is also relevant, which suggests that any given attitude provides one to four different personality functions, i.e. knowledge, utilitarian, value-expressive, and ego-defensive functions (Katz, 1960). The knowledge function acknowledges that people are motivated by the need to obtain information to understand and organise their environment, and, therefore it enables consumers to figure out their environment through social media brand communication, whereas the utilitarian function suggests that people are motivated to gain rewards from their environment. Hence, it drives consumers to pursue personal benefit through social media brand communication. Furthermore, the value-expressive function suggests that people are motivated by the need to express or show their self-concepts and values, which helps enhance one's image in the eyes of others by matching the information with social morality (Katz, 1960). Finally, the ego-defensive function reveals the motivations for defending one's self-image, which serves as a safety measure to prevent people from forming inner insecurities and exterior threats. Therefore, consumers engage in social media brand communication to minimise their self-doubts and strengthen their sense of belonging (Katz, 1960).

According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), the fundamental motive to engage in WOM is based on the expectation confirmation theory, since WOM is motivated when consumers' feel their expectations are unconfirmed. In addition, consumers are also driven by the equity theory, which articulates that individuals are likely to be

fair in the exchange process. In other words, "If a consumer feels he or she has received a higher output/input ratio than the company, then helping the firm by recommending its offerings over the Internet is one way the output/input ratio can be equalised" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 42).

Based on these theories, the existing literature has advanced a variety of motivations of consumers to create and/or engage in user-generated communication (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Payal et al., 2013; Presi et al., 2014). In the context of eWOM, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) formulate the motivations to engage in eWOM by drawing on the utility typology identified by Sundaram et al. (1998) as well as using the critical-incident technique. Namely, altruism, venting, vengeance, social benefit, self-enhancement, and anxiety reduction. In the context of social media, Payal et al. (2013) confirm that the motivations of consumers to exchange brand-related information with others on social media are altruism, vengeance, social benefit, advice seeking, and anxiety reduction. Presi et al. (2014) identify that altruism, vengeance, self-enhancement, and economic motivation are drivers for user-generated content creation after a negative service experience. Based on the existing construct formulated by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), and Presi et al. (2014), the constructs are revised to be suitable for the context of social media and to test its applicability for user-generated social media brand communication.

3.3.1. The influence of altruism on user-generated social media brand communication

Altruism is widely acknowledged as an intrinsic motivation for WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ho and Dempsey, 2010). It refers to "the intention to benefit others as an expression of internal values, regardless of social or motivational reinforcement" (Price et al., 1995' p. 257). According to Smith and Kollock (1999), altruism is a motivation that occurs spontaneously from wanting to help others. Altruistic acts are considered selfless actions that are based on affection and love, which may be the most relevant indicator of the need for affection (Ho and Dempsey, 2010). For example, Dichter (1966) suggests that people provide others with information due to the need to give something to others; they are willing to share their pleasure with

others; and they share information with others in order to express affection care or friendship.

In terms of WOM literature, the evidence supports that consumers are driven by altruistic motivations in both the offline environment (Sundaram et al., 1998) and the online environment (Phelps et al., 2004). Social media enable users to exchange information with hundreds or even thousands of other users online, therefore, even though they may not know who will browse the information, they still contribute to the pool of knowledge online (Smith and Kollock, 1999). Furthermore, as the information is exchanged rapidly and often remains online for a long time, a particular kind of reciprocity appears, which is called serial reciprocity (Ulrich, 1998). Internet users who have benefited from other users' information sharing online in the past, feel they should repay the benefit by helping others (Parra-Lopez et al., 2011). Therefore altruistic motivation contains both wanting to help others selflessly and wanting to do so because of having received help from others' information in the past (Parra-López et al., 2011). It is also found that consumers with high altruism are more likely to create brand-related content (Poch and Martin, 2015). Therefore, the hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 1a: Altruism has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.

3.3.2. The influence of venting on user-generated social media brand communication

Venting refers to the expression of negative emotions and feelings, which helps to reduce tension, anger, or frustration (Presi et al., 2014). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explain that venting negative feelings is as an individual's means of emotional release. Venting is different from altruism in that although the information a consumer shares may be helpful to others, venting is derived from an individual's need to express negative feelings as an approach to seeking consolation and releasing one's own frustration, which does not necessarily indicate a desire to help others. Murtiasih et al. (2014) find that disappointed consumers are likely to complain by writing comments about their negative experiences through social media

platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, etc., which can be read countless times by other consumers. Therefore, the hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 1b: Venting motivation has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.

3.3.3. The influence of vengeance on user-generated social media brand communication

Bechwati and Morrin (2003, p. 996) define vengeance as "the retaliatory feelings that consumers feel towards a firm, such as the desire to exert some harm on the firm, typically following an extremely negative purchase experience." According to Zourrig et al. (2009), vengeance is considered a problem-focused strategy, in which consumers find solutions by means of vengeance, creating user-generated content to release their anger caused by the company. Although vengeance is closely related to venting it is different, since venting is merely a way of releasing one's negative feelings or emotions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) or to blow off steam (Bushman, 2002) without aiming to inflict harm on a company purposefully, while vengeance is an individual's desire to seek revenge on a company that causes anger. The Internet enables consumers to publicly take revenge on a company. Previous research has discussed the perspectives of consumers who take revenge by means of the Internet (Gregoire et al., 2010). As a result, the hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1c: Vengeance has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.

3.3.4. The influence of self-enhancement on user-generated social media brand communication

The motivation for self-enhancement refers to enhancing images among other consumers by presenting themselves as intelligent shoppers, which stimulates users to engage in WOM so that they can project a desirable image of themselves (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Payal et al., 2013). This usually takes various forms but is generally considered as having a constant positive and flattering view of oneself

(Sedikides and Gregg, 2008). Self-enhancers are more likely to show off success and deny responsibility for failures (Campbell and Sedikides, 1999), have high self-esteem (Hepper et al., 2013), and may be recognised by their active participation in social networks, such as constant self-focused status updates, posts, or reviews. Creating consumption-related WOM enables them to show connoisseurship, gain attention, and imply superiority to others (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). For example, Dichter (1966) finds that people can shape their sense of self by creating WOM to gain attention from others. Similarly, the research of Sundaram et al. (1998) reveals that self-enhancement is a crucial motivation for consumers to engage in WOM. Therefore, the hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 1d: Self-enhancement has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.

3.3.5. The influence of economic motivation on user-generated social media brand communication

Economic motivation refers to "the degree to which the community members want to gain utilitarian rewards (e.g., monetary rewards, time savings, deals or incentives, merchandising and prizes) through their participation in the community" (Baldus et al., 2015, p. 981). Most economic motivations have been described as economic incentives (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). According to Arnhold (2010), economic rewards usually incorporate monetary and signalling rewards, which can motivate consumers to engage in social media brand communication, such as writing a good review or rating a product online. Tsai and Men (2013) find that economic rewards are the basic reasons for using brand pages on Facebook. Rohm et al. (2013) argue that the benefits offered by the brand serve as new strategic interaction methods in the context of social media brand communication. The researcher introduces the motivations above to the current study to investigate the motivations of consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1e: Economic motivation has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.

3.4. SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION DIMENSIONS AND CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY DIMENSIONS

A theoretical foundation of the relationship between communication and consumer-based brand equity is based on the schema theory (Eysenck, 1984), which suggests that consumers tend to compare communication stimuli with the existing knowledge of relevant communication activities and the degree of fit, which has an influence on the following processing of the incentives as well as the shape of attitude of the recipient. Therefore, communication stimuli lead to a positive influence on consumers, whose perception of the communication positively influences their brand awareness and brand image. As Yoo et al. (2000) argue, brand communication can be positively associated with consumer-based brand equity when the communication brings about favourable consumers' reactions to the product compared with the equivalent non-branded product. Social media brand communication, therefore, plays a significant role in enhancing consumer-based brand equity by motivating consumers to incorporate a brand into their consideration set, thereby simplifying the process of brand selection and transforming that choice into a habit (Yoo et al., 2000).

Many studies demonstrate that brand communication has a positive impact on brand equity by enhancing the possibility of absorbing the brand into the consumer's consideration set, which helps to shorten the period of brand decision-making, and, finally, turns it into a habit (Yoo et al., 2000). For example, Yoo et al. (2000) discover that advertising has an impact on brand awareness and brand association, as it strengthens consumer's awareness and associations towards the brand. Wang et al. (2009) also prove that advertising contributes to building consumer-based brand equity and having an accumulative and sustaining influence on this asset. Consumers are more likely to perceive highly advertised brands as brands that have higher quality (Gil et al., 2007). However, some researchers find that WOM has a higher impact than that of advertising (Money et al., 1998), as Chu and Kim (2011) suggest that consumers tend to regard recommendations from friends or relatives as trustworthy and credible.

Specifically, regarding social media brand communication, it is acknowledged that social media brand communication plays a considerable role in influencing consumer-based brand equity (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012, Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Bruhn et al. (2012) investigate the effect of social media brand communication on consumer-based brand equity across three different industries: tourism, telecommunications, and pharmaceuticals. They demonstrate that social media brand communication has a significant influence on consumer-based brand equity. A similar effect is also detected by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), who investigate the impact of social media brand communication on the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity through Facebook across three different industries: clothing, non-alcoholic beverages, and mobile network providers. They find positive influences of both firm-generated and user-generated social media brand communication on brand awareness and brand association.

3.4.1. The influence of social media brand communication dimensions on brand awareness

Brand awareness is defined as the "strength of a brand's presence in the consumers' mind" (Aaker, 1996, p. 10). In other words, it refers to "the ability of the potential buyer to recognize and recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category" (Aaker, 1996, p. 61). Communication stimuli are able to positively influence consumers as recipients, as long as the communication content achieves a satisfactory customer reaction to the brand or product (Yoo et al., 2000). Firm-generated social media brand communication refers to a way of communication in which the information is brand-related, and created by firms for the purpose of developing and maintaining one-on-one relationships with existing and potential customers by means of the interactive features of social media (Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Kumar et al., 2016).

Previous research reports that the perception of firm-generated social media brand communication positively influences consumers' perception of brand awareness (Bruhn et al., 2012). The results of Schivinski and Dabrowski's (2015) research show that firm-generated social media brand communication affects brand awareness. In order to transmit positive brand-related information as much as possible, marketers

always utilise firm-generated social media brand communication, which is under their full control to achieve this goal (Bruhn et al., 2012). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between firm-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness in China. Thus, this research assumes that a positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication will positively influence consumers' brand awareness. The following hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 2a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness.

User-generated social media brand communication refers to a way of communication in which the information is brand-related, publicly available, reflects some degree of creative effort, and is generated outside professional routines through personal communication and information exchange by means of social media's interactive nature (OECD, 2007; Presi et al., 2014, p. 1600). In terms of the influence of user-generated social media brand communication on awareness, it is widely acknowledged that user-generated social media brand communication is out of marketing interference as well as company control, thus, the content can either be positive or negative, and both the positive and negative brand-related information is effective in increasing consumers' brand awareness (Bruhn et al., 2012).

A considerable number of researchers find that consumers' reviews of products have become a major part of user-generated social media brand communication (e.g. Schindler and Bickart, 2005; Sen and Lerman, 2007), and has become increasingly common for consumers to browse product reviews on social media in order to obtain pre-purchase product information (Zhu and Zhang, 2010). For example, Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) reveal that negative online reviews of products have a significantly adverse impact on consumer-based brand equity, and, therefore, causes equity dilution.

In addition, their research shows that even those consumers who have substantial knowledge of the brand are not immune from such a negative impact. This

relationship has also been confirmed by Hutter et al. (2013) who find a positive relationship between the users' engagement in brand communities (i.e. Facebook brand fan page) and brand awareness. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) investigate the impact of social media brand communication and find that user-generated social media communication influences brand awareness and brand association. However, Bruhn et al. (2012) obtain the opposite result that there is no positive relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness in China. Thus, this research assumes that a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication will positively influence the consumer's brand awareness. The following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness.

User-generated content and firm-generated content are not absolutely separate, as it is a co-created brand environment nowadays in which marketers can engage and interact with consumers (Fournier and Avery, 2011). Firm-generated content is able to elicit user-generated content by encouraging consumer creating, sharing, reviewing, or replying to the firm-generated content. Therefore, some user-generated content is directly stimulated by marketers and is a sign of brand engagement (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010), which gives birth to a new form of brand-related content, i.e. the co-creation of user-generated and firm-generated content.

Based on Dichter's (1966) research on product- and message-involvement, it suggests that the product-related messages generated by a firm could motivate consumers to create and share WOM with others. In a similar vein, Ding et al. (2014) argue that the product-related firm-generated content may stimulate customers to generate product-related content, which is because when consumers see product-related firm-generated content, such as product photos, feature, or function introduction, they may be stimulated to share this information by adding their own feelings, suggestions, or expectations about the product or the brand. For

consumers who have used the product, seeing the product-related firm-generated content may motivate them to share their usage experience and evaluation with others. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), firm-generated social media brand communication can be used to motivate the user-generated content: marketers can build a framework or provide a platform so that consumers have access to express their opinions, reviews, experiences, and information about a brand (Mangold and Faulds, 2009), which contributes to building consumers' brand awareness, associations, recognition, and empathy (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012).

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and brand awareness in China. Thus, this research assumes that a positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive impact on the consumer's brand awareness. The following hypothesis is put forward:

Hypothesis 2c: A positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness.

3.4.2. The influence of social media brand communication dimensions on brand association

Brand association is defined as "anything linked to the memory of a brand" (Aaker, 1991, p. 109), which can be understood as "whatever that consumer relates to brand. It can include consumer image-making, profile of the product, consumer's conditions, brand characteristics, symbols and signs" (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). According to Keller (1993), brand association has two aspects: affective association and attribute association. Affective association refers to consumers' feelings about a brand's experiential advantages or symbolic benefits, while attribute association refers to consumers' knowledge about product attributes. With regard to attribute association, firm-generated social media brand communication has the advantage of fostering the formation of attribute association, which is critical to companies and marketers in brand differentiation and brand positioning (Low and Lamb, 2000). In addition, Keller (2007) demonstrates that advertising can create strong, favourable, and unique brand associations, which are derived from

consumer-brand interaction. Advertising can affect brand associations through its ability to yield, strengthen, or modify associations with new contacts. Therefore, the more experience or exposure to communications consumers have, the stronger the brand association that consumers have (Aaker, 1991). Similarly, Yoo et al. (2000) also discover that advertising influences brand associations, as it reinforces consumer's associations with the brand.

In terms of social media rather than traditional mass media, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) find that firm-generated social media brand communication influences brand association. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand associations in China. Thus, this research assumes that a positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication will positively influence the consumer's brand association. The following hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 3a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand association.

With regard to user-generated social media brand communication, a number of studies identify that user-generated social media brand communication is positively related to brand associations (e.g. Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) investigate the influence of social media brand communication on the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity through Facebook and find positive relationships between user-generated social media brand communication and brand associations. As mentioned above, brand association has two aspects: affective association and attribute association (Keller, 1993). In respect of the affective association, user-generated social media brand communication has an advantage of fostering the formation of affective association due to its nature. In terms of the influence of user-generated social media brand communication on brand associations, it is considered a crucial means through which consumers express themselves, communicate, and exchange information with other consumers online (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). According to Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2007), the content ranging from consumer comments, reviews, ratings, remix of brand

information, to even artistic work, may contain both customer complaints and fan dedication.

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand associations in China. Thus, this research assumes that a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication will positively influence the consumer's brand association. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand association.

The co-creation of social media brand communication is a way of consumer-brand interaction in which brand-related conversations enable and stimulate consumers to integrate their own thoughts and experiences into the brand story depending on the interactive nature of social media (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). Social media offer brands an approach to co-create brand stories with consumers through a higher level of brand-consumer interaction (Gensler et al., 2013). According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), firm-generated social media brand communication can be used to motivate user-generated social media brand communication: marketers can build a framework or provide a platform so that consumers have access to expressing their opinions, reviews, experiences, and information about a brand (Mangold and Faulds, 2009), which contributes to building consumers' brand awareness, associations, recognition, and empathy (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012).

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and brand association in China. Thus, this research assumes that a positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication will positively influence the consumers' brand association. The following hypothesis is presented:

Hypothesis 3c: A positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand association.

3.4.3. The influence of the social media brand communication dimensions on perceived quality

Perceived quality is defined as "the consumer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives" (Aaker, 1991, p. 85). In addition to first-hand consumption experience, perceived quality provides another channel for consumers to acquire knowledge about the product quality by communicating product performance information to consumers through either personal channels (e.g., WOM) or non-personal channels (e.g., advertising) (Keller, 1993). With regard to the non-personal channels, according to Rao and Monroe (1989), consumers regard advertising as an extrinsic indicator to evaluate the quality of products. Previous studies demonstrate that there is a positive correlation between advertising spending and perceived quality (e.g. Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005; Hameed, 2013), as consumers tend to judge highly advertised brands as being premium brands (Yoo et al., 2000).

Therefore, in the social media context, which is considered similar to traditional media, it is assumed that firm-generated social media brand communication will influence consumer's perception of product quality. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality.

User-generated social media brand communication has become an increasingly important source of information for consumers, as it is considered more trustworthy than firm-generated content, especially in respect of product quality (Li and Bernoff, 2011). As mentioned above, perceived quality can provide the evaluation of product performance to consumers through personal channels (e.g., WOM) (Keller, 1993), therefore, user-generated social media brand communication is considered to have influence on perceived quality. Riegner (2007) indicates that user-generated social

media brand communication can provide information about product or service quality for consumers. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) examine the effects of user-generated content (e.g. Facebook fan pages) on the consumers' perception of product quality. The results reveal that user-generated social media brand communication affects the perception of other consumers in terms of product quality. Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) identify that negative online product reviews have a significant adverse influence on consumer-based brand equity, and, hence, cause considerable dilution of brand equity. Even those consumers who are familiar with this brand are not immune from such unfavourable effects.

Therefore, this research assumes that a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication will positively influence the consumers' perception of brand quality. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality.

As mentioned before, some researchers find that user-generated social media brand communication can provide information about product or service quality for consumers (Riegner, 2007), the positive relationship between advertising spending and perceived quality (Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco, 2005), and the positive impact of user-generated social media brand communication on perceived quality (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). To the best knowledge of the author, however, the existing literature lacks any investigation of the relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and perceived quality.

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and perceived quality. In the context of social media, this study assumes that similar to user-generated social media brand communication, consumers will associate the quality of the co-creation of social media brand communication with the quality of the brand itself. Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 4c: A positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality.

3.4.4. The influence of social media brand communication dimensions on brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is generally acknowledged as being a key dimension of brand equity (Torres et al., 2015). It is acknowledged as the company's most enduring asset as well as the primary goal of relationship marketing (Pan et al., 2012). Brand loyalty is defined as "a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronise a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour" (Oliver, 1997, p. 392). In other words, it refers to the consumer's commitment to a favourable evaluation of the brand and the repeated purchases (Mustafa, 1999). According to Palmatier et al. (2007), brand loyalty is based on the values consumers receive from interactions with the company. Previous studies demonstrate that advertising spending has a positive impact on brand loyalty (e.g. Ha et al., 2011; Yoo et al., 2000). Khadim et al. (2018) demonstrate that firm-generated social media brand communication positively influences brand loyalty. However, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) investigate how firm-generated social media brand communication influences the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity through Facebook, and the result reveals that the positive relationship between firm-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty cannot be confirmed.

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between firm-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty in China. Thus, this research assumes that a positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication will positively influence the consumers' brand loyalty. The following hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 5a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Regarding the relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty, it is supported by the involvement theory. Zaichkowsky (1985, p. 342) defines involvement as "a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests." User-generated social media brand communication is an indicator for a high involvement with the brand. Khadim et al. (2018) demonstrate that user-generated social media brand communication positively influences brand loyalty. Moreover, Bruhn et al. (2012) demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between consumer interactions in brand communities (i.e. Facebook brand fan page) and consumers' perception of brand loyalty, as such interactions are able to boost the symbolic, experiential, and functional brand community benefits. In a similar vein, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) reveal the same result in that user-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand loyalty, since user-generated content is considered to be unbiased, trustworthy, and credible (Christodoulides et al., 2012).

Therefore, this research assumes that a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication will positively influence the consumers' brand loyalty. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forward:

Hypothesis 5b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

As mentioned before, some researchers find that consumers' positive evaluation of advertising is able to cultivate consumers' loyalty to the brands they are familiar with (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Yoo et al. (2000) identify that there is a positive relationship between advertising spending and brand loyalty, since it enriches consumers' associations with the brand. In the context of social media brand communication, Bruhn et al. (2013) find that there is a positive relationship between consumer interactions in brand communities (i.e. Facebook brand fan page) and consumers' perception of brand loyalty, as such interactions are able to boost the experiential, functional, and symbolic brand community benefits. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) also report the same result that user-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand loyalty. To the best knowledge of the author,

however, the existing literature lacks investigation of the relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and brand loyalty.

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and brand loyalty. In the context of social media, this study assumes that similar to user-generated social media brand communication, consumers' evaluation of the co-creation of social media brand communication will positively influence the consumers' brand loyalty. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

Hypothesis 5c: A positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

3.5. RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY DIMENSIONS

The relationships among the consumer-based brand equity dimensions are based on the traditional hierarchy of effects model, also known as the standard learning hierarchy following the theory of reasoned action, which postulates that subjective norms and attitudes influence intentions, and, in turn, influence behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975). This model suggests that consumers build beliefs about a product by searching for information regarding relevant attributes and then evaluate the beliefs about the product to make decisions about purchasing or refusing the brand (Solomon et al., 2006). It is considered a consumer learning process. The learning process of the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity starts with making consumers aware of a brand and then increasing consumers' associations with the brand, and once the brand awareness and brand associations are formed, the continuous communication with the brand will influence consumers' perceptions of brand quality as well as brand loyalty (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Many researchers regard this model as a useful framework for investigating the causal order among brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of consumers (e.g. Keller and Lehmann, 2003; Maio Mackay, 2001; Tolba and Hassan, 2009).

As shown by previous research, the brand equity dimensions have relationships among each other (Aaker, 1991; Yoo et al., 2000). Based on Aaker (1991), brand awareness is the foundation and the first step of overall brand equity dimensions. Brand association relies on the establishment of brand awareness, as brand associations can be shaped on the basis of the consumers' awareness of the brand name (Tong and Hawley, 2009). Furthermore, high quality can leave a favourable impression about the brand's superiority and distinctiveness in consumers' minds (Aaker, 1991). Perceived quality is influenced by brand awareness, because a visible brand may be regarded as more likely to offer superior quality (Zeithaml, 1988). According to Yoo and Donthu (2002), brand loyalty is affected by the other three dimensions, i.e. brand awareness, brand association, and perceived quality.

3.5.1. The influence of brand awareness on brand association

"Brand awareness is the ability of a potential buyer to recognise or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category" (Aaker, 1991, p. 61). Based on Konecnik and Gartner (2007), brand awareness can influence the formation and the strength of brand associations. According to Aaker (1991), brand awareness is a foundation of overall brand equity and an antecedent to brand association. Based on Keller (1993), consumer-based brand equity commences to form when the consumer is aware of the brand and maintains some favourable associations in their memory towards a brand. Brand awareness enables consumers to link a brand to different associations in their memories (Keller, 2003). Brand awareness, therefore, is a prerequisite for the creation of brand association. In other words, consumers must first have awareness of a brand, and, later, accumulate associations attached to a brand (Smutkupt et al., 2012).

Brand awareness influences the formation and strength of brand associations (Keller, 1993). Brand awareness, which is the foundation of consumer knowledge, influences brand association, which is the higher degree of consumer knowledge (Kumar et al., 2013). When a brand is well-established in a consumer's memory, it is easier for various associations to the brand to adhere and further strengthen them in their memory (Keller, 1993). Brand awareness affects consumers' decision-making by influencing the strength of the brand association in consumers' minds. Villarejo-

Ramos and Sanchez-Franco (2005) find that brand awareness positively influences the formation of consumers' association about the product's brand image. Kumar et al. (2013) also identify the hierarchical relationship between brand awareness and brand association in that brand awareness leads to brand association.

Accordingly, this research assumes that the higher the brand awareness that consumers have, the more the brand associations that consumers have. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

Hypothesis 6: Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand association.

3.5.2. The influence of brand awareness on perceived quality

Brand awareness involves linking the brand to diverse associations including perceived quality in memory (Keller, 2003). Thus, brand awareness is a key antecedent to not only brand association but also perceived quality (Buil et al., 2013), which is considered as being the first stage in developing perceived brand image among consumers (Na et al., 1999). It enables consumers to recognise or recall a brand from a certain product category (Heding et al., 2009). Brand awareness combined with brand associations can form a specific perception of brand image, such as perceived quality (Yoo et al., 2000). Brand awareness can affect the formation and strength of perceived quality (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007).

Considerable research reveals that the higher the brand awareness that consumers have, the higher the brand quality that consumers' perceive (e.g. Chi et al., 2009; Lin, 2006). In a research investigating the influence of brand awareness on consumers' product choice, Hoyer and Brown (1990) find that participants who had awareness of a brand in the choice set regard that brand as a hint of product quality, which indicates that brand awareness can have an important impact on the product selection of inexperienced consumers. Wang and Hwang (2001) find that products with higher brand awareness can receive a better quality evaluation. Khan et al. (2015) investigate the causal relationship among the brand equity dimensions in the context of the Malaysian fashion clothing industry and find that brand awareness has a positive impact on perceived quality. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) investigate the causal relationship among consumer-based brand equity metrics through

Facebook across three different industries: mobile network providers, non-alcoholic beverages, and clothing, and find that brand awareness positively affects consumers' perception of brand quality.

Therefore, this research assumes that the higher the brand awareness that consumers have, the better the brand quality that consumers grasp. Hence, the following hypothesis is presented:

Hypothesis 7: Brand awareness has a positive effect on perceived quality.

3.5.3. The influence of brand awareness on brand loyalty

According to Aaker and Keller (1990), a brand with high awareness and good image is likely to strengthen the brand loyalty of consumers. Considerable empirical research proves that brand awareness influences brand loyalty across different product categories (e.g. Krystallis and Chrysochou, 2014; Liu et al., 2012). For example, Peng (2006) identifies that brand awareness can affect brand loyalty. When businesses plan to develop a new product or enter a new market, they should make an effort to enhance their brand awareness to gain the brand loyalty of consumers (Chou, 2005). Khan et al. (2015) investigate the causal relationship among brand equity dimensions in the context of the Malaysian fashion clothing industry and find that brand awareness has a positive impact on brand loyalty. Similarly, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) investigate how brand association influences brand loyalty through Facebook and confirm the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty.

According to Keller (2003), the level of brand awareness could result from the frequency and range of brand appearance, which is directly affected by brand advertisement spending. Consequently, the higher the spending on advertisements, the higher the awareness level that may be achieved (Yoo et al., 2000). Although brand awareness alone may not induce consumer purchase behaviour, a high level of brand awareness can enhance consumer preference of a brand (Gil et al., 2007). Since previous behaviours and experiences can build up strong consumers' brand associations (Romaniuk and Nenycz-Thiel, 2013), they enable consumers to recall

and process relevant information, distinguish the brand, and develop a positive attitude towards the brand (Aaker, 1991).

Based on the traditional hierarchy of effects model, which is also known as the standard learning hierarchy (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975), the metrics of consumer-based brand equity are considered to have a causal order as a consumer learning process. According to Aaker (1991), consumers' awareness of a brand is the basis of the subsequent brand associations, which means that once an individual has learned about the brand, associations about the brand start to accumulate as time goes by, and that the accumulation of understanding of this brand will affect the consumers' perceptions of the brand quality (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). In order to become loyal to a certain brand, consumers must first be aware of the brand (Torres et al., 2015).

Therefore, this research assumes that the higher the brand awareness that consumers have, the more brand loyalty consumers hold. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 8: Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

3.5.4. The influence of brand association on perceived quality

The relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions are based on the traditional hierarchy of effects model, also known as the standard learning hierarchy (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975), which suggests that the order of the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity is considered to be a consumer learning process. The learning process of the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity starts with making consumers aware of a brand and then increasing consumers' associations with the brand, and, once the brand awareness and brand associations are formed, the continuous communication with the brand will influence consumers' perceptions of brand quality as well as brand loyalty (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Therefore, consumers' brand association has an impact on the perception of inferiority or superiority of a brand's offering. The more positive a consumer is associated with the brand, the better the perception of the brand quality (Kumar et al., 2015). For

example, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) investigate the causal relationship among consumer-based brand equity metrics through Facebook across three different industries: non-alcoholic beverages, clothing, and mobile network providers, and find that brand association positively influences customers' perception of brand quality.

Therefore, this research assumes that the more brand associations consumers have, the better brand quality that consumers perceive. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forward:

Hypothesis 9: Brand association has a positive effect on perceived quality.

3.5.5. The influence of brand association on brand loyalty

As mentioned before, according to the traditional hierarchy of effects model, which is also known as the standard learning hierarchy (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975), the consumer-based brand equity dimensions are considered to have a causal order as a consumer learning process. Based on Aaker (1991), consumers' brand associations are formed on the basis of brand awareness, which means that once consumers learn about a brand, they start to accumulate associations with the brand, and that the continuous contact and increasingly comprehensive understanding of the brand will influence consumers' loyalty towards the brand (Yoo and Donthu, 2001).

Since previous behaviours and experiences can build a strong consumer brand association (Romaniuk and Nenycz-Thiel, 2013), it enables consumers to recall and process relevant information, distinguish brands, and develop a positive attitude towards the brand (Aaker, 1991). Therefore, when consumers obtain a more positive perception of a brand, loyalty exists (Oliver, 1999). Brand association represents the antecedent step leading to brand loyalty (Keller and Lehmann, 2003). Positive association therefore can reinforce brand loyalty (Keller, 1993). For instance, Lu and Xu (2015) find that brand association has a positive influence on the loyalty of young Chinese consumers to sportswear brands. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) investigate how brand association influences brand loyalty through Facebook and

confirm the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between brand association and brand loyalty.

Therefore, this research assumes that the more brand associations consumers have, the more brand loyalty consumers hold. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

Hypothesis 10: Brand association has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

3.5.6. The influence of perceived quality on brand loyalty

Substantial research suggests that perceived quality has a significant impact on consumers' brand loyalty (e.g. Bang et al., 2005; Konecnik and Gartner, 2007; Yaseen et al., 2011), as perceived quality affects consumers' satisfaction and trust of the brand, which, in turn, helps develop brand loyalty. Based on Yee and Sidek (2008), the perception of the product quality is the most significant factor that influences brand loyalty. According to Oliver (1997), the consumers' perceptions of high-quality products leads to brand loyalty, as it is the foundation of consumer satisfaction. For example, Erdogmus and Budeyri-Turan (2012) investigate the effect of perceived quality on brand loyalty in the ready-to-wear industry from the perspectives of young consumers, and identify that perceived quality, affected by consumers' self-image congruity, positively influences consumers' brand loyalty. Khan et al. (2015) investigate the causal relationship among brand equity dimensions in the context of the Malaysian fashion clothing industry and find that perceived quality has a positive influence on brand loyalty.

Therefore, this research assumes that the higher the brand quality that consumers perceive, the greater the brand loyalty that consumers hold. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forward:

Hypothesis 11: Perceived quality has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

3.6. CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY DIMENSIONS AND PURCHASE INTENTION

In order to evaluate the behavioural effect of social media brand communication on consumer-based brand equity, this research adds purchase intention as a consequence to the conceptual framework. The author expects that consumer-based brand equity dimensions have positive influences on purchase intention. Previous research identifies that a high level of consumer-based brand equity stimulates repeated purchase of the same brand (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Loyal customers tend to purchase more frequently than less loyal or new customers (Yoo et al., 2000).

3.6.1. The influence of brand awareness on purchase intention

Brand awareness has a significant impact on consumers' purchase intention (Macdonald and Sharp, 2000) and helps consumers make purchase decisions (Percy and Rossiter, 1992). A brand having high awareness can affect consumers' purchase decision (Grewal et al., 1998), since consumers tend to purchase familiar products (Macdonald and Sharp, 2000). According to Aaker and Keller (1990), the higher the brand awareness, the higher the purchase intention. Khan et al. (2015) investigate the causal relationships among the dimensions of brand equity in the context of the Malaysian fashion clothing industry and they find that brand awareness has a positive effect on purchase intention. According to Liao and Wang's research (2009), brand awareness plays an important role in the brand choice of Chinese consumers. Some consumers who know little about the brands choose and purchase name brands merely because the brands are famous and well-known, which can indicate their social status.

As Keller (1993) states, brand awareness plays a crucial role in consumer decision-making. The major reasons are as follows: first, brand awareness represents the initial stage and the prerequisite for consumers to reach the following stages (Hutter et al., 2013). Brand awareness enables consumers to recognise or recall a brand from a product category, which may help them make purchase decisions (Percy and Rossiter, 1992). Enhancing brand awareness raises the likelihood that consumers will present the brand for consideration among a set of brands in a certain product

category, which will be considered when consumers are making purchase decisions (Chakravarti et al., 2003). Second, brand awareness can affect consumers' consideration set when they are making purchase decisions, even if there are no other associations with the brand. It is demonstrated that consumers tend to purchase well-known brands (Jacoby et al., 1977). Grewal et al. (1998) find that a brand with a high level of brand awareness is likely to gain higher consumer preferences, since it has a higher quality evaluation and market share. Especially in low-involvement circumstances, brand awareness alone is able to influence consumers' choice of a brand (Hoyer and Brown, 1990). Third, brand awareness can affect the strength of brand associations that form brand image. Brand awareness is the foundation of creating associations as it is necessary to present the brand in consumers' minds in order to make up brand associations (Keller, 2008). According to Keller (2008), the strength of the presence determines how easily differing kinds of information will be associated with the brand.

Thus, this research assumes that the higher the brand awareness that consumers have, the stronger the purchase intention that consumers hold. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 12: Brand awareness has a positive effect on purchase intention.

3.6.2. The influence of brand association on purchase intention

According to Keller (1993), both the product-related and non-product-related attributes of a brand, which facilitate the formation of consumers' brand associations, can positively influence the purchase process of consumers. Consumers are more likely to buy a well-known brand than a less well-known brand (Hsu, 2000). Kamins and Marks (1991) reveal the relationship between brand association and purchase intention in that the more brand associations that consumers have, the higher the purchase intention. Qi et al. (2009) find that brand associations (as a result of communication experience) positively influence consumers' intention to purchase mobile data services. Petruzzellis (2010) confirms that positive brand awareness and brand associations help develop favourable consumer knowledge about the brand, and, therefore, have a positive influence on consumer behaviours. O'Cass and Lim

(2002) find that consumers tend to differentiate brands through the associations adhering to them, and, therefore, the brand associations influence their purchase intentions. Jarvelainen (2007) finds that positive brand associations contribute to consumers' trust of the intangibility and invisibility of the e-commerce environments and elevate consumers' intentions to purchase online. Moreover, some research indicates that consumers are more likely to support a brand when the brand's attitude towards a certain issue is considered a good fit with their minds (e.g. Jurisic and Azevedo, 2011; Veloutsou, 2007), which indicates a positive relationship between brand association and consumers' purchase intention.

Therefore, this research assumes that the more brand associations consumers have, the stronger the purchase intention that consumers hold. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 13: Brand association has a positive effect on purchase intention.

3.6.3. The influence of perceived quality on purchase intention

Numerous external cues can be utilised to examine the brand quality, such as country-of-origin, price, and packaging of the product (Yoo et al., 2000). For example, brand name is a major indicator of the product quality, or a global image of a brand can also indicate the product quality (Steenkamp et al., 2003). Considerable empirical research demonstrates that perceived quality influences consumers' purchase intention (e.g. Kumar et al., 2009; Moradi and Zarei, 2012; Sasirekha and Sathish, 2017). According to Hoyer and Brown (1990), although consumers will consider a wide variety of factors when they make the purchase decision, perceived quality is of the greatest importance among these factors, especially for unfamiliar brands. Yoo et al. (2000) find that consumers' perception of the product quality positively influences brand equity, and that the perceived high quality stimulates consumers to purchase a certain brand over other competing brands (Na et al., 1999). Khan et al. (2015) investigate the causal relationship among brand equity dimensions in the context of the Malaysian fashion clothing industry and they find that perceived quality has a positive impact on purchase intention. According to

Aaker (1991), brands with high perceived quality tend to be evaluated positively by consumers, and thus, lead to consumers' purchase behaviour.

Therefore, this research assumes that the higher the brand quality that consumers perceive, the stronger the purchase intention that consumers hold. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forward:

Hypothesis 14: Perceived quality has a positive effect on purchase intention.

3.6.4. The influence of brand loyalty on purchase intention

Brand loyalty is considered to be a key factor for achieving repeat purchases (Fischer et al., 2010). Previous research finds that customers tend to exhibit an unconditional preference for the brand they are loyal to, and that such a strong attachment cannot be either formed or erased in the short term but can be built up by means of elaborately designed long-term marketing activities (Grover and Srinivasan, 1992). Judith and Richard (2002) find that brand loyalty positively influences purchase intention. Khan et al. (2015) investigate the relationship among the brand equity dimensions as well as the effect of each dimension of brand equity on the purchase intention of Malaysian consumers in the fashion industry. They find that brand loyalty has the strongest influence on purchase intention, successively followed by perceived quality, brand image, and brand awareness, which confirms the findings of previous studies that brand loyalty is of paramount importance to the consumer purchase intention (e.g. Bennett and Rundle-Thiele, 2004; Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000; Sasirekha and Sathish, 2017). Loyal consumers have been found to make purchases of the brand confidently (Yee and Sidek, 2008). They repurchase the products of the brand repeatedly and are unlikely to switch to another brand (Oliver, 1999). Based on Foscht et al. (2009), young consumers are apt to repurchase the products of the brand to which they are loyal.

Therefore, this research assumes that the higher the brand loyalty that consumers have, the stronger the purchase intention that consumers hold. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 15: Brand loyalty has a positive effect on purchase intention.

3.7. COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN AND CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY DIMENSIONS

The country-of-origin of a product is regarded as an extrinsic cue, which can influence consumer perceptions and enhance cognition (Hong and Wyer, 1989). According to Aaker (1991), the country-of-origin is able to develop an association in consumers' minds, which originates from the consumers' stereotypes about a country, and, in turn, influences consumer perceptions of the brand derived from this country. For example, Moradi and Zarei (2012) find that consumers from developing countries tend to purchase products of brands founded in developed countries in order to manifest their self-esteem or personal achievement. Consumer behaviour research demonstrates that brand country-of-origin influences the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity (e.g. Hamzaoui-Essoussi et al., 2011; Zeugner-Roth et al., 2008). For example, Pappu et al. (2006) investigate the impact of brand country-of-origin (i.e. Japan, China, and Malaysia) on the metrics of consumer-based brand equity with respect to two different industries – car and television – and they find that consumer-based brand equity varies according to the brand country-of-origin. According to Lin and Kao (2004), consumer's positive evaluation of a brand according to its origin will increase consumer-based brand equity.

Taking into account that consumer-based brand equity is conceptualised as a construct with four metrics, i.e. brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991), this general hypothesis can be subdivided into more micro-related hypotheses. To the best knowledge of the author, there is no hypothesis with regard to the influence of country-of-origin on brand awareness. This is because brand awareness cannot be a separate variable that is affected by country-of-origin, as the formation of brand association is based on consumers' awareness of the brand, which is the prerequisite of the formation of association (Keller, 1999). According to Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), a brand can create secondary associations from a range of entities, such as people, events, and places, which are connected with the brand, and country-of-origin is one such kind of association and serves as a secondary association to the brand associations. In a similar sense, Rossiter and Percy (1987) argue that secondary associations are

based on consumers' awareness, attitudes, and beliefs of the brand-related people, events, or places. Therefore, brand awareness is excluded from the investigation of the relationship between the consumer-based brand equity metrics and the country-of-origin.

3.7.1. The influence of country-of-origin on brand association

Consumers' assessment of a brand, either negative or positive, is built on the consumers' existing knowledge and perceptions of the brand's country-of-origin (Paswan and Sharma, 2004). Murtiasih et al. (2014) investigate the effect of country-of-origin on brand equity in the Indonesian car market; the results show that, generally, the ability to escalate the image of country-of-origin can increase consumers' brand knowledge regarding the differential effect. Moradi and Zarei (2012) find that consumers perceive that brands originating from a country with a desirable image are more reliable than brands from a country with a less favourable image. Consequently, these brands are more likely to be selected during the purchase decision process. The results suggest that a brand's country-of-origin has a significant impact on brand association. Batra et al. (2000) identify that global products are treated more favourably than domestic products for status reasons as global brands are considered status-enhancing. Besides, Pappu et al. (2006) prove that consumers' brand associations vary significantly based on the country-of-origin of the brand. According to Paswan and Sharma (2004), consumers' perception of a brand's country-of-origin plays a significant role in associating the image of the country-of-origin with the brand image. Only when consumers have awareness of the brand's country-of-origin can it influence the consumers' association of the brand. If consumers do not know the brand's country-of-origin, the consumers' perception and association of the brand will shrink. The more consumers are familiar with the brand's country-of-origin, the more consumers get to know this brand (Murtiasih et al., 2014).

As plenty of researches (e.g. Hu and Dickerson, 1997; Zhang, 1996) reveals, Chinese consumers have long been known for their positive attitude towards foreign brands, especially those originating from developed countries, and their perceptions are that foreign brands are superior to the domestic brands. For example, Meng-

Lewis et al. (2013) investigate the Chinese consumers' reaction to foreign sports companies. They find that the brands from developed countries could be more acceptable and preferable than domestic sports brands for Chinese consumers. Similarly, Jap (2010) finds that Chinese consumers perceive that global brands are of higher quality than domestic brands; Chinese consumers perceive global brands as being more customer-oriented and innovative than domestic brands; and Chinese consumers are more likely to purchase international brands to enhance their social status and manifest their personality. Lu and Xu (2015) examine the influence of the country-of-origin on young Chinese consumers brand association with sportswear brands. They confirm that young Chinese consumers display more positive brand associations with international brands than with domestic Chinese brands. Whereas other research discloses that there seems to be a change that Chinese consumers no longer believe that all foreign brands are better than domestic brands (Melewar et al., 2004). Hence, it is of importance to examine the current situation concerning young Chinese consumers' perception of the relationship between country-of-origin and brand associations.

Therefore, this research assumes that the brand's country-of-origin can affect consumers' brand associations. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 16a: Country-of-origin has a positive effect on brand association.

3.7.2. The influence of country-of-origin on perceived quality

Based on Aaker (1991), perceived quality is a key metric of consumer-based brand equity. Customers in both developing and developed countries have a preference towards global brands as they regard these brands as being of better quality (Ing et al., 2012). This may be due to the fact that if a brand is accessible globally, it is supposed to be superior in quality globally (Sharma, 2017).

Many studies demonstrate that country-of-origin has an influence on the consumers' perceptions of the quality of the products (e.g. Hu et al., 2012; Kwok, 2014; Murtiasih et al., 2014). Some research even finds that country-of-origin has the strongest impact on perceived quality among the consumer-based brand equity dimensions

(e.g. Lim et al., 1994; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). Pappu et al. (2006) observe that the difference in the impact of the country-of-origin on perceived quality is the largest in terms of the impact of country-of-origin on the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity. To be more specific, the magnitude of the difference in the perceived quality is nearly twice that of brand loyalty and one and a half times that for brand association. Murtiasih et al. (2014) investigate the effect of country-of-origin of a brand and WOM on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions with respect to the car industry in Indonesia. They find a positive correlation between country-of-origin and perceived quality. Similarly, Pappu et al. (2006) also prove that consumers' perception of the brand quality varies significantly according to the country-of-origin of the brand. According to Murtiasih et al. (2014), consumers regard country-of-origin as a cue of a brand's comparative and competitive advantages and that it can influence the consumer's perception of product quality. In other words, consumers tend to believe that the products that originate from countries with strong associations are of better quality than those from countries with weaker associations (Pappu et al., 2006).

Lu and Xu (2015) investigate the impact of country-of-origin on young Chinese consumers' perception of product quality of sportswear brands. They find that young Chinese consumers distinguish no difference in the quality between domestic and international sportswear brands, particularly as numerous products of global brands are manufactured in China. Accordingly, it is of significance to examine the current situation of young Chinese consumers' perception of the relationship between country-of-origin and perceived quality.

Therefore, this research assumes that the brand's country-of-origin can affect consumers' perception of product quality. Thus, the hypothesis is stated as follows:

Hypothesis 16b: Country-of-origin has a positive effect on perceived quality.

3.7.3. The influence of country-of-origin on brand loyalty

When consumers are loyal to a brand, they will simply choose this brand as a habitual behaviour rather than evaluate its attributes and compare it with others,

since consumers are familiar with this brand due to past experience and have built a positive attitude towards it (Murtiasih et al., 2014). According to Pappu et al. (2006), consumers' preference for a brand is partly due to its country-of-origin, as consumers have knowledge about or have experienced the superiority or benefits of a brand (e.g. Apple) originating from a particular country (USA). Hence, they argue that consumers may develop country loyalty, which is similar to brand loyalty. Pappu et al. (2006) prove that consumers' brand loyalty varies significantly according to the country-of-origin of the brand. In addition, Agarwal and Sikri (1996) demonstrate that the effects of country-of-origin in a certain industry can be transferred to other industries within the same country.

Lu and Xu (2015) examine the impact of country-of-origin on young Chinese consumers brand loyalty towards sportswear brands, and confirm that young Chinese consumers held a stronger brand loyalty towards global brands than domestic Chinese brands. Consequently, it is of significance to examine the current situation of young Chinese consumers' perception of the relationship between country-of-origin and brand loyalty.

Therefore, this research assumes that the brand's country-of-origin can affect consumers' loyalty towards a brand. Thus, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

Hypothesis 16c: Country-of-origin has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

3.8. SUMMARY

In this chapter, a conceptual model and a set of hypotheses based on the research questions (see Table 3.1, overleaf) are elaborated upon. As stated in Figure 3.1, it is proposed that the dimensions of social media brand communication have an effect on the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, the motivations as antecedents have an effect on user-generated social media brand communication, the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity have an effect on the purchase intention as a consequence of this model, and the country-of-origin has an effect on the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity.

In the next chapter, the research methodology and methods will be applied to examine the aforementioned hypotheses in order to answer the research questions. In addition, the research design, including the research setting and development of measurement scales, will be elaborated upon. In the section of the development of measurement scales, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and a pilot study will be conducted and explained in detail.

Table 3.1: List of research hypotheses based on research questions

Research questions	Hypotheses	Major references
RQ1) From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are consumers' motivations to engage in user-generated social media brand communication?	H1a: Customers' altruistic motivation has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Ho and Dempsey (2010), Parra-López et al. (2011), Payal et al. (2013), Phelps et al. (2004), Presi et al. (2014), Price et al. (1995), Ulrich (1998), Yoo and Gretzel (2011)
	H1b: Customers' venting motivation has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Sparks and Browning (2010)
	H1c: Customers' vengeance has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.	Bechwati and Morrin (2003), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Payal et al. (2013), Zourrig et al. (2009)
	H1d: Customers' self-enhancement motivation has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.	Alicke et al. (1995), Berthon et al. (2008), Chung and Darke (2006), Courtois et al. (2009), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Hepper et al. (2013), Ho and Dempsey (2010), Payal et al. (2013), Sundaram et al. (1998), Shao (2009), Shrauger and

		Schoeneman (1979)
	H1e: Customers' economic motivation has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.	Baldus et al. (2015), Gummerus et al. (2012), Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2014), Martins and Patrício (2013), Muntinga et al. (2011), Tsai and Men (2013), Rohm et al. (2013), Yoo and Gretzel (2011)
RQ2) From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of social media brand communication affect each dimension of consumer-based brand equity?	H2a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication positively influences brand awareness.	Bruhn et al. (2012), Godes and Mayzlin (2009), Jansen et al. (2009), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2015)
	H2b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication positively influences brand awareness.	Bruhn et al. (2012), Godes and Mayzlin (2009), Hutter et al. (2013), Jansen et al. (2009), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015)
	H2c: A positive evaluation of co-creation social media brand communication positively influences brand awareness.	
	H3a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication positively influences brand association.	Bruhn et al. (2012), Godes and Mayzlin (2009), Jansen et al. (2009), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015)
	H3b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication positively influences brand association.	Bruhn et al. (2012), Godes and Mayzlin (2009), Hutter et al. (2013), Jansen et al. (2009), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Schivinski and

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		Dabrowski (2015)
	H3c: A positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication positively influences brand association.	
	H4a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication positively influences perceived quality.	Murtiasih et al. (2014), Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco (2005)
	H4b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication positively influences perceived quality.	Murtiasih et al. (2014), Li and Bernoff (2011), Riegner (2007), Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015)
	H4c: A positive evaluation of co-creation social media brand communication positively influences perceived quality.	
	H5a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication positively influences brand loyalty.	Bruhn et al. (2012), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015)
	H5b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication positively influences brand loyalty.	Bruhn et al. (2012), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015)
	H5c: A positive evaluation of co-creation social media brand communication positively influences brand loyalty.	
RQ3) From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are the causal relationships among the consumer-based	H6: Brand awareness positively influences brand association.	Aaker (1991), Kumar et al. (2013), Tong and Hawley (2009), Singh and Pattanayak (2016)

brand equity dimensions?	H7: Brand awareness positively influences perceived quality.	Aaker (1991), Khan et al. (2015), Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), Yoo and Donthu (2001)
	H8: Brand association positively influences perceived quality.	Aaker (1991), Khan et al. (2015), Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), Yoo and Donthu (2001)
	H9: Brand awareness positively influences brand loyalty.	Aaker (1991), Khan et al. (2015), Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), Torres et al. (2015), Yoo and Donthu (2001)
	H10: Brand association positively influences brand loyalty.	Aaker (1991), Khan et al. (2015), Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), Torres et al. (2015), Yoo and Donthu (2001)
	H11: Perceived quality positively influences brand loyalty.	Khan et al. (2015), Torres et al. (2015), Yee and Sidek (2008)
RQ4) From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of consumer-based brand equity affect purchase intention?	H12: Brand awareness positively influences purchase intention.	Aaker (1996), Khan et al. (2015), Macdonald and Sharp (2000), Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2013), Shij and Piron (2002), Wang and Li (2012)
	H13: Brand association positively influences purchase intention.	Aaker (1996), Khan et al. (2015), Macdonald and Sharp (2000), Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2013), Shij and Piron (2002), Wang and Li (2012)

	H14: Perceived quality positively influences purchase intention.	Aaker (1996), Jones et al. (2002), Khan et al. (2015), Kim et al. (2009), Kumar et al. (2009), Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2013), Shij and Piron (2002), Wang and Li (2012)
	H15: Brand loyalty positively influences purchase intention.	Aaker (1996), Jahn and Kunz (2012), Khan et al. (2015), Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2013), Shij and Piron (2002), Wang and Li (2012)
RQ5) From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does brand country-of-origin affect the consumer-based brand equity dimensions?	H16a: Country-of-origin positively influences brand association.	Batra et al. (2000), Hu et al. (2012), Lin and Kao (2004), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Pappu et al. (2006), Paswan and Sharma (2004), Zeugner-Roth et al. (2008)
	H16b: Country-of-origin positively influences perceived quality.	Batra et al. (2000), Hu et al. (2012), Lin and Kao (2004), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Pappu et al. (2006), Paswan and Sharma (2004), Koschate-Fischer et al. (2012), Godey et al. (2012), Zeugner-Roth et al. (2008)
	H16c: Country-of-origin positively influences brand loyalty.	Batra et al. (2000), Hu et al. (2012), Lin and Kao (2004), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Pappu et al. (2006), Paswan and Sharma (2004), Zeugner-Roth et al. (2008)

Source: developed by the researcher for the study

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters conducted a detailed literature review and presented the development of the conceptual framework. The purpose of this chapter is to clarify and justify the research methodology and the research design in order to test the conceptual model and hypotheses elaborated upon in Chapter 3. Therefore, this chapter is organised as follows: Section 4.2 justifies the proper methodology and methods for this research, including the philosophical foundation of this research and the discussion of the qualitative and quantitative methods as general approaches to the theory construction and development. Section 4.3 selects the research strategies and design, including the research setting and the unit of analysis, which are stated before the development of the measurement scales and the validation of the methods. Section 4.4 develops and validates the measurement scales, including the development of the measurement scales, the implementation of in-depth interviews, focus groups, the pilot study, and the main study. Finally, Section 4.5 provides a summary of this chapter.

4.2. JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Crotty (1998), it is advisable for researchers to answer two questions before they commence the study: (1) what methodologies and methods will be applied in the study; and (2) what is the justification for this selection of methodologies and methods? In academic research, researchers often use the terms 'research method' and 'research methodology' interchangeably, however, the research method refers to the procedures and techniques employed to collect and analyse the data pertinent to the research questions or hypotheses (Crotty, 1998). In social research, this is defined as the technique used to identify the research questions, gather and analyse the data, and present the research results (Payne and Payne, 2006). Whereas research methodology refers to "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking

the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). In social research, research methodology is used to indicate "a set of conceptual and philosophical assumptions that justify the use of particular methods" (Payne and Payne, 2006, p.148). Therefore, it is necessary to justify the selection of the research methodologies and research methods, respectively.

4.2.1. Philosophical foundation of the research

The philosophical foundation plays an important role in selecting the research methodology (Crotty, 1998), as it helps researchers to justify their choice of a certain research methodology or method, which is based on the researcher's 'knowledge claims'. According to Crotty (1998), it refers to the assumptions about the knowledge that researchers can obtain from their research. For instance, 'ontology' 'paradigm' 'epistemology' are all knowledge claims (Creswell et al., 2003). In general, researchers use 'epistemology' to represent what the knowledge is and how it can be acquired, and use 'ontology' to explain how they know it (Crotty, 1998). The 'paradigm' refers to "a set of assumptions consisting of agreed upon knowledge, criteria of judgement, problem fields and the way to consider them" (Malhotra and Birks, 2003, p. 136). Although various 'knowledge claims' are used in social research (Creswell et al., 2003), two perspectives are widely-used: interpretivism and positivism (Corbetta, 2003).

Malhotra and Birks (2003, p. 193) state that interpretivism is "the dynamic, respondent-constructed position about the evolving nature of reality, recognising that there may be a wide array of interpretations of reality or social acts." Accordingly, it is necessary to understand an individual's behaviour by means of interactions, such as observation and questions to the respondents (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). In contrast, positivism refers to "a philosophy of language and logic consistent with an empiricist philosophy of science", which stresses the scientific explanation of social phenomena and human behaviours (Malhotra and Birks, 2003, p. 136). Therefore, positivists select and employ a framework that is similar to those applied in natural sciences when investigating a particular phenomenon (Payne and Payne, 2006). As a result of testing the assumptions of the study, theories can be modified, refined and extended through the process that enables one to reach an objective conclusion

elicited from reality. In order to better understand the opposite research paradigms, the more detailed differences in the characteristic features between interpretivism and positivism are illustrated in Table 4.1, and Table 4.2 presents some alternative names for these two paradigms.

Table 4.1: Paradigm features

Paradigm	Interpretivist	Positivist
Reality	Subjective and multiple	Objective and singular
Relationship of research and respondent	Interacting with each other	Independent of each other
Researcher language	Informal and personal	Formal and impersonal
Values	Value-laden=biased	Value-free=unbiased
Researcher/research design	Multiple influences With free will Evolving design Field/ethnography Context-bound Perceptive decision-making Understanding and insight Theoretical sampling Case studies Inductive	Cause and effect Simple determinist Static research design Laboratory Context-free laboratory Reliability and validity Prediction and control Representative surveys Experimental design Deductive

Source: Creswell (1994 cited in Malhotra and Birks, 2003, p. 139)

Table 4.2: Alternative paradigm names

Interpretivist	Positivist
Subjectivist Qualitative Humanistic Revolutionist Phenomenological	Objectivist Quantitative Scientific Traditionalist Experimentalist

Source: Hussey and Hussey (1997 cited in Malhotra and Birks, 2003, p.138)

On the basis of the research paradigm, researchers further select an appropriate research approach including the inductive approach and the deductive approach in

order to test and construct theories (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). The inductive approach is utilised by interpretivists to begin identifying the research area, set it in a context that lacks established theory, and seek to achieve generalisations, while the deductive approach is employed by positivists to identify the research area, set it in a context full of well-developed theory, and seek to achieve concrete empirical evidence; in other words, researchers develop their theory by combining the factors that they have observed before (Malhotra and Birks, 2003).

The deductive approach is adopted in this research, since the researcher selects positivism as the research paradigm, which stresses the objective and scientific explanation of social phenomena and human behaviours. It depends on empirical data that can be observed and measured (Malhotra and Birks, 2003), which enables various components to be compared at relative frequency. Besides, by means of the deductive approach, the researcher can test the theory by hypotheses acceptance and rejection (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). Furthermore, the deductive approach facilitates the researcher to develop existing theory incrementally, by testing it in a new context (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). However, from the positivist's perspective, the qualitative approach can be employed in the primary stage, as it helps the researcher to obtain a deeper insight into the essence of the research problem as well as refine the initial research model and hypotheses (Malhotra and Birks, 2003).

Based on Corbetta (2003), this research is pertinent to the post-positivist's perspective, as, on the one hand, it is similar to positivists in that they both believe in an autonomous social reality as well as aim to clarify and testify what happens in social reality (Corbetta, 2003), while, on the other, post-positivist researchers contend that social reality can only be forecast in a problematic and imperfect manner (Corbetta, 2003). From the post-positivist perspective, it is necessary to employ some qualitative methods as a minor part of the research, as they seek to account for not only what happens in social reality, but also how and why distinctions occur among individuals' thoughts in this social reality (Thomas and Brubaker, 2000). Consequently, it is advisable to adopt a mixed-methods approach containing the qualitative methods in the early stage of the research and quantitative methods in the following stages of the research in order to generate law-like regularities that

can be generalised into more extensive situations. Hence, it is necessary to employ some qualitative methods that serve as a minor and complementary part of the study, which aim to explain not only what happens in social reality, but also explore how and why differences appear among individuals in this social reality (Thomas and Brubaker, 2000).

In summary, by taking the positivist's perspective, this study aims to prove the conceptual framework hypothesised in Chapter 3 and to identify consumers' motivations to engage in social media brand communication, the relationships among social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the relationships among country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity dimensions, and the relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions and purchase intention. By means of applying research methods derived from natural sciences, such as hypotheses testing and correlation analysis, this research is expected to attain results that can be employed to identify regularities and in turn, can be generalised to extensive areas.

4.2.2. Mixed-methods research

In the previous section, the typical philosophy of social research has been discussed, and a conclusion is attained that the research approach selected by a researcher to establish or enrich theories relies on the researchers' perceptions of the social reality, and that the research paradigm and methodology determine the selection of the research methods. With regard to this research, a mixed method of qualitative methods and quantitative methods is employed in order to combine the advantages of both types of method into one single study (Morse, 2003). According to Creswell and Clark (2011, p. 5), "as a method, it focuses on collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone." Tashakkori and Tedllie (1998) define mixed methods as a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches in the research methodology of a multi-staged study or a single study.

In general, qualitative approaches are regarded as corresponding to interpretivism, while quantitative approaches are widely-acknowledged as corresponding to positivism (Crotty, 1998). According to Kumar (2014, p. 14), the qualitative approach "is embedded in the philosophy of empiricism; follows an open, flexible and unstructured approach to enquiry; aims to explore diversity rather than to quantify; emphasises the description and narration of feelings, perceptions and experiences rather than their measurement; and communicates findings in a descriptive and narrative rather than analytical manner, placing no or less emphasis on generalisations." Qualitative research enables researchers to form interpretations of the subjects under study and present these interpretations in order to enrich the body of knowledge (Wright, 2008).

As Katz et al. (1973, p. 511) stated, "people are sufficiently self-aware to be able to report their interests and motives in particular cases, or at least to recognise them when confronted with them in an intelligible and familiar verbal formulation." Qualitative approaches enable researchers to investigate how ordinary people observe and depict their lives by accessing an individual's unconscious or subconscious levels to understand and grasp the nuances of individual's behaviours (Silverman, 1993). Where an individual may explain events superficially to others, qualitative approaches can enable researchers to explore deeper (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). Qualitative researchers seek to apprehend the meaning of an individual's behaviour instead of clarifying any regularity or statistical patterns (Payne and Payne, 2006). Therefore, the research findings by qualitative methods usually depend on a single case or a few cases rather than rely on a representative sampling (Malhotra and Birks, 2003).

According to Kumar (2014, p. 14), the quantitative approach "is rooted in the philosophy of rationalism; follows a rigid, structured and predetermined set of procedures to explore; aims to quantify the extent of variation in a phenomenon; emphasises the measurement of variables and the objectivity of the process; believes in substantiation on the basis of a large sample size; gives importance to the validity and reliability of findings; and communicates findings in an analytical and

aggregate manner, drawing conclusions and inferences that can be generalised."
Quantitative methods help researchers pursue "regularities in human lives by
separating the social world into empirical components called variables which can be
represented numerically as frequencies or rate, whose associations with each other
can be explored by statistical techniques and accessed through researchers'
introducing stimuli and systematic measurement" (Payne and Payne, 2006, p. 180).
Quantitative approaches generally consist of quantitative observations and
questionnaire surveys. For instance, collecting and counting the behavioural modes
of people, events and objects systematically to acquire information about the
research phenomena (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). The comparison of the differences
between qualitative methods and quantitative methods is presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Comparison of qualitative and quantitative approaches

	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Purpose	Inductive: discovery and process oriented Context Meaning Process Inductive development of theory Discovering unanticipated events, conditions, and influences	Deductive: verification and outcome oriented Precise measurement and comparison of variables Interface from sample to population Establishing relationships between variables
Research questions	Process questions Meaning How and Why Context (holistic) Causality (physical) Hypotheses as part of conceptual framework	Variance questions Presence or absence Truth of proposition Degree or amount Correlation Causality (factual) Hypothesis testing

Relationship	Use of influence as a tool for understanding (research as part of process)	Objectivity/ reduction of influence (research as an extraneous variable)
Sampling	Purposeful sampling	Probability sampling
		Establishing valid comparisons
Data collection	Measures tend to be subjective	Measures tend to be objective
	Inductive development of strategies	Prior development of instruments
	Adapting to particular situation	Standardisation
	Collection of textual or visual material	Measurement/testing-quantitative/categorical
Data analysis	Textual analysis (memos, coding, connecting)	Numerical descriptive analysis (statistics, correlation)
	Grounded theory	Estimation of population variables
	Narrative approaches	Statistical hypothesis testing
		Conversion of textual data into numbers or categories
Validity/Reliability	Valid	Reliable
	Self as instrument (the evaluator is close to the data)	Technology as instrument (the evaluator is removed from the data)
Generalisability	Ungeneralisable	Generalisable
	Case oriented	Population oriented
	The insider's perspective	The outsider's perspective

Source: Kumar (2014), Maxwell and Loomis (2003), and Steckler et al. (1992)

The difference between the two is based on the philosophies of empiricism and rationalism (Kumar, 2014). Empiricism is based on the belief that "the only knowledge that human beings acquire is from sensory experiences" and rationalism is based on the belief that "human beings achieve knowledge because of their capacity to reason" (Bernard, 1994, p. 2). In addition, there are significant differences between the qualitative methods and quantitative methods in investigating and understanding respondents' behaviours (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). For example, the qualitative methods are based on the recognition that respondents are essential parts of the social process, whereas the quantitative methods are based on the recognition that social process is immune to an individual's comprehension. In other words, qualitative studies concentrate on the interaction between the individuals and social reality as well as the features of reality generated by social actors, while

quantitative studies focus on testing research hypotheses as well as generalise the findings to an extensive population (Corbetta, 2003).

Qualitative methods and quantitative methods both have different advantages and disadvantages. For instance, qualitative approaches are too subjective to gain objectively valid results (Malhotra and Birks, 2003), which are considered "unscientific and atheoretical ..., open to subjective bias by the individual researcher ... and not open to inspection or replication" (Payne and Payne, 2006, p. 177). Qualitative methods are likely to lack representative sampling as the research results merely rely on a single case or a few cases (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). In contrast, quantitative approaches rarely to reveal the subjective dimensions of an individual's behaviour (Marsh, 1982), and lack the sensitivity to grasp the subtleties of individual attitude and behaviour (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). In order to resolve this problem and maximise the advantages and minimise the disadvantages of both approaches in a single research, many scholars have suggested that qualitative approaches and quantitative approaches should be regarded as complementary and that they should be combined in a research (e.g. Payne and Payne, 2006; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003). According to Kumar (2014, p. 14), the mixed-methods approach "uses the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research. It aims to select the best methods, regardless of the qualitative-quantitative divide, to find answers to the research questions." Therefore, mixed-methods approaches were adopted in the present study.

Due to the stance of positivists and the discussion and comparison about the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative methods and quantitative methods, this research used quantitative approaches predominantly, with a small proportion of the methods drawn from qualitative approaches, which is called "dominant/less dominant studies" (Creswell, 1994, p. 177). To be more specific, this study mainly applied the quantitative approaches, especially a self-administered questionnaire survey, with the aim of identifying the relationship among the social media brand communication metrics and consumer-based brand equity metrics, the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity metrics, the relationship among consumer-based brand equity metrics and purchase intention, and the relationship among country-of-

origin and consumer-based brand equity metrics from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. Accordingly, qualitative methods were employed in the first stage of this study in order to gain a deeper insight into the essence of the research problems (Malhotra and Birks, 2003) as well as to generate extra measuring items for the purpose of developing a questionnaire for the main survey (Creswell et al., 2003).

As social media is a relatively newly-emerged and rapidly developing channel for marketing both in academia and industry, no established knowledge exists (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). According to Branthwaite and Patterson (2011), social media are likely to be useful sources of information on social attitudes and discourse, as they offer an account for social life. Nevertheless, by its nature it is a difficult platform to accurately understand and interpret the meanings, motivations, and attitudes, and so on. Qualitative research is an adaptable approach, which excels at understanding consumer motivations, perceptions, and the causes behind their actions; understanding what consumers tell as well as the context; revealing possibilities to improve brands; avoiding momentary reactions from consumers; and identifying the impact of brands. Thereby, qualitative research is suitable for the study of social media (Branthwaite and Patterson, 2011). Besides, the advantage of the inductive approach is that "it lets the reality tell its story on its own terms and not on the terms of received theory and accepted concepts" (Gummesson, 2003, p. 488).

In terms of this research, to identify the relationship between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity, new perspectives may appear gradually from the interpretation and analysis of empirical materials instead of from pre-existing theoretical constructs (Gummesson, 2003). The in-depth interviews and focus groups were selected from the qualitative techniques to acquire information from the respondents not only to provide access to the research phenomenon, but also to equip the research with extra measurement items related to the research setting.

This kind of research design is named exploratory sequential design (Creswell et al., 2003). Studies that use methods one after the other are called sequential studies

(Creswell, 1994). Exploratory research is "when a study is undertaken with the objective either of exploring an area where little is known or of investigating the possibilities of undertaking a particular research study" (Kumar, 2014, p. 477). According to Creswell and Clark (2011), exploratory sequential design commences with the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Based on the qualitative results, quantitative research is conducted sequentially by developing and testing the quantitative instruments (see Figure 4.1). The mixed methods enable researchers to form more sensitive survey instruments in order to better understand the research phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2003) and offer more information obtained by qualitative techniques to the quantitative part of the research (Baker, 2001), averting the potential bias that appears in the qualitative research alone (Baker, 2001).

Figure 4.1: Mixed-methods procedures
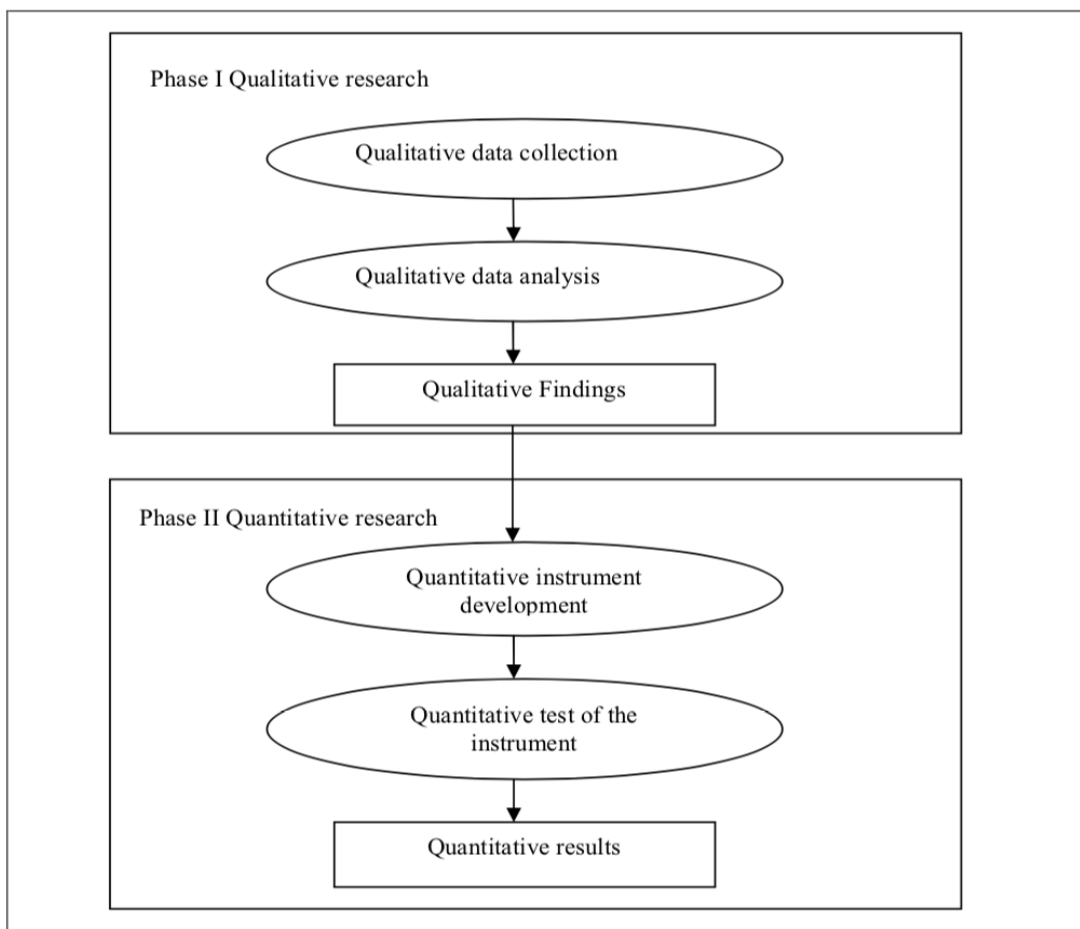
Source: Creswell et al. (2003, p. 235)

4.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The aforementioned sections discussed the philosophical foundation and the selection of the methodology and methods applied in this research. This section discusses the research design, which plays a vital role in guiding the data collection (Churchill, 1996), the research setting, and the unit of analysis of this research.

4.3.1. Research setting

According to Whetten (1989), the evaluation of the generalisability of the research findings is based on the context where the research has been implemented so that the conditions can be defined and the boundaries for the relevant theories can be settled. As presented in Chapter 2, the studies on social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity have mainly been conducted in Western countries, especially developed countries. Only a few have investigated this situation in China. Therefore, the generalisability of the theory is limited. Accordingly, the knowledge and theory with regard to the relationship between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity has been limited so far, particularly in a non-Western context.

Yet, regardless of insufficient evidence about social media brand communication and the effect on consumer-based brand equity in a non-Western context, it is likely that social media brand communication activities are becoming increasingly popular and the effect on consumer-based brand equity is becoming increasingly prevalent in the context of China. The reason is that China has become a typical representative among non-Western and developing countries for experiencing an evident transition in its economy and values. Traditional Chinese values include thriftiness, suppression of desire in consumption, especially conspicuous consumption (Fan, 2000), which are rooted in the Confucian cultural spirit (Yao, 2000) and various facets of which have been advocated by the ideology of the Communist government (Lin and Wang, 2010). However, with the rapid economic development and modernisation process, China is witnessing a drastic transformation with respect to social values (Xiao and Kim, 2009). Utilitarian values have declined while hedonic values have increased in consumption in Chinese consumers' minds (Stout et al., 1994). More and more Chinese consumers purchases products for hedonic purpose

instead of only for utilitarian functions, especially the young Chinese consumers (Chu and Ju, 1993). Since the younger generations have been experiencing the rapid growth of the economy and the increasing exposure to Western culture, younger generations tend to hold more materialistic values than older generations (Dou et al., 2006). Conspicuous consumption is surging constantly (Thompson, 2011).

Globalisation is another contributor of such value transformation. Previous research indicates that globalisation boosts the worldwide expansion of materialism, individualism, and hedonism, from developed countries to less developed countries (Dholakia et al., 1988), as a result, hedonism, individualism, and materialism are growing rapidly among the youth (Gu and Hung, 2009). Nowadays, in China, young consumers have been switching from the traditional values of thriftiness and simplicity to spending money to show their own personality and to pursue fashion (Podoshen et al., 2011). While young Chinese have become consumption-oriented, they also try to achieve a balance between material consumption and saving money in order to optimise their purchases (Duan and Dholakia, 2015). The attitudes towards saving and consuming indicate the mixture of the traditional value of thriftiness and the emerging hedonism and materialism developing in China, especially among young Chinese consumers.

The number of China's youth population is colossal. Presently, there are approximately 220 million people in China between the ages of 21 and 30 (Population Census Office under the State Council, 2012), who were all born after the economic reform and with the one-child policy. In response to the swelling population, Chinese government implemented the one-child policy in 1980 (it was terminated in 2016), which restricted the number of children each family could have to one, irrespective of ethnic minorities and couples with no siblings (Fitzpatrick, 2009). One conspicuous result of this policy is the 'little emperors' family structure, which refers to the only child in one family being cherished and even spoiled by 'six-pockets' (i.e. two parents plus four grandparents) (Wysocki, 1997). China's one-child generation grew up in a dramatically different economic environment than older generations. Compared to the older generations, these 'little emperors' experience

many more consumer goods (Ngai and Cho, 2012), and are less likely to be tradition-bound, and more oriented towards self-expression, self-gratification, and brands. This is because before the economic reform in 1978, consumer goods had uniform prices, and the categories of consumer products were extremely finite (Salzman, 1999).

However, due to the new economic policy that largely reduced the constraints on foreign companies and imports after 1978, the conventional state-owned, institutionalised and centralised Chinese consumer market has been transformed by the large-scale entry and expansion of global brands, which has deeply influenced Chinese consumers' way of consumption (Wang et al., 2009). As a result, the younger generations in China have greater access to many more consumer goods, and with the rapid increase in disposable income, the younger generations have greater motives to purchase them (Chen and Feng, 2000). While older generations are likely to be less brand-oriented and more price-conscious, younger Chinese consumers seem to be the opposite (Wassner, 2009).

Therefore, they have become more brand-conscious (Dou et al., 2006), which refers to the mental inclination of selecting products of highly advertised and well-known brands (Liao and Wang, 2009). Brand conscious consumers tend to regard brands as crucial indicators of self-expression in that brands possess strong symbolic values (Jamal and Goode, 2001). "Just as people take care in choosing friends who have a similar personality to themselves, so brands, which are symbolic of particular images, are chosen with the same concern" (de Chernatony and McDonald, 1997, p. 145). All in all, using well-known brands helps consumers build confidence in forming their own self-identity as well as present it to others (Wang et al., 2009). Previous research finds that Chinese consumers pay more attention to brands than their counterparts in Europe or the USA (Meyer et al., 2009). Liao and Wang (2009) find that Chinese consumers prefer famous and well-known brands. Even if some consumers lack knowledge of a certain brand, they are willing to choose name-brand products due to the fact that famous brands can manifest their identity and social status. Branding is therefore particularly crucial for companies in China.

Moreover, due to the remarkable economic growth, the social media in China have developed rapidly, playing an important role in transforming Chinese consumers' lifestyles and values. As Lysonski (2014) stressed, international companies are keen to grow revenue in China, and, hence, understanding the mindset of the Chinese consumers is crucial to determine how to position and promote products in China. Duan and Dholakia (2015) investigate how Chinese social media Weibo has reshaped traditional Chinese values. They find that Weibo provides a platform to make personal consumption experiences accessible to the public, and they find that 'enjoy now' has become a desirable lifestyle, coupled with a growing sense of hedonism and materialism. Because of the dramatic change in the level of economic development as well as the amount of personal income, Chinese consumers, especially the young Chinese consumers who tend to pursue a lifestyle depending on the rising purchase power, have readily adopted and adapted to the Western values and lifestyles (Ye et al., 2012). Western brands with high brand equity are attractive to the younger generations of consumers living in urban areas who have not experienced another way of life other than a modern urban (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006).

The discussion above points to the fact that the study of social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity are overdue for those who would like to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media brand communication dimensions on consumer-based brand equity dimensions for young consumers in a non-Western setting and an emerging market. Conducting this study in China, a non-western country, can thus test the applicability as well as validity of the theories developed in Western countries (Peng et al., 1991). Furthermore, this study can also complement and provide some insights into the views concerning the managerial implications for international high street fashion companies to make improvements in emerging markets and developing countries in Asia and for other non-Western countries.

A single area of work – in this research, brand communication on Chinese social media WeChat – is considered to offer the research better control over the market and environmental distinctions than a survey of multiple areas (Conant et al., 1990).

Therefore, the analysis data were collected from (1) in-depth interviews, (2) focus groups, (3) a pilot study, and (4) a main survey in this area.

4.3.2. Unit of analysis

According to Corbetta (2003), the unit of analysis is a key object or entity investigated in a study. A proper unit of analysis is to determine "what unit it is that you want to be able to say something about" (Patton, 1987, p. 51), which mainly relies on the research questions and research objectives (Baker, 1994). The objective of this research is to examine from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, the motivation to engage in social media brand communication, the influence of social media brand communication dimensions on consumer-based brand equity dimensions, respectively, the causal relationships between the metrics of consumer-based brand equity, the relationship between consumer-based brand equity and purchase intention, and the relationship between country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity. Therefore, in accord with the research objectives, the suitable unit of analysis is the individual in this field in both qualitative and quantitative studies. Data collection at an individual level denotes that the relationships between the social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions are measured by means of questionnaires distributed to young Chinese consumers. In order to develop the measurement items from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers as well as to refine the clarity of the constructs and the relationships between the constructs in this study, the primary data regarding all the constructs were derived from interviews with young Chinese consumers in the first stage of this study.

In terms of the data collection methods, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed to develop the measurement items. In addition to the items selected from the existing literature, a qualitative approach was also used to explore and generate new measurement items. In this study, in-depth interviews and focus groups of young Chinese consumers were conducted, while in the following stage, a pilot study using the quantitative approach was conducted. Next, the measurement items were refined by conducting a reliability test as well as exploratory factor

analysis. The detailed data collection approaches are illustrated below in this chapter.

4.3.3. Target population and sampling technique

Malhotra and Birks (2003, p. 358) emphasise that it is crucial to specify the target population of the study and make clear "who should and should not be included in the sample" regarding the research problems. The population is defined as "the universe of units from which the sample is to be selected" (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 182). The population of this research is young Chinese consumers. 'Elements' and 'sampling units' were used to specify the target population. Sampling units comprising the elements are available for being selected in the sampling process (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). Based on the research questions, each province of China is the sampling unit of this study and the individual young Chinese consumer is the element. The sampling frame, which refers to any source material or device employed to acquire access to the finite population of interest (Sarndal et al., 2003) can be determined by diverse means, such as a mailing list on a database, a telephone book or a student database. However, as China has the largest population in the world of about 14 million as well as a vast national area (The World Bank, 2019), it is not feasible to conduct the research covering such a large area due to the limited timeframe and manpower. Consequently, probability sampling methods could not be employed.

According to Churchill (1996), there are two main sampling methods: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sample is "a sample that has been selected using random selection so that each unit in the population has a known chance of being selected," while non-probability sample is "a sample that has not been selected using a random selection method" (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 182). Probability sampling is regarded as superior to non-probability sampling as "the resulting sample is likely to provide a representative cross-section of the whole" (Denscombe, 2002, p. 12). Besides, probability sampling provides researchers with access to "the accuracy and validity of the finding from the survey by referencing to the degree of error and/or bias which may be present in it as measured by well understood statistical methods" (Baker, 2002, p. 106). According to Churchill (1996, p. 479), "each member of the population has a known, nonzero chance of being

included in the sample. The chance of each member of the population to be included in the sample may not be equal, but everyone has a probability of inclusion" (Churchill, 1996, p. 479).

In contrast, in terms of the non-probability sampling method, "there is no way of estimating the probability that any population element will be included in the sample" (Churchill, 1996, p. 479). Whereas, when confronted with limitations that the probability-based sampling method cannot be conducted, it is advisable to employ the non-probability sampling technique, in spite of the comparatively limited generalisability for statistical results (Denscombe, 2002). The common non-probability based sampling techniques consist of convenience samples, quota samples, and judgement samples (Churchill, 1996). Due to the inaccessibility to the sampling frame (total number of target population), it is impossible to employ probability sampling, hence, the researcher adopted a non-probability based sampling technique, i.e. judgement sampling, which is also called purposive sampling, to collect a sample of young Chinese consumers. The major characteristic of this sampling technique is that the population elements are selected deliberately in order to select representatives of the population that can serve the research purpose (Churchill, 1996). As Churchill (1996, p. 483) claimed, "when the courts rely on expert testimony, they are in a sense using a judgement sample." On the basis of purposive sampling, a researcher is no longer interested in sampling a cross-section of opinion but focuses on sampling those who can provide a valid perspective on the research questions (Churchill, 1996).

The aim of this study is to examine the influence of social media brand communication dimensions on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. In order to fulfil this objective, the students from Sichuan University were selected as the sample population for this study. The reasons are as follows: first, there are significant studies regarding social media employing students as subjects (Khang et al., 2012). An analysis of the top journals in respect of communication, marketing, advertising, and public relations reveals that approximately 31% of those articles used student samples, as they are acknowledged to be the most frequent users of the Internet, especially for social

media platforms (Florenthal et al., 2012). According to an international study of college students by the Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change and the International Centre for Media & the Public Affairs (ICMPA) (The World Unplugged, 2011), college students across the world are the most active users of digital technology, especially social media. They spend hours on social media conducting various activities (Rigby and Waugh, 2010). The rapid development of social media, has caused it to become the main approach for students to acquire information, including brand advertisements (The World Unplugged, 2011). The booming popularity of social media brings about enormous opportunities for international brands to attract college students, and, therefore, it is vital and appropriate to study this segment.

Second, the Chinese market, as vast as it is, is an aggregation of numerous submarkets with distinctive consumer needs and purchasing power (Forbes, 2014). Based on the level of economic development, the Chinese market is classified into four tiers of cities (The Wall Street Journal, 2014). Tier-1 cities represent the cities with the most advanced economy and most attractive markets, Tier-2 cities are usually the capitals of the provinces of China, which have a less advanced economy compared to Tier-1 cities but have strong market potential, and Tier-3 and Tier-4 cities represent the least developed cities across the country (Mullich, 2014). Generally, academic research focuses on Tier-1 cities in China (e.g. Lu and Xu, 2015; Ye et al., 2012), and the Tier-2 to Tier 4 cities are rarely considered. Therefore, Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province of China, which has a population of about 14 million (Chengdu Bureau of Statistics, 2019), was selected as the research context. According to China Core Cities Annual Report 2017 (China Centre for Urban Development, 2018), Chengdu ranks first among the Tier-2 cities in China, which indicates that it is an attractive market and has strong market potential.

Third, Sichuan University is one of China's top comprehensive universities and ranks first among the universities in Sichuan with approximately 37,000 undergraduate students and over 20,000 master students and PhD candidates (Sichuan University, 2018).

However, some response bias should be noticed. As Baumgartner and Steenkamp (2001) point out that respondents of an interview or a questionnaire may be manipulated by some 'content-irrelevant factors', which are regarded as response bias. In the literature, response bias usually refers to 'socially desirable responding' (Baumgartner and Steenkamp, 2001). For instance, participants are likely to overemphasise favourable attitudes and underemphasise unfavourable attitudes (Tellis and Chandrasekaran, 2010). In terms of this research, a young Chinese student who has a positive attitude towards social media WeChat and is an active user might overestimate the effect of social media brand communication on consumer-based brand equity, and vice versa.

Social desirability bias is also considered to be a possibility as some participants might be influenced more by social acceptability than their true opinions about items (Podsakoff, et al., 2003). In other words, people are likely to pursue a favourable image in other people's minds. In terms of this research, it examines the influences of the social media brand communication dimensions on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions by means of questionnaires. The social desirability bias may, to some extent, influence the research findings (Podsakoff et al., 2003). For example, in order to maintain a nice image, the participant may report that he/she considers altruism to be one of the motivations to engage in social media brand communication.

4.4. SCALE DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION

The development of the scale, especially in terms of scale validity and reliability, is of paramount importance, since it links the previous theoretical framework to the present empirical research. As Churchill (1979, p. 64) states, measurement scale development is "a critical element in the evaluation of a fundamental body of knowledge in marketing as well as improved marketing practice." According to de Vellis (1991), the measurement scale refers to the gathering of selected items in a compound score, which serves as an indicator of the level of theoretical variables that are not observed by direct means. Developing measurement scales in a systematic way is crucial to enhance the generalisability of the research findings, while developing measurement scales unsystematically may cause wrong

conclusions (de Vellis, 1991). Therefore, in order to develop measurement scales systematically, Churchill's (1979) procedure for developing proper measures is adopted in this study (see Figure 4.2, overleaf), and the procedure for scale development for this research is specified in the following subsections.

Figure 4.2: Procedure for developing better measures
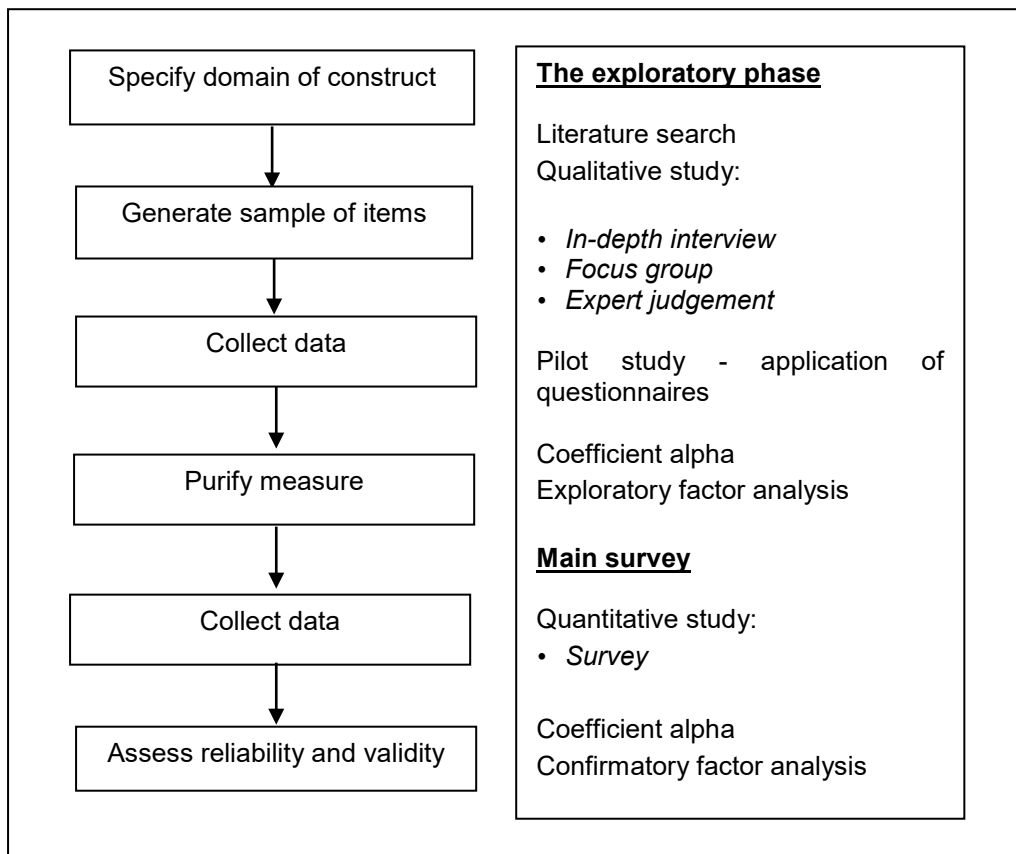
Source: adapted from Churchill (1979)

4.4.1. Specification of the domain constructs

In terms of the proper procedure for measurement scale development, the first step is to specify the domain of each construct, which includes specifying the operational definitions and metrics of constructs. As Churchill (1979, p. 67) emphasises, it is vital for researchers to explicitly define "what is included in the definition and what is excluded." In order to achieve this goal, Churchill (1979) also points out that it is significant for researchers to thoroughly review the relevant literature in this step. Table 4.4 (overleaf) presents the key constructs with their definitions. The following

step is based on the clear definition of the constructs completed in this step in order to generate the items hypothesised for each dimension.

Table 4.4: The main constructs and their definitions

Constructs	Definitions	Major references
Social media brand communication (domain) Social media brand communication refers to the creation and exchange of brand-related information between individuals through Internet based applications and tools that build on the foundations of Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 6; Mangold and Faulds, 2009).		
• Firm-generated social media brand communication	A way of communicating that the information is brand-related, created by firms for the purpose of developing and maintaining one-on-one relationships with existing and potential customers by means of social media's interactive feature.	Godes and Mayzlin (2009); Kumar et al. (2016)
• User-generated social media brand communication	A way of communicating that the information is brand-related, publicly available, reflecting some degree of creative effort, and generated outside professional routines through personal communication and information exchange by means of the interactive nature of social media.	OECD (2007); Presi et al. (2014)
• Co-creation of social media brand communication	A way of customer-brand interaction through which brand-related conversations enable and stimulate customers to integrate their own thoughts and experiences into the brand story by means of the interactive nature of social media.	Mangold and Faulds (2009); Singh and Sonnenburg (2012)
Consumer-based brand equity (domain) Consumer-based brand equity refers to the customers' familiarity with the brand and associations with its value, which is reflected by the metrics of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty (Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Pappu et al., 2006).		
• Brand awareness	Brand awareness is the strength of the presence of a brand in consumers' memory and the ability of consumers to recognise or recall a brand in its product category.	Aaker (1996); Pappu et al. (2005)
• Brand association	Anything in consumer's memory that can be linked to a brand, including attributes of the product/service, reputation of the company, and characteristics of the brand.	Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000); Wang and Li (2012)

• Perceived quality		The consumer's perception and evaluation of the overall quality or excellence of a product or service according to some desired objectives.	Aaker (1991); Bhuian (1997); Moradi and Zarei (2012)
• Brand loyalty		A commitment held by consumers to rebuy or repatronise a certain brand constantly in the future as well as treat it as the first choice to purchase.	Oliver (1997); Wang and Li (2012)

The motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication (domain)

In the context of communication on social media, it is the drives, urges, willingness, interest or desires to engage in brand-related information processing among consumers (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989; Rubin, 2002).

• The motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication	Altruism	Altruism is a motivation based on wanting to help other social media users without anticipating any reward in return as well as wanting to do so due to having benefited from other user's help previously.	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004); Presi et al. (2014)
	Venting	Venting is a motivation based on releasing negative feelings or emotions after a negative consumption experience in order to reduce anger, tension or frustration.	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004); Sundaram et al. (1998)
	Vengeance	Vengeance is a motivation based on retaliating against the company due to a negative consumption experience.	Bechwati and Morrin (2003); Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004)
	Self-enhancement	Self-enhancement is a motivation based on enhancing self-images among other consumers by interacting with other users on social media.	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004); Sedikides and Gregg (2008)
	Economic motivation	Economic motivation is stimulated by winning rewards through engaging in social media brand communication.	Arnhold (2010); Sundaram et al. (1998)

Purchase intention		
• Purchase intention	The consumer's personal preference towards a certain product or service or the likelihood to purchase a certain brand.	Fishbein and Ajzen (1975); Payal et al. (2013)
Country-of-origin		
• Country-of-origin	This is not only tangible cues, such as the packaging, logo, and labelling concerning which country the product originated from, but also the intangible cues such as emotion, feelings and perception about the country the product came from.	Roth and Romeo (1992); Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999)

Source: developed by the researcher for the present study

4.4.2. Generation of measurement items

According to Churchill's (1979) paradigm, the second step is to generate sample items regarding specified domains. In order to generate measurement items, researchers can consult the existing literature, exploratory research, experience surveys, interviews, and focus groups, and so on (Churchill, 1979). In this study, the researcher employs items from the existing literature as well as qualitative research including in-depth interviews and focus groups with young Chinese consumers.

4.4.2.1. The items of constructs in the literature

As is stated in the previous section, some of the items of the constructs in this study were adapted from the existing literature and the constructs are multi-item scales. This is because, according to Churchill (1979, p. 66), a single item usually has "uniqueness or specificity in that each item seems to have only a low correlation with the attribute being measured and tends to relate to other attributes." Besides, a single item may also have significant measurement error, as they yield "unreliable responses in the same way so that the same scale position is unlikely to be checked in successive administrations of an instrument" (Churchill, 1979, p. 66).

In terms of the present study, with regard to the measurement items for each motivation for consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, the construct altruism is based on the items from Price et al. (1995),

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Yoo and Gretzel (2011), Rensink (2013), and Presi et al. (2014); the measurement scales for venting originated from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), McColl-Kennedy et al. (2009), Yoo and Gretzel (2011), Rensink (2013), and Presi et al. (2014); the items for vengeance are derived from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Wetzer et al. (2007), McColl-Kennedy et al. (2009), Rensink (2013), and Presi et al. (2014); the items for self-enhancement are adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Wetzer et al. (2007), and Yoo and Gretzel (2011); and the items for economic motivation are adapted from Baker et al. (2011), and Azar et al. (2016).

Regarding the measurement items for the metrics of social media brand communication, the construct firm-generated social media brand communication are based on the items from Magi (2003), Tsiros et al. (2004), Bruhn et al. (2012), Sri et al. (2014), and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015); and the measurement items for user-generated social media brand communication are derived from Magi (2003), Tsiros et al. (2004), Bruhn et al. (2012), Sri et al. (2014), and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015). In terms of co-creation of social media brand communication, as there are no previous studies on this dimension of social media brand communication, no references for these items exist.

Regarding the measurement items for the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, the items for brand awareness originated from Yoo et al. (2000), Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco (2005), Bruhn, et al. (2012), Murtiasih et al. (2014), and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015); the measurement items for brand association are derived from Yoo et al. (2000), Pappu et al. (2005), Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco (2005), Bruhn et al. (2012), Wang and Li (2012), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Lu and Xu (2015), and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015); the measurement scales for perceived quality are based on the items from Aaker (1991), Yoo et al. (2000), Pappu et al. (2005), Pappu, et al. (2006), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Khan et al. (2015), Lu and Xu (2015) and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015); and the items for brand loyalty are derived from Yoo et al. (2000), Yoo and Donthu (2001), Pappu, et al. (2006), Walsh et al. (2009), Murtiasih et al. (2014), Khan et al. (2015), Lu and Xu (2015) and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015).

In respect of purchase intention, the items are derived from Grewal et al. (1998), Kim et al. (2009), Bruhn et al. (2012), Wang and Li (2012), and Khan et al. (2015). In regard to purchase intention, the measurement items are adapted from Moradi and Zarei (2012), and Murtiasih et al. (2014). More details regarding the domains and items of the constructs can be found in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: The domains and items of constructs in extant literature

Constructs	Items	References
The motivation for consumers to engage in social media brand communication		
Altruism	AL1: I would like to help other people AL2: I would like to share my own positive experiences AL3: I would like to share what I have AL4: Information other people posted helped me, so I would like to return the favour AL5: I would like to contribute to a pool of information	Presi et al. (2014); Price et al. (1995); Yoo and Gretzel (2011)
	AL6: I want to give others the opportunity to buy the right product	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004); Rensink (2013)
Venting	VT1: I want to express my anger about my negative experience	Presi et al. (2014); Wetzer et al. (2007); Yoo and Gretzel (2011)
	VT2: I want to vent my negative feelings	Presi et al. (2014); Yoo and Gretzel (2011),
	VT3: My contributions help me to shake off frustrations about bad buys	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004); Rensink (2013)
	VT4: I want to seek consolation	Adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004)
	VT5: I want to pour my heart out	Wetzer et al. (2007)
Vengeance	VG1: I want to take revenge upon the company, as I suffered a great loss VG2: The company harmed me, and I will harm the company	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004); McColl-Kennedy et al. (2009); Presi et al. (2014); Rensink (2013)

	VG3: I want to take actions to attempt to sabotage the company VG4: I want the company to lose customers	McColl-Kennedy et al. (2009); Presi et al. (2014)
	VG5: I want to give this brand a bad reputation	Wetzer et al. (2007)
Self-enhancement	SE1: I want to show my personality to others	Adapted from Yoo and Gretzel (2011)
	SE2: I feel good when I can tell others my buying success SE3: I want to gain attention from others SE4: I want to show my fashion taste to others SE5: I want to show others that I am a clever customer	Adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004)
	SE6: Showing that I use this product makes a good impression	Adapted from Wetzer et al. (2007)
Economic motivation	EM1: I interact with brands on social media in order to get vouchers or coupons EM2: I interact with brands on social media in order to get free products or other special offers	Adapted from Azar et al. (2016)
	EM3: I would like to get some money reward from [brand] EM4: I am looking for some benefit EM5: I want to have a financial compensation	Adapted from Baker et al. (2011)
Social media brand communication		
Firm-generated social media brand communication	FG1: I am satisfied with the content generated by companies about [brand] on social media FG2: The level of the content generated by companies about [brand] on social media meets my expectations FG3: The content generated by this company about [brand] on social media performs well, when compared with other companies	Bruhn et al. (2012); Magi (2003); Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015); Tsiros et al. (2004)
	FG4: The content generated by companies about [brand] is very attractive	Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015)

	FG5: I can get enough information about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication	Adapted from Sri et al. (2014)
	FG6: I got recommendations from firm-generated social media brand communication to buy [brand]	
	FG7: I only hear positive things about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication	
User-generated social media brand communication	UG1: I am satisfied with the content generated by users about [brand] on social media	Bruhn et al. (2012); Magi (2003); Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015); Tsiros et al. (2004)
	UG2: The level of the content generated by users about [brand] on social media meets my expectations	
	UG3: The content generated by users about this [brand] on social media performs well, when compared with other brands	
	UG4: The content generated by users about [brand] is very attractive	Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015)
	UG5: I can get enough information about [brand] through user-generated social media brand communication	Adapted from Sri et al. (2014)
	UG6: I got recommendations from user-generated social media brand communication to buy [brand]	
	UG7: I only hear positive things about [brand] through user-generated social media brand communication	
Co-creation of social media brand communication	New construct	There are no previous studies
Consumer-based brand equity		

Brand awareness	BA1: I easily recognise [brand]	Bruhn et al. (2012); Murtiasih et al. (2014); Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015); Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco (2005); Yoo et al. (2000)
	BA2: I can recognise [brand] among other competing brands	
	BA3: I easily recall the symbol/logo of [brand]	
	BA4: I know what the [brand] looks like	
	BA5: Give own opinion of [brand]	Murtiasih et al. (2014); Yoo et al. (2000)
	BA6: I am aware of [brand] presence	
Brand association	BAS1: Several characteristics of [brand] instantly come to my mind	Bruhn et al. (2012); Murtiasih et al. (2014); Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015); Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco (2005); Yoo et al. (2000)
	BAS2: Associating [brand] with functions	Murtiasih et al. (2014); Yasin et al. (2007)
	BAS3: Associating [brand] with uniqueness	
	BAS4: Associating [brand] with prestige	
	BAS5: Associating [brand] with creativity	
	BAS6: I have a clear image of the type of person who would use [brand]	Wang and Li (2012)
	BAS7: I like the brand image of [brand]	Lu and Xu (2015); Pappu et al. (2005)
Perceived quality	PQ1: Products of [brand] are of great quality	Aaker (1991); Murtiasih et al. (2014); Pappu et al. (2006); Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015); Yoo et al. (2000)
	PQ2: Products of [brand] are very durable	
	PQ3: Products of [brand] are very reliable	
	PQ4: Products of [brand] are worth their price	
	PQ5:Products function as well as I expected	Khan et al. (2015)
	PQ6: The materials used by the [brand] are comfortable	
	PQ7: I trust the quality of products from [brand]	Lu and Xu (2015); Pappu et al. (2005)
Brand loyalty	BL1: The willingness to pay higher price for [brand] although other brands have similar characteristics	Khan et al. (2015); Murtiasih et al. (2014); Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015); Walsh et al. (2009)
	BL2: I intend to remain the [brand's] customer	
	BL3: I would love to recommend [brand] to my friends	Khan et al. (2015); Lu and Xu (2015)

	BL4: I consider myself to be loyal to [brand] BL5: The product of [brand] would be my first choice BL6: I will not buy other brands if [brand] is available at store BL7: Want to choose [brand] when purchasing clothes	Khan et al. (2015); Lu and Xu (2015); Murtiasih et al. (2014); Pappu et al. (2006); Yoo and Donthu (2001); Yoo et al. (2000)
Purchase intention		
Purchase intention	PI1: It is possible that I will buy [brand] in the near future. PI2: It is highly likely that I will buy [brand] in the future. PI3: I will seriously consider buying [brand] in the future.	Bruhn et al. (2012); Grewal et al. (1998)
	PI4: I plan to buy products of [brand] more often	Kim et al. (2009)
	PI5: I plan to buy products of [brand] right away	Wang and Li (2012)
	PI6: I have intention to buy [brand] in the future	Khan et al. (2015)
Country-of-origin		
Country-of-origin	COO1: The [country] is a rich developed country. COO2: The [country] is a country that has high quality in its workmanship COO3: The [country] is a country that is prestigious COO4: The [country] is a country that is innovative	Adapted from Moradi and Zarei (2012)
	COO5: The [country] is a country that is competent in design	Adapted from Murtiasih et al. (2014)
	COO6: I like the [country] COO7: The [country] is technologically advanced	Ar and Kara (2014)

Source: developed by the researcher for the present study

Prior to the main studies, thirteen in-depth interviews, three focus groups (total of eighteen participants), expert item judging, and one pre-test study were conducted. The purposes of which was to determine whether the literature-generated definitions of all the constructs of this research as well as the relationships concurred with the ordinary young consumers' views, and to generate items for the constructs' measures. Such a qualitative approach has been increasingly acknowledged as being a useful scale development tool (Haynes et al., 1999). After all the qualitative researches finished, the items generated from the qualitative researches were combined with the items adapted from the existing literature. In the following section, details of the in-depth interviews and focus groups are discussed.

4.4.2.2. A qualitative study: semi-structured interviews

When conducting interviews to generate possible measurement items, one concern is that the constructs and their measurement items are applied in different research settings. In other words, researchers should pay more attention to the equivalence and applicability of the constructs and their measurement items. As Craig and Douglas (2000, p. 256) noted, "a particular construct identified in one country may not exist in another country or may not be expressed in the same terms." Hence, when a research is conducted in a context different from the research in which the adapted items originate from, the operationalisation of the existing measurement items and the relevance of the definition should be re-evaluated (Craig and Douglas, 2000). Shimp and Sharma (1987) propose some solutions to identify whether the constructs and their measurement items are applicable to other countries, they suggest translating the constructs and their measurement items into different languages and to check "whether the same construct exists in different countries" (Craig and Douglas, 2000, p. 256). Additionally, when the constructs are confirmed as existing elsewhere, researchers should further test whether the elements are the same in the different contexts (Craig and Douglas, 2000).

Given the insufficient existing research concerning the relationship between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity, this research uses qualitative research in the first step including two qualitative methods: in-depth interviews and focus groups. In-depth interviews are a widely used method in

phenomenological investigation (McEachern et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 1990), because the method "gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves" (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). It provides the insights into the respondents' own interpretations of the phenomenon and enables researchers to better understand the constructs (Miles and Huberman, 1994). From a phenomenological perspective of view, consciousness enables people to gain access to realities. Conversation is an effective way to approach informants' conscious experiences and to further obtain insight into their realities. As an in-depth interview provides greater depth of understanding of the research phenomenon, it enables the generation of possible measurement items to measure each investigative construct. According to Morgan (1997), in-depth interviews are apt to investigate personal issues, such as individual motivations for media use, in more detail. Besides, they enable researchers to determine individual opinions and attitudes towards the issues.

Exploratory investigations are considered to be of less concern when contacting a large group of people who are representative of the population (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In terms of the sample size for in-depth interviews, a small sample size is widely-adopted in exploratory studies, for example, Chen and Haley (2010) conducted a phenomenological study to interview 12 participants to explore users' experiences of a Chinese social media platform. Information saturation is also a concern, which refers to a point where the researcher finds it hard to discover new information from respondents in the data collection stage (Kumar, 2014). Therefore, in the period of the recruiting process, the researcher first contacted friends who are students in Sichuan University by sending them emails about the research purpose and research subject and asked whether they would like to participate. The reason for selecting participants with whom the researcher is familiar is that they can offer more detailed and sufficient data for the researcher to gain a deeper insight into the research questions. Some participants asked to see the topic guide in advance, therefore, the researcher sent them the topic guide through the Internet. In total, the researcher conducted 13 in-depth interviews within two weeks in Sichuan University in Chengdu to achieve the requirement of information saturation (for the details of

the interviews and respondents, see Table 4.6, and for the details of the interviewees' profiles, see Table 4.7, overleaf).

The in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face with only the informant and the researcher in public places, such as the cafeteria or library in Sichuan University. To put informants at ease, the interviews commenced with a brief introduction about the purpose of the interview as well as an assurance of confidentiality. The interviews lasted from 60-90 minutes and were audio recorded with the prior permission of the interviewees and transcribed later. The researcher used a topic guide to make sure all the research questions were addressed during the interviews (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). The interview guide was formulated according to the research questions of this study. The English interview guide was first translated into Chinese and then back-translated into English by a second translator to guarantee the validity of the questions (Geisinger, 1994). Two native Chinese speakers who achieved master's degrees in the UK served as the translators for the interview guide. A few deviations were found and settled through discussion.

Table 4.6: Details of interviews and respondents

Study population:		Young Chinese consumers (21-30)	
Sample population:		Young Chinese consumers (21-30) in Chengdu city	
Sampling technique: Judgement sampling		Students of Sichuan University who agreed to participate in the interviews	
Conducted interviews		13	
Respondents' profile		No. of respondents	%
Gender	Female	10	76.9%
	Male	3	23.1%
Age	21-30	13	100%
Level of education	Bachelor's degree	5	38.4%
	Master's	6	46.2%

	degree		
	PhD	2	15.4%

Source: developed by the researcher

Table 4.7: Interviewees' profiles

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Duration (hours: minutes)	Interview date
1	Female	24	Master	1:36	2nd Dec 2017
2	Female	22	Bachelor	1:22	2nd Dec 2017
3	Female	23	Master	1:09	3rd Dec 2017
4	Female	27	PhD	1:31	4th Dec 2017
5	Female	24	Master	1:01	5th Dec 2017
6	Female	21	Bachelor	1:18	6th Dec 2017
7	Male	23	Master	1:28	7th Dec 2017
8	Female	23	Master	1:40	8th Dec 2017
9	Female	21	Bachelor	1:13	9th Dec 2017
10	Female	24	Master	1:20	9th Dec 2017
11	Male	21	Bachelor	1:03	10th Dec 2017
12	Male	22	Bachelor	1:11	12th Dec 2017
13	Female	28	PhD	1:38	14th Dec 2017

Source: developed by the researcher

The interview questions comprised the measurement items of all the constructs of this research. The researcher encouraged the informants to elaborate their views, attitudes, and understandings on each question and emphasised that, if they were confronted with questions that they did not understand, they should point it out immediately. The interview guide was divided into six parts. The first part referred to the overall view of social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity and the relationship between them. More specifically, the questions focused on what the social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity are and what dimensions they contain. The second part consisted of questions regarding the motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand

communication. The 'qualitative attitude approach' (Vesala and Rantanen, 2007) was applied in the motivation part of the interview, which is characterised by presenting statements with interviewees regarding which they were asked for their opinions or comments as well as the reasons for such responses. In order to operationalise motivations, five statements were proposed as follows:

(1) I am willing to share brand information with my friends if it is useful or beneficial to them.

(2) If the product I purchased has awful quality, I would like to post information about it to release my negative feelings.

(3) If the product I purchased caused a safety problem, I would like to post information about it to warn others not to buy it so that I can take revenge on the brand.

(4) I would like to create or share brand content to show my identity or taste.

(5) I would like to post brand information if I can get some reward from it.

This was followed by the question, can you think of any other motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication?

The third part consisted of questions concerning the way that social media brand communication affects consumer-based brand equity. To be more specific, it investigated the influence of each metric of social media brand communication on each metric of consumer-based brand equity. The fourth part comprised questions about the causal relationships between the consumer-based brand equity dimensions. The fifth part consisted of questions regarding the way that each dimension of consumer-based brand equity affects purchase intention. The last part comprised questions concerning the way that country-of-origin affects each metric of consumer-based brand equity. The questions were designed as open-ended questions. For instance, the informants were asked to describe each construct from their own perspective based on their knowledge and experience. When necessary, the researcher also asked more probing questions to gain a deeper understanding of the studied constructs. For example, when the answers from respondents were too abstract or vague, such as "I have seen my friends posting brand-related information

on Moments of WeChat", the researcher then asked a probing question, such as "did it have any influence on you? If yes, what influence did it have?" Furthermore, in order to figure out the relationships between constructs, the informants were asked questions regarding the research questions (details about the interview questions are illustrated in Appendix A: Topic guide for the in-depth interviews).

Three pre-study interviews were implemented to learn more about the constructs of this research, and, after having conducted the pre-study, the interview guide was modified to be more specific, including open questions. The in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner in accord with exploratory nature, thereby enabling certain aspects of this study to be explored in greater depth. A total of 13 interviews were conducted within 2 weeks. All the interviews were subsequently transcribed into Chinese. The transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher of this study and two external experts from Sichuan University specialising in consumer research in China. All the reviewers were fluent in both Chinese and English. The data from the interviews were organised by means of NVivo software. The findings of the in-depth interviews are stated next with selected quotes, as some quotes from different respondents have the same meaning, the clear and characteristic quotes were selected intentionally to contextualise each item.

Qualitative analysis was conducted after the completion of the data collection from the in-depth interviews and focus groups, and the findings were subsequently integrated. The research questions and the theoretical background guided the transcript coding. The literature review and prior work played an important role in formulating the preliminary items guiding the initial data analysis. The researcher identified and classified the interview data on the basis of the item list obtained from the existing literature. Beginning with the analysis of the data from the in-depth interviews, the researcher used NVivo to yield free nodes according to the item list.

As Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 102) highlight, the data should be "broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences" in the open coding stage. The researcher scrutinised every single word and phrase in order to probe the underlying meaning. Then the codes were grouped into categories

which served as important analytical ideas (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). After the categories were all developed, the open coding was completed. The researcher closely examined the data and identified the relevant categories. The sentences or paragraphs that underlaid the existing nodes were coded first and then added to the existing nodes (see Appendix B: The coding of the in-depth interviews). Since the analytical approach is inductive, the theoretical framework serves as a general direction for analysis, but is apt to modification as new items appear from the responses of the participants. The researcher generated new free nodes for sentences or paragraphs including new information. The researcher created new free nodes on the basis of the responses that contained new information not present in the existing literature. Next, in the process of axial coding, each item was categorised into a relevant construct. Then the researcher identified the relationship between the items, which was based on the constructs. The items pertinent to each construct were combined into each tree node. In addition, to gain deeper insight into the relationship between the constructs, the researcher also applied selective coding to the research to examine the texts according to the research questions.

In summary, the responses collected from the in-depth interviews were generally in accordance with the existing literature. The results revealed that the items acquired from the in-depth interviews were roughly similar to the items obtained from the existing literature. However, 11 new items were explored from the findings of the in-depth interviews (see Appendix B: The coding of the interviews). In the next chapter, the findings of in-depth interviews are discussed in detail.

4.4.2.3. A qualitative study: focus groups

According to Kumar (2014), a focus group is "a form of strategy in qualitative research in which attitudes, opinions or perceptions towards an issue, product, service or programme are explored through a free and open discussion between members of a group and the researcher." They facilitate interactions among participants and support honest revelations (Papista and Dimitriadis, 2012) which enables insights and depth into participants' attitudes and behaviour intentions for the research questions (Krueger, 1994), provides insights into the grounds and

motivations of complex behaviours (Herstein and Zvilling, 2011), and provides a greater breadth of understanding (Morgan, 1997).

Regarding the sampling and sample size, Churchill (1979) suggests that focus groups can facilitate additional measurement items to be generated. Malhotra and Birks (2003, p. 163) explain that focus groups are a desirable technique to generate measurement items since "putting a group of people together will produce a wider range of information, insight and ideas compared to individual response which was secured privately." In addition, a focus group enables comparison of the findings acquired from each source to validate the results. Unlike in-depth interviews, focus groups enable researchers to understand consumers' experiences in their own terms. Furthermore, participants can directly present the differences and similarities among participants' experiences and opinions (Morgan, 1997). Nevertheless, a major drawback of focus groups is that the participants may feel shy or stressed due to the other participants being present and may be too reserved to reveal some true opinions (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). In contrast, in-depth interviews allow "more candid discussion on the part of the interviewee, who might be intimidated to talk about a particular topic in a group" (Churchill, 1996, p. 127). Therefore, the researcher decided to integrate these two qualitative approaches to maximise their advantages and offset their disadvantages.

The criterion of how many groups should be formed is based on whether the next group can generate extra themes of the phenomenon under the research (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2005). As such, an aggregate of three focus groups were conducted to meet the requirement of data saturation in theoretical sampling. In addition, as a general rule, small size groups (4-6 participants) are preferable when the participants have sufficient experience of the topic (Krueger and Casey, 2000). Therefore, three focus groups were conducted with six participants in each group, which lasted for 2-2.5 hours. The participants were young Chinese consumers engaged in social media brand communication on WeChat to ensure that the findings from the interviews are relevant for each research question (for details of the focus groups and participants, see Table 4.8, overleaf).

Table 4.8: Details of focus groups and participants

Study population:		Young Chinese consumers (21-30)	
Sample population:		Young Chinese consumers (21-30) in Chengdu city	
Sampling technique: Judgement sampling		Students of Sichuan university who agreed to participate in the focus groups	
Conducted focus groups			
Date		**Duration (hours: minutes)**	**Number of participants**
6th Mar. 2018		2:10	6
8th Mar. 2018		2:25	6
10th Mar. 2018		2:30	6
Participants' profile		**No. of participants**	**%**
Gender	Female	12	67%
	Male	6	33%
Age	21-30	18	100%
Level of education	Bachelor's degree	6	33%
	Master's degree	7	39%
	PhD	5	28%

Source: developed by the researcher

The questions for the focus groups were the same as those for the in-depth interviews so that the data from both methods could be integrated with some new questions to further investigate some findings from the previous interviews. A topics guide was prepared, which aimed to explore the research questions. Introductory questions were asked in each focus group, such as "can I assume that everyone here is a WeChat user" (all participants are WeChat users) and "we will talk about brand-related information on WeChat". This was followed by a discussion about the participants' overall views of social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity; their motivations to engage in user-generated social media

brand communication; the influences of social media brand communication on consumer-based brand equity; the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions; the influence of consumer-based brand equity on purchase intention; and the influence of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity.

Each focus group was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Then each participant received the transcription and was asked to review and comment on it to confirm its accuracy. In consideration of confidentiality, the participant's name was replaced by a code in the transcript and they were notified of their corresponding code. The revised transcripts were then translated from Chinese to English. After reading the transcripts carefully, the author commenced data analysis. The data from the focus groups were analysed to gain a broader understanding of the relationship between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity. The findings of the focus groups were consistent with the findings of the in-depth interviews and provided broader views that were integrated into the analysis. The findings of the focus groups are discussed in detail in the next chapter. As a result, the preliminary items were tested, supplemented and refined as analysis improved. The in-depth interviews and focus groups were used to refine the conceptual model before conducting the online survey.

4.4.3. Measurement purification: a pilot study

After completing the item generation in the previous stage, a pilot study was conducted to purify the measurement items (de Vellis, 1991). Based on Churchill's (1979) scale development paradigm mentioned earlier, the third step is to test the validity and reliability of the measurement items. Expert judgement is invited to guarantee content validity and face validity (Churchill, 1979). The aggregate measurement items were reviewed by two academic experts including one UK lecturer and one Chinese lecturer in marketing to ensure content validity and face validity. In general, the two experts agreed with the items for measuring the constructs in the context of China's social media. However, according to their feedback, some descriptions of the items were modified. Finally, the pilot questionnaire was formulated, which contained 92 items derived from the existing measurement items, the in-depth interviews, and focus groups (see Appendix C: The

pilot study questionnaire). Before conducting the pilot study, all the measurement items were translated into Chinese and later translated back into English by two people who are proficient in Chinese and English. In the subsequent sections, the details of the pilot study and scale purification process are elaborated.

As WeChat is a mobile app and the samples are young Chinese consumers who are WeChat users, the researcher employed the mobile questionnaire to collect quantitative data. According to Kumar (2014), data collection through mobile phones follows the same developmental process as for a normal questionnaire. The only difference between a normal questionnaire and the mobile questionnaire is that in a normal questionnaire the respondent completes the questionnaire by hand and in a mobile questionnaire the respondent uses a mobile phone.

According to Creswell and Clark (2011), the participants for the quantitative research should not be the same individuals who offered the qualitative data in the initial qualitative step, since the participants of a qualitative study might subsequently think about the phenomenon differently. Therefore, the individuals who participated in the qualitative research were free from participating in the quantitative research. However, according to Malhotra and Birks (2003), the selection of respondents for the pilot study as well as the main survey should be drawn from the same population. As they suggested, "the respondents in the pilot-test should be similar to those who will be included in the actual survey in terms of background characteristics, familiarity with the topic, and attitudes and behaviours of interest" (Malhotra and Birks, 2003, p. 345). Therefore, judgement sampling, a non-probability based sampling technique, was applied in the data collection of pilot study. As clarified earlier, the main feature of judgement sampling is that the population components are deliberately selected as it is acknowledged that they are representative of the population of research interest and they are expected to undertake the research purpose (Churchill, 1996). Consequently, the data for the pilot study were collected from young Chinese consumers from the city of Chengdu who are WeChat users; the rationale having been explained in Section 4.3.4. (Target population and sampling technique).

According to Malhotra and Birks (2003), generally, a pilot study requires a small number of respondents (15-30) for pre-test questionnaires. Whereas, Hair et al. (2010) suggest that the sample size must be more than the number of variables (92 variables) in order to fulfil factor analysis (EFA). Furthermore, Hair et al. (2010) also suggest that it is preferable to achieve 90-100 observations for the sample size. Based on the research of Yu and Cooper (1983), the response rate for questionnaires distributed in person is about 81.7%. Therefore, the researcher planned to distribute 130 questionnaires to the targeted respondents in order to obtain enough responses.

In order to distribute the questionnaire to the targeted respondents, the researcher contacted WeChat friends who met the requirement of age and living place and asked whether they would like to complete the mobile questionnaire. The reason for selecting participants from among the researcher's WeChat friends is that they are more likely to participate in it and they may help the researcher to distribute more mobile questionnaires to other people who also meet the requirements of the survey sample.

A Likert scale was employed in the pilot questionnaires, which, according to Kumar (2014), is based on the assumption that each item on the scale has equal attitudinal value, weight, or importance with regard to reflecting an attitude towards the research question. The respondents were asked to score items on the basis of the scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree), which is based on their experience of WeChat use. Based on the feedback of the in-depth interviews at the qualitative stage, some interviewees pointed out that they were not clear about the meaning of the construct consumer-based brand equity. The researcher, hence, clarified the question as follows: consumer-based brand equity contains brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991). In addition, in order to avert ambiguity concerning the meaning of items, the researcher asked the respondents to point out any item that was ambiguous to them (Kohli et al., 1993). Finally, 130 questionnaires were distributed between October and November 2018. By the cut-off date, 100 completed questionnaires were collected (see Table 4.9, overleaf).

Table 4.9: Details of questionnaires and respondents for pilot study (n=100)

Study population:	Young Chinese consumers (21-30)
Sample population	Young Chinese consumers (21-30) in Chengdu
Sampling technique: Judgement sampling	Young Chinese consumers (21-30) in Chengdu who are WeChat users
Sample size required	90-100
Distributed questionnaires	130
Usable questionnaires	100

Respondents' profile		No. of respondents	%
<u>Gender</u>	Female	56	56%
	Male	44	44%
<u>Age</u>	21—30	100	100%
	Bachelor's degree	65	65%
<u>Level of education</u>	Master's degree	31	31%
	PhD	4	4%

Source: developed by the researcher

4.4.3.1. Reliability analysis

According to Churchill (1979), after an adequate number of respondents for the pre-test sample size have been confirmed, the following step is to analyse the reliability of the scales. Internal consistency is a commonly used measure of reliability, and refers to "the homogeneity of the items comprising a scale" (de Vellis, 1991, p. 25). Therefore, the items of the same construct should be highly intercorrelated (Churchill, 1979). In general, coefficient alpha and item-to-total correlation are examined to evaluate the internal consistency (e.g. Churchill, 1979; Melewar, 2001).

The coefficient alpha is a tool for checking the reliability of the measurement scales (Churchill, 1979), which refers to "the degree of interrelatedness among a set of items designed to measure a single construct" (Netemeyer et al., 2003, p. 49). As Melewar (2001, p. 39) suggested, "a low coefficient alpha indicates the sample of items performs poorly in capturing the construct." In line with the standard of reliability, values of item-to-total correlation of more than 0.35 and values of

coefficient alpha equal to or more than 0.70 indicate that the measurement items are reliable (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 4.10: Reliability test results on the basis of the pilot study

Constructs	Items	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha (α) if item deleted	Cronbach's alpha
Firm-generated social media brand communication	FG1	0.660	0.824	0.846
	FG2	0.629	0.828	
	FG3	0.549	0.836	
	FG4	0.676	0.820	
	FG5	0.691	0.819	
	FG6	0.505	0.846	
	FG7	0.455	0.849	
	FG8	0.610	0.829	
User-generated social media brand communication	UG1	0.745	0.871	0.892
	UG2	0.787	0.868	
	UG3	0.760	0.870	
	UG4	0.742	0.871	
	UG5	0.776	0.869	
	UG6	0.467	0.899	
	UG7	0.441	0.901	
	UG8	0.704	0.875	
Co-creation of social media brand communication	CO1	0.649	0.878	0.890
	CO2	0.668	0.877	
	CO3	0.682	0.876	
	CO4	0.755	0.868	
	CO5	0.702	0.873	
	CO6	0.521	0.892	
	CO7	0.587	0.884	
	CO8	0.779	0.865	
Brand awareness	BA1	0.824	0.899	0.921
	BA2	0.778	0.906	
	BA3	0.866	0.894	
	BA4	0.824	0.900	
	BA5	0.690	0.918	
	BA6	0.673	0.921	
Brand association	BAS1	0.798	0.905	0.921

	BAS2	0.775	0.908	
	BAS3	0.824	0.902	
	BAS4	0.810	0.904	
	BAS5	0.663	0.918	
	BAS6	0.735	0.911	
	BAS7	0.683	0.916	
Perceived quality	PQ1	0.776	0.929	0.936
	PQ2	0.781	0.928	
	PQ3	0.820	0.924	
	PQ4	0.783	0.928	
	PQ5	0.790	0.927	
	PQ6	0.808	0.925	
	PQ7	0.804	0.926	
Brand loyalty	BL1	0.721	0.908	0.917
	BL2	0.744	0.905	
	BL3	0.784	0.901	
	BL4	0.782	0.901	
	BL5	0.744	0.905	
	BL6	0.660	0.914	
	BL7	0.795	0.899	
Altruism	AL1	0.672	0.914	0.917
	AL2	0.812	0.896	
	AL3	0.802	0.897	
	AL4	0.712	0.909	
	AL5	0.766	0.902	
	AL6	0.827	0.893	
Venting	VT1	0.786	0.869	0.926
	VT2	0.842	0.863	
	VT3	0.847	0.862	
	VT4	0.659	0.884	
	VT5	0.725	0.876	
Vengeance	VG1	0.819	0.955	0.956
	VG2	0.866	0.947	
	VG3	0.889	0.943	
	VG4	0.916	0.939	
	VG5	0.898	0.942	
Self-enhancement	SE1	0.401	0.850	0.835

	SE2	0.348	0.858	
	SE3	0.722	0.784	
	SE4	0.740	0.782	
	SE5	0.704	0.788	
	SE6	0.793	0.770	
Economic motivation	EC1	0.680	0.901	0.908
	EC2	0.771	0.888	
	EC3	0.854	0.876	
	EC4	0.849	0.876	
	EC5	0.692	0.900	
	EC6	0.631	0.907	
Purchase intention	PI1	0.794	0.900	0.918
	PI2	0.753	0.905	
	PI3	0.715	0.910	
	PI4	0.838	0.893	
	PI5	0.719	0.910	
	PI6	0.787	0.900	
Country-of-origin	COO1	0.708	0.920	0.925
	COO2	0.797	0.910	
	COO3	0.865	0.903	
	COO4	0.833	0.907	
	COO5	0.830	0.908	
	COO6	0.521	0.939	
	COO7	0.852	0.904	

Source: developed for this study by the researcher

As presented in Table 4.10, the results of the coefficient alpha and item-to-total correlation supported the reliability of the firm-generated social media brand communication (FG), user-generated social media brand communication (UG), co-creation of social media brand communication (CO), brand awareness (BA), brand association (BAS), perceived quality (PQ), brand loyalty (BL), altruism (AL), venting motivation (VT), vengeance (VG), self-enhancement (SE), economic motivation (EC), purchase intention (PI), and country-of-origin (COO). A summary of the assessment of reliability is presented in the following sections.

Firm-generated social media brand communication (FG): According to Churchill (1979), a high coefficient alpha shows that the items represent the construct well of the construct. The result of the Cronbach's alpha (α) for firm-generated social media brand communication was 0.849, which was above the acceptable level (α > 0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of the items of firm-generated social media brand communication (FG) ranged from 0.455 to 0.691, which was above the acceptable level of 0.3 (Nunnally, 1978). This therefore indicated that the items for firm-generated social media brand communication (FG) were internally consistent.

User-generated social media brand communication (UG): The Cronbach's alpha (α) for user-generated social media brand communication was 0.892, which was above the acceptable level (α > 0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of user-generated social media brand communication (UG) were greater than 0.3 (from 0.441 to 0.787) (Nunnally, 1978). The results therefore revealed the internal consistency of the items of user-generated social media brand communication (UG).

Co-creation of social media brand communication (CO): It was found that the Cronbach's alpha (α) for user-generated social media brand communication (CO) was above the acceptable level (α=0.890) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of user-generated social media brand communication (CO) were above 0.3 (from 0.521 to 0.779) (Nunnally, 1978). Thus, the results indicated that the items of co-creation of social media brand communication (CO) were internally consistent.

Brand awareness (BA): The Cronbach's alpha (α) for brand awareness (BA) was 0.921, which was regarded as a high coefficient alpha (Nunnally, 1978), and the item-to-total-correlation values of brand awareness (BA) ranged from 0.673 to 0.866, which was above 0.3 (Nunnally, 1978). Thus, the results indicated the internal consistency of the items for brand awareness (BA).

Brand association (BAS): The Cronbach's alpha (α) result for brand association (BAS) at 0.921 (α > 0.70) showed a high level of coefficient (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of brand association (BAS) were above 0.3 (from 0.663 to 0.824) (Nunnally, 1978). This, therefore, indicated that the items for brand association (BAS) were internally consistent.

Perceived quality (PQ): It was found that the Cronbach's alpha (α) for perceived quality (PQ) was above the acceptable level (α=0.936) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of perceived quality (PQ) were above 0.3 (from 0.776 to 0.820) (Nunnally, 1978). Thus, the results indicated that the items for perceived quality (PQ) were internally consistent.

Brand loyalty (BL): The Cronbach's alpha (α) result for brand loyalty (BL) was 0.917, which was above the acceptable level (α > 0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of the items for brand loyalty (BL) ranged from 0.660 to 0.795, which was above the acceptable level of 0.3 (Nunnally, 1978). This therefore indicated that the items for brand loyalty (BL) were internally consistent.

Altruism (AL): The result of the Cronbach's alpha (α) for altruism (AL) showed a high level of coefficient, as it was 0.917 (α > 0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of altruism (AL) were above 0.3 (from 0.672 to 0.827) (Nunnally, 1978). This therefore indicated that the items for altruism (AL) were internally consistent.

Venting motivation (VT): It was found that the Cronbach's alpha (α) for venting motivation (VT) was above the acceptable level (α=0.926) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of venting motivation (VT) were above 0.3 (from 0.659 to 0.847) (Nunnally, 1978). Thus, the results indicated that the items for venting motivation (VT) were internally consistent.

Vengeance (VG): The Cronbach's alpha (α) result for vengeance (VG) was 0.956, which was above the acceptable level (α > 0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of the items of vengeance (VG) ranged from 0.819 to

0.916, which was above the acceptable level of 0.3 (Nunnally, 1978). This therefore indicated that the items for vengeance (VG) were internally consistent.

Self-enhancement (SE): The result of the Cronbach's alpha (α) for self-enhancement (SE) was 0.835, which was above the acceptable level (α > 0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of self-enhancement (SE) were above 0.3 (form 0.348 to 0.793) (Nunnally, 1978). This therefore indicated that the items for self-enhancement (SE) were internally consistent.

Economic motivation (EC): It was found that the Cronbach's alpha (α) for economic motivation (EC) was above the acceptable level (α=0.908) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of economic motivation (EC) were above 0.3 (from 0.631 to 0.854) (Nunnally, 1978). Thus, the results indicated that the items for economic motivation (EC) were internally consistent.

Purchase intention (PI): The result of the Cronbach's alpha (α) for purchase intention (PI) was 0.918, which was above the acceptable level (α > 0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values of the items for purchase intention (PI) ranged from 0.715 to 0.838, which was above the acceptable level of 0.3 (Nunnally, 1978). This therefore indicated that the items for purchase intention (PI) were internally consistent.

Country-of-origin (COO): The result of the Cronbach's alpha (α) for country-of-origin (COO) at 0.925 (α > 0.70), showed a high level of coefficient (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the item-to-total-correlation values for country-of-origin (COO) were above 0.3 (from 0.521 to 0.865） (Nunnally, 1978). This therefore indicated that the items for country-of-origin (COO) were internally consistent.

The results above justified that the Cronbach's alpha (α) and the corrected item-to-total correlation of firm-generated social media brand communication (FG), user-generated social media brand communication (UG), co-creation of social media brand communication (CO), brand awareness (BA), brand association (BAS), perceived quality (PQ), brand loyalty (BL), altruism (AL), venting motivation (VT),

vengeance (VG), self-enhancement (SE), economic motivation (EC), purchase intention (PI) and country-of-origin (COO) were all above the acceptable level. Therefore, the reliability of the scale was proved. Afterwards, the measurement scales were examined by EFA, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.4.3.2 Exploratory factor analysis

After assessing the reliability of the scales, the researcher implemented EFA to examine the factorial structure of the measurement scales. EFA is widely acknowledged as a useful tool to apply in the early phase for scale refinement and validation, as it enables the researcher to gain a primary understanding of the relationships between the indicators and their pertinent constructs (Churchill, 1979). EFA was applied to the items in order to reduce the set of observed variables to a smaller size. Before conducting EFA, the researcher first examined the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of Sphericity to confirm whether it is appropriate to use factor analysis (Norusis, 1992).

As Field (2009, p. 645) stated, "the reliability of factor analysis is also dependent on sample size." Menon et al. (1996) suggested that when there are many constructs to be investigated, testing fewer measurement models yields more reliable results. According to Hair et al. (2006), the number of observations per item for each analysis should be at least 5:1. Consequently, the measurement items were divided into several groups to guarantee the proper ratio of observations for each item. The constructs that were assumed to be theoretically relevant were combined together.

To be more specific, in order to meet the criteria of five observations for each item in one analysis as well as the theoretical relevance, firm-generated social media brand communication (FG) was assigned to the first group (8 items), which met the requirement of a sample size of 100; user-generated social media brand communication (UG) and co-creation of social media brand communication (CO) were classified as the dimensions of social media brand communication, and combined into the second group (16 items in total), which satisfied the rule of thumb with the sample size of 100; brand awareness (BA) and brand association (BAS) were both classified as the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, and added

to the third group (13 items in total); perceived quality (PQ) and brand loyalty (BL), which were classified as the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, comprised the fourth group (14 items in total); altruism (AL), venting motivation (VT), and vengeance (VG), the dimensions of the motivations to engage in user-generated social media brand communication were combined into the fifth group (18 items in total); self-enhancement (SE) and economic motivation (EC), the dimensions of the motivations to engage in user-generated social media brand communication were joined into the sixth group (12 items in total); purchase intention (PI) and country-of-origin (COO) comprised the last group (13 items in total).

After examining the absolute sample size, the researcher investigated the KMO measure of sampling adequacy to determine whether it is suitable for factor analysis. According to Field (2009), the values here should be more than 0.50. The p-values for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were also examined, as when the values are significant at $p < 0.0001$, they indicate that the matrix is not an identity matrix and that there are some relationships between the variables. Therefore, it is appropriate to employ EFA. The next step was to examine the intercorrelation between the variables in the correlation matrix in order to identify whether the correlation is either too high or not high enough (Hair et al., 2010). As suggested by Hair et al. (2010), high correlations (>0.80) indicate the problem of multicollinearity for the dataset while the correlations below 0.30 imply that the correlation is too low (Field, 2009). Therefore, the correlation values should range from 0.3 to 0.8 (Field, 2009; Hair et al., 2010).

The SPSS 25 statistical program was applied to implement the EFA. Regarding the purification stage, there are two basic approaches for extracting factors in EFA, i.e. common factor analysis and principal component analysis (Conway and Huffcutt, 2003). According to Conway and Huffcutt (2003), the main difference between these two approaches is their purpose. The purpose of common factor analysis is to understand the latent variables that explain the relationships among the observed variables, while the purpose of principal component analysis is to reduce the number of variables by creating linear combinations that maintain as much of the original variance of the measure as possible. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007),

principal component analysis is suitable for identifying and reducing a large number of variables into a smaller number of elements through converting interrelated variables into unrelated linear composite variables. This helps the extraction of the maximum variance from the dataset, which means that the first component extracts the highest variance and the last component extracts the least variance (Hair et al., 2010). Principal component analysis was employed in this research to gain a minimum number of required factors in order to represent the initial dataset, since it explains specific, common, and random error variance (Hair et al., 2010).

Before conducting the extraction of factors, it is essential to calculate the variability in the variance for any given variables (Field, 2009). According to Hair et al. (2010), communality is the average error of variance of the measured variables and represents the average amount of variation between indicator variables. A variable that has no random variance (or specific variance) would have a communality of 1, while a variable that shares none of its variance with any other variable would have a communality of 0 (Field, 2009). According to Hair et al. (2010), communalities should > 0.5, otherwise the research requires a larger sample size.

Eigenvalues are regarded as "part of an initial run with principal component extraction" (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007, p. 644), and are used to identify the number of factors to extract (Hair et al., 1998; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). As each variable for component analysis variance is contributing 1, a variable with an eigenvalue of less than 1 is not significant (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, factors are considered significant when eigenvalues are greater than 1 and all factors with latent roots less than 1 are considered not significant (Hair et al., 2010). The number of the extracted factors are identified by eigenvalues, and a scree plot is used to determine the maximum number of extracted factors by examining the diagram. According to Hair et al. (2010, p. 110), "the scree test is derived by plotting the latent roots against the number of factors in their order of extraction, and the shape of the resulting curve is used to evaluate the cut-off point."

After the factors are extracted, it is necessary to examine the rotated loading matrix to identify the number of variables that load on each factor. Oblique rotation and

orthogonal rotation are the two main types of rotation method (Field, 2009). According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), oblique rotation is useful when the extracted factors are related to each other and the extent to which the factors are correlated is recognised, while orthogonal factor rotation is suitable when each factor is independent of all the other factors. In addition, orthogonal rotation offers ease of describing, interpreting, and reporting results. This study adopted the orthogonal rotation method to reduce the number of observed variables to a smaller set of variables. The varimax orthogonal technique is selected as it can maximise the variance of the factor loadings by making high loadings higher and low ones lower for each factor (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

The resultant factor analysis was examined and any item whose highest factor loading was less than 0.50 or whose loadings were high on more than one factor were excluded (Hair et al., 2010). Then each loaded factor was assessed by the reliability test to examine internal consistence. In the following sections a summary of the scale purification process is presented.

Firm-generated social media brand communication (FG)（1st group): In the first group of EFA, it was found that none of the correlation values in the correlation matrix was above 0.8, while some of the correlation values were below 0.3, which indicated that multicollinearity is not a problem for the dataset (Field, 2009). The result for the KMO value was 0.812, which is higher than the acceptable level (0.50) (Kaiser, 1974). Therefore, it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. However, two factors with an eigenvalue greater than one were extracted after rotation and the scree plot also presented two principal components, which was not in line with the literature. Therefore, it is necessary to scrutinise the factor loadings of each item. It was found that two items, FG6 and FG7, were highly loaded on the other factor, which could not be justified conceptually. Therefore, these items were deleted.

In the second run of EFA, the value of KMO was 0.843 (>0.5), which indicated that it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. There was only one factor with an eigenvalue greater than one extracted from the dataset this time, which was in line with the literature. The result of the scree plot also matched that of the factor extraction. After rotation, none of the factor loadings of the items were less than 0.5. Therefore, all the items in this run were retained (Hair et al., 2010). Consequently, the Cronbach's alpha for the firm-generated social media brand communication construct became 0.866 and the corrected item-to-total correlations of the items were all above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). These results indicated that the measurement scales were consistent with each other. Therefore, these measurement scales were kept for using in the main survey questionnaires.

User-generated social media brand communication (UG) and co-creation of social media brand communication (CO) （2nd group): The second group of EFA revealed that the correlation values in the correlation matrix ertr above 0.8, while some of the correlation values were below 0.3, which indicated that multicollinearity is not a problem for the dataset (Field, 2009). In addition, the result for the KMO value was 0.908, which is higher than the acceptable level (0.50) (Kaiser, 1974). Therefore, it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. However, three factors with an eigenvalue greater than one were extracted after the varimax rotation and the scree plot also presented three principal components, which was not in line with the literature. Therefore, it is vital to examine the factor loadings of each item. It was found that the factor loadings of items UG6, UG7, CO6, and CO7 were below 0.5, and, thus, these items were eliminated.

In the second run of EFA, the value of KMO was 0.919 (>0.5), which indicated that it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair

et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. There were two factors with an eigenvalue greater than one extracted from the dataset this time, which was in line with the literature. The result of the scree plot also matched that of the factor extraction. After rotation, all the factor loadings of the items were above 0.6, therefore, all the items in this run were retained (Hair et al., 2010). As a result, the Cronbach's alpha for the user-generated social media brand communication (UG) construct and co-creation of social media brand communication (CO) became 0.920 and 0.894, respectively, and the corrected item-to-total correlations for all the items for both constructs were above 0.6 (Hair et al., 2010). These results indicated that the measurement scales were consistent with each other. Therefore, these measurement scales were kept for using in the main survey questionnaires.

Brand awareness (BA) and brand association (BAS) (3rd group): In the third group of EFA, it was found that none of the correlation values in the correlation matrix was above 0.8, while some of the correlation values were below 0.3, which indicated that multicollinearity is not a problem for the dataset (Field, 2009). Besides, the result for the KMO value was 0.906, which is higher than the acceptable level (0.50) (Kaiser, 1974). Therefore, it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. Moreover, the items for the brand awareness (BA) construct and brand association (BAS) construct loaded on two factors, which was in line with the theoretical assumption. The scree plot also presented two principal components, which matched the result of the extraction. After rotation, all the factor loadings were above 0.6 (>0.5) (Hair et al., 2010). In addition, with regard to the Cronbach's alpha (α) for brand awareness (BA) and brand association (BAS), they were both 0.921, which was above the acceptable level (α=0.70). Besides, it was found that the corrected item-to-total correlation of the items were above 0.6, which was above the acceptable level of 0.3 (Nunnally, 1978). These results indicated that the measurement scales were consistent with each other. Therefore, these measurement scales were retained for the main survey questionnaires.

Perceived quality (PQ) and brand loyalty (BL) (4th group): In the fourth group of EFA, it was found that none of the correlation values in the correlation matrix was above 0.8, while some of the correlation values were below 0.3, which indicated that multicollinearity is not a problem for the dataset (Field, 2009). Besides, the result for the KMO value was 0.878, which is higher than the acceptable level (0.50) (Kaiser, 1974). Therefore, it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. Moreover, the items for perceived quality (PQ) and brand loyalty (BL) loaded on two separate factors, which was in line with the theory. The result of the scree plot matched that of the factor extraction. However, item BL3 cross-loaded on two factors, and was therefore deleted.

In the second run of factor analysis, the value of KMO was 0.869 (>0.5), which indicated that it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. Besides, the items for the perceived quality (PQ) construct and brand loyalty (BL) construct loaded on two factors, which was in line with the theoretical assumption. The scree plot also presented two principal components, which matched the result of the extraction. All the factor loadings for both constructs were above 0.6 (>0.5) (Hair et al., 2010). The Cronbach's alpha for perceived quality and brand loyalty were 0.936 and 0.901, respectively, and the corrected item-to-total correlations for both constructs were above 0.6 (>0.3) (Nunnally, 1978). These results indicated that the measurement scales were consistent with each other. Therefore, these measurement scales were kept for using in the main survey questionnaires.

Altruism (AL), venting motivation (VT), and vengeance (VG) (5th group): In the fifth group of EFA, it was found that none of the correlation values in the correlation matrix was above 0.8, while some of the correlation values were below 0.3, which indicated that multicollinearity is not a problem for the dataset (Field, 2009). Besides, the result for the KMO value was 0.848, which is higher than the acceptable level

(0.50) (Kaiser, 1974). Therefore, it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. Furthermore, the items for altruism (AL), venting motivation (VT), and vengeance (VG) loaded on three factors, which was in line with the literature. The result of the scree plot matched that of the factor extraction. However, item VT4 was cross-loaded on two factors. Therefore, this item was excluded.

In the second run of factor analysis, the value of KMO was 0.836 (>0.5), which indicated that it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. Besides, three factors with an eigenvalue greater than one were extracted from the dataset, which was in line with the literature. The result of the scree plot also matched that of the factor extraction. After rotation, all the factor loadings of the items were above 0.5, and, therefore, all the items in this run were retained (Hair et al., 2010). In addition, with regard to the Cronbach's alpha (α) for altruism (AL), venting motivation (VT), and vengeance (VG), they were 0.917, 0.886, and 0.956, respectively, which were above the acceptable level (α=0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). Besides, it was found that the corrected item-to-total correlation of items were all above the acceptable level of 0.3 (Nunnally, 1978). These results indicated that the measurement scales were consistent with each other. Therefore, these measurement scales were kept for using in the main survey questionnaires.

Self-enhancement (SE) and economic motivation (EC) (6th group): In the sixth group of EFA, it was found that none of the correlation values in the correlation matrix was above 0.8, while some of the correlation values were below 0.3, which indicated that multicollinearity is not a problem for the dataset (Field, 2009). Besides, the result for the KMO value was 0.846, which is higher than the acceptable level (0.50) (Kaiser, 1974). Therefore, it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some

relationships between the variables. Moreover, the items for self-enhancement (SE) and economic motivation (EC) loaded on two separate factors, which was in line with the theory. The result of the scree plot matched that of the factor extraction. However, the communalities of items SE1 and SE2 were below the acceptable level (<0.5) (Hair et al., 2010), therefore these items were deleted.

In the second run of factor analysis, the value of KMO was 0.843 (>0.5), which indicated that it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. Besides, two factors with an eigenvalue greater than one were extracted from the dataset, which was in line with the literature. The result of the scree plot also matched that of the factor extraction. After rotation, all the factor loadings of the items were above 0.6, and, therefore, all the items in this run were retained (Hair et al., 2010). In addition, with regard to the Cronbach's alpha (α) for self-enhancement (SE) and economic motivation (EC), they were 0.887 and 0.908, respectively, which were above the acceptable level (α=0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, it was found that the corrected item-to-total correlation of items were all above the acceptable level of 0.3 (Nunnally, 1978). These results indicated that the measurement scales were consistent with each other. Therefore, these measurement scales were kept for using in the main survey questionnaires.

Purchase intention (PI) and country-of-origin (COO) (7th group): In the seventh group of EFA, it revealed that the correlation values in the correlation matrix were above 0.8, while some of the correlation values were below 0.3, which indicated that multicollinearity is not a problem for the dataset (Field, 2009). In addition, the result for the KMO value was 0.865, which is higher than the acceptable level (0.50) (Kaiser, 1974). Therefore, it is suitable for factor analysis. Besides, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. Moreover, the items for purchase intention (PI) and country-of-origin (COO) loaded on two separate factors, which was in line with the theory. The result of the scree plot matched that of the factor extraction. However, the

communality of item COO6 was below the acceptable level (<0.5) (Hair et al., 2010), and, therefore, this item was eliminated.

In the second run of factor analysis, the value of KMO was 0.859 (>0.5), which indicated that it is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at p=0.000, which means that the matrix is not an identity matrix (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, there are some relationships between the variables. Besides, two factors with an eigenvalue greater than one were extracted from the dataset, which was in line with the literature. The result of the scree plot also matched that of the factor extraction. After rotation, all the factor loadings of the items were above 0.7, and, therefore all the items in this run were retained (Hair et al., 2010). In addition, with regard to the Cronbach's alpha (α) for purchase intention (PI) and country-of-origin (COO), they were 0.918 and 0.939, respectively, which were above the acceptable level (α=0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). Besides, it was found that the corrected item-to-total correlation of items were all above the acceptable level of 0.3 (Nunnally, 1978). These results indicated that the measurement scales were consistent with each other. Therefore, these measurement scales were kept for using in the main survey questionnaires.

In summary, during the item purification process, by conducting reliability test and EFA, 11 items were deleted (see Table 4.11, overleaf). In this stage, the items generated from the in-depth interviews, focus groups, and the literature were subjected to the preliminary purification process (Churchill, 1979). The reliability of the internal consistency was investigated by measuring the item-to-total correlations as well as the coefficient alphas. The dimensionality and item reduction were examined by employing EFA.

In accord with Churchill (1979), the remaining measurement items were employed for developing the main survey questions (see Appendix D: Main survey questionnaire) in the next stage – main survey – in order to gather data for further evaluation of the construct reliability and validity. In Section 4.4.4 and Section 4.4.5, the process of the main survey and the techniques for the data analysis are

elaborated, and the data analysis and findings derived from the main survey are presented in chapter 6.

Table 4.11: The results from the item purification process

Constructs	Items dropped	Reasons for dropping the items
Firm-generated social media brand communication	FG6 FG7	Highly loaded on the other factor, which could not be justified conceptually
User-generated social media brand communication	UG6 UG7	Low factor loadings (<0.5)
Co-creation of social media brand communication	CO6 CO7	Low factor loadings (<0.5)
Brand loyalty	BL3	Multiple loadings on two factors
Venting motivation	VT4	Multiple loadings on two factors
Self-enhancement	SE1 SE2	Low communalities (<0.5)
Country-of-origin	COO6	Low communalities (<0.5)

Source: developed by the researcher

4.4.4. Main study

After the scale development, the main survey was conducted in China in order to further purify the measurement scales (Churchill, 1979). The data obtained from the main study were employed to evaluate the reliability and validity of the investigated constructs and to test the research hypotheses. The process of the data collection for the main survey is discussed in the following sections.

4.4.4.1. Sampling and sample size

As explained in Section 4.3.2, it was impossible to carry out probability sampling, as it is inaccessible to the sampling frame (the total number of the population). Therefore, the researcher collected the sample through judgement sampling, which is a non-probability based sampling technique. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. In order to achieve this purpose, young Chinese consumers from the city of Chengdu who are WeChat users were selected for the main survey, which are consistent with the pilot

study sample. Therefore, they are expected to provide information about their perception about social media brand communication on WeChat as well as the consumer-based brand equity and their relationships.

After the sample population has been stipulated, the next step, based on Malhotra and Birks (2003), is to specify the sample size that refers to the number of elements to be gathered in this research. According to Churchill (1979), the data of the main survey are utilised to conduct a CFA in order to confirm the validity of the scales. The minimal sample size for the CFA is supposed to be more than the number of the covariance in the matrix of the input data (Hair et al., 2010). According to Hair et al. (2010), the minimum sample size should range from 100 to 400 responses if the Maximum Likelihood method is adopted, which is the most popular method of assessment available in the Amos structural equation modelling software. Besides, based on previous research, the sample size for conducting multivariate data analysis should be a total of at least five observations for each variable (e.g. Hair et al., 2010; Joreskog and Sorbom, 1996). However, a more widely accepted criterion for the sample size is a total of ten observations for each parameter (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, in accordance with the discussion above, the sample size of this research should be 275-550 respondents (55 parameters).

4.4.4.2. Data collection procedure

The researcher first contacted WeChat friends who met the requirement of age and living place and asked whether they would like to complete the mobile questionnaire. The reason for selecting WeChat friends is to ask them to share questionnaires to their WeChat friends who met the requirements in order to achieve the sample size. The mobile questionnaire asked the respondents about firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, co-creation of social media brand communication, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty, purchase intention, and country-of-origin (see Appendix D: Main survey questionnaire).

4.4.5. Data analysis techniques

After conducting the main survey, the researcher conducted CFA for the data gathered from the main survey. The following sections elaborate the data analysis techniques adopted in this research.

4.4.5.1. Confirmatory factor analysis

According to Hair et al. (2010), CFA is a method to confirm the validity of the constructs, and is used to guarantee that the theoretical meaning of a construct is empirically presented by its indicators. It is a theoretically-driven approach where the factors need to be specified in advance whereas EFA is a data-driven approach in which the factors are unknown (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). "If the factor analysis 'discovers' precisely the item groupings that researchers intended when creating the items, the researchers will have strong confirmation of their initial hypothesis concerning how the items should relate to one another" (de Vellis, 1991, p. 109). It is significant for theory testing as well as theory development (Steenkamp and van Trijp, 1991). Therefore, after conducting EFA on the pilot survey data, the researcher performed CFA on the main survey data to examine whether the hypothesised relationships based on the theory were presented in the data (Hair et al., 2010).

The study followed a two-step model-testing approach as recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). In the first step, in order to confirm the causal relationships between the constructs and their measurements, the model was evaluated by assessing the unidimensionality of the items for each construct and model identification. In the second step, in order to identify the relationships between the constructs, the researcher evaluated the validity of the model by assessing the model fit as well as the validity and reliability of the constructs. In addition, in order to guarantee that the data assumptions are suitable for conducting multivariate analysis, the researcher examined the sampling adequacy and the characteristics of the data, including missing data analysis, outlier analysis, normality analysis, homoscedasticity assessment, linearity assessment, multicollinearity assessment, and common method bias assessment (the details of the analyses can be found in Chapter 6).

In this study, Amos 25 SEM software was used to conduct CFA. SEM is usually employed to test theoretical models, and, therefore, contributes to theoretical developments in any field (Bollen, 1989). According to Anderson and Gerbing (1988), using CFA to assess the measurement model can evaluate the fundamental dimensions that demand the validity of a construct. The dimensions of construct validation contain the unidimensionality, reliability, discriminant validity, convergent validity, and nomological validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The analysis was conducted with 69 observed variables loading on 13 constructs. The model was assessed in line with a selected set of goodness of fit indicators.

Model fit assessment: "after a measurement model has been estimated, a researcher would assess how well the specified model accounted for the data with one or more overall goodness-of-fit indices" (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988, p. 416). The purpose of assessing the model's overall fit is to testify the consistency between the measurement model and the theoretical model, which is based on the observed values (Hair et al., 2010). Numerous techniques have been developed to examine the overall fit of the model (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1996), albeit none of them alone can achieve an absolute guarantee of model fit. Each measure can be superior to the others under different conditions, such as "estimation procedure, sample size, variable independence, model complexity and violation of underlying assumptions of multivariate normality" (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2000, p. 83). In this study, both absolute and incremental goodness of fit measures were employed to assess the model's overall fit (Hair et al., 2010). The researcher estimated measures of fit indices as follows: chi-square statistics (χ^2), normed chi-square, comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI).

Assessing validity and reliability: based on the qualitative and quantitative data obtained from the exploratory research and the pilot study, the content and the relevance of measurement scales were refined. In addition, based on the quantitative data gathered from the main survey, the measurement scales were validated (Narissara, 2012). Considerable researchers place emphasis on the need for investigating the reliability and validity of the measures. According to Peter

(1979), validity refers to the extent to which instruments truly measure the constructs that are proposed to measure, while reliability refers to a necessary condition for validity as it guarantees "measures are free from error and therefore yield consistent results" (Peter, 1979, p. 6).

In order to assess reliability, the coefficient alpha was employed in this study. Coefficient alpha is a basic statistic for determining the internal consistency reliability of measurement scales (Churchill, 1979), which is widely used as an estimate of reliability (de Vellis, 1991). Theoretically, it refers to "the degree of interrelatedness among a set of items designed to measure a single construct" (Netemeyer et al., 2003, p. 49). Based on a standard of reliability, when the values of alpha are equal to or above 0.70, the reliability is proved (Hair et al., 2010).

Apart from measurement scale reliability, it is also necessary to investigate measurement scale validity, which refers to the extent to which the latent variable is the cause of item co-variation or the extent to which an operational measure manifests the concept that is investigated. In accordance with existing research (e.g. Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Narissara, 2012), the following types of validity were examined in this study: content validity, face validity, discriminant validity, convergent validity, and nomological validity.

The face validity and content validity of the measurement scale were investigated in the second stage of the scale's development procedure. The content validity was applied to assess the relevance of the elements of the measurement scales to the targeted construct (Peter and Churchill, 1986). In order to evaluate content validity, the list of domains and measurement items were shown in the interviews. The participant were asked to reply as to whether they agreed with the lists. In addition, face validity was conducted to evaluate the extent to which the items of a scale adequately measure the constructs (Peter and Churchill, 1986). The items were assessed by the experts before developing the pilot questionnaire.

After conducting CFA, the convergent and discriminant validity were evaluated. Convergent validity and discriminant validity are subtypes of construct validity, which

is a necessity for further theory testing and development (Steenkamp and van Trijp, 1991). Construct validity deals with the theoretical relationship of one construct with other constructs (de Vellis, 1991). Convergent validity refers to the degree to which the measures of similar constructs are correlated (Peter and Churchill, 1986). In addition, the discriminant validity refers to the extent to which the measures diverge from the constructs that are conceptually distinct (Peter and Churchill, 1986).

Apart from the convergent validity and the discriminant validity, unidimensionality, reliability, and nomological validity should also be evaluated in order to confirm whether the construct is valid (Steenkamp and van Trijp, 1991). Based on Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the unidimensionality of a construct should be proved before any further theory testing, as it indicates that the multiple items of a construct are internally consistent and externally different from other constructs. In CFA, the overall fit of the model is considered a necessary factor to examine whether a set of measurement items are unidimensional (Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991). The researcher, therefore, employed EFA after the pilot study and CFA after the main survey to examine the unidimensionality of all the constructs. CFA is widely used to investigate the unidimensionality of a construct and it also offers computational criteria to evaluate convergent validity, discriminant validity, and nomological validity. Nomological validity refers to the examination of the hypothesised relationships between constructs and the empirical links between indicators and the underlying dimensions (Peter and Churchill, 1986). According to Steenkamp and van Trijp (1991), nomological validity can be assessed using goodness-of-fit indices.

In addition, ecological validity is also taken into consideration in this study. This refers to the extent to which the findings of this study accurately reflect what occurs in natural settings (Denscombe, 2002). According to Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006, p. 847), "any theoretical or conceptual argument needs to be tested in actual application." The aim of this research is to obtain a better understanding of the relationships between the metrics of social media brand communication and the metrics of consumer-based brand equity, the relationships between the motivations of engaging in user-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication, the relationships between the metrics

of consumer-based brand equity and purchase intention, and the relationships between country-of-origin and the metrics of consumer-based brand equity, by examining the experiences and perceptions about these relationships among young Chinese consumers.

The researcher reviewed the existing literature concerning the definitions of social media brand communication (user-generated social media brand communication, firm-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication), consumer-based brand equity (brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty), purchase intention, and country-of-origin. Based on the literature review, the researcher proposed a conceptual model concerning the relationships between social media brand communication and the antecedent factors of interest, the relationships between the metrics of social media brand communication and the metrics of consumer-based brand equity, the relationships between country-of-origin and the metrics of consumer-based brand equity, and the relationships between the metrics of consumer-based brand equity and the consequent factor of interest. The researcher empirically investigated these hypothesised relationships in practice, by examining them from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers.

This study demonstrates the motivations for user-generated social media brand communication, how the metrics of social media brand communication influence the metrics of consumer-based brand equity, how the metrics of consumer-based brand equity influence purchase intention, and how country-of-origin influences the metrics of consumer-based brand equity from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. In accordance with Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006), this approach enables the researcher to operationalise the conceptual model by investigating it in an "ecologically valid environment" (Smith et al., 1998, p. 64). The findings of this study are linked to the natural setting where they actually occurred, therefore this study achieves ecological validity.

4.4.5.2. The evaluation of the structural model and the examination of the research hypotheses

After evaluating the validity and reliability of the measurement scale, the relationships between the constructs were investigated. The researcher examined the proposed model by testing the covariance matrix, path estimates and t-values in order to identify whether each path was statistically significant. In addition, the researcher also conducted the following fit indices in order to identify how well the model fitted: chi-square statistics (χ^2), normed chi-square (χ^2/df), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and the comparative fix index (CFI).

4.5. SUMMARY

To sum up, this chapter explains the research design in detail including a mixed-methods approach with a quantitative basis. In order to develop a measurement scale for the constructs of the proposed model, this study adopted the procedures for developing measurement suggested by Churchill (1979). Therefore, the research design contained three stages of data collection. First, qualitative research was conducted including in-depth interviews and focus groups, which were expected to offer insights into the research subject. Based on the items generated from the qualitative research and the existing literature, a draft of the questionnaire was developed for the pilot study. The data gathered from the pilot study were put into the reliability test and EFA in order to further purify the measurement items. Next, the refined questionnaires were used in the main survey. Based on the data collected from the main survey, CFA was conducted. The validity and reliability of the measurement scales were evaluated by means of CFA. Finally, the structural equation model and the research hypotheses were assessed. In the next chapter, the findings of qualitative research are presented in detail.

CHAPTER 5 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous discussed the importance of the methodology utilised in this study. In terms of the qualitative research, thirteen in-deptn interviews and three focus groups were conducted with young Chinese consumers, and this chapter presents the results of these qualitative approaches.The results of in-depth interviews are described in Section 5.2, and the results of focus groups are discussed in Section 5.3. Finally, Section 5.4 offers a summary of conclusions.

5.2. RESULTS OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The findings of this research are discussed starting with the motivations for young Chinese consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication. A motivational statement can be distinguished from a single word, a sentence, or even a paragraph. Therefore, each statement was coded based on the responses to the motivation information: altruism, venting motivation, vengeance, self-enhancement, and economic motivation, which are derived from existing literature. In addition, extensive descriptions of each motivation they stated were also provided. When informants mentioned motivations that were not in accord with any of the motivations that stemmed from the literature, these were marked as new motivations.

The motivations for consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication: All the interviewees considered altruism as one of the motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication, and all of them mentioned the same reason, that sharing good things with friends is a kind of human nature, which is altruistic. The participants also clarified situations in line with the existing measurement items, i.e. "I would like to help other people", "Information other people posted helped me, so I would like to return the favour", "I

want to give others the opportunity to buy the right product" (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Price et al., 1995; Presi et al., 2014; Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). Some representative statements are shown as follows:

"I always share some useful information such as discount information with my friends on social media. For example, when I was shopping in a department store, I saw some products of Zara are on sale, I would like to take a picture and sent it to my friend through WeChat." (Interview 2)

"If I use a product which is really good, I would like to tell my friends through social media platforms such as WeChat." (Interview 3)

"I always send my friends some information of the brand that they really like, because I think it is beneficial to them." (Interview 4)

"As they are my friends, I am willing to share good things with them, which is of course altruistic." (Interview 12)

Another motivation is venting, the researcher found that some of the interviewees considered venting motivation as one of the motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication. The participants mentioned some words and sentences in accordance with existing literature, i.e. "I want to express my anger about my negative experience", "I want to vent my negative feelings", "I want to seek consolation" (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Presi et al., 2014; Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). For example:

"Because customers need an outlet to release negative emotions, which are caused, in this case, by awful product quality or customer experience. For instance, I saw my friend post the pictures of a shirt from H&M, which is stretched out of shape after the first wash." (Interview 1)

"As WeChat is a virtual friend circle, users can post information to release their negative feelings about some product and obtain consolation from their WeChat friends." (Interview 3)

"For example, the clothes I bought from Zara severely shrank after I washed it for the first time. Then I posted this information on my WeChat Moments to warn others about the bad quality of Zara as well as to release my negative emotions." (Interview 5)

"For instance, I saw my friend posting pictures and complaints about the bad quality of some high street fashion clothes on the Moments of WeChat." (Interview 6)

The third motivation is vengeance, according to the responses, only a few interviewees considered it as a motivation for consumers to engage in social media brand communication. Some responses were in line with existing measurement items, i.e. "I want to take revenge upon the company, as I suffered a great loss", "The company harmed me, and I will harm the company" (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2009; Presi et al., 2014; Rensink, 2013). For instance:

"If the product does harm to a consumer's mental or physical wellbeing, it will trigger consumer's vengeance on the company. But compared to venting motivation, this motivation happens far less." (Interview 1)

"Because if the product has bad quality, consumers may warn others not to buy this product to avoid potential loss." (Interview 3)

"I saw my friend posted product information due to motivation of vengeance. It was about skincare cosmetics which made her face seriously allergic, therefore she would like to sue that company." (Interview 5)

However, other interviewees did not consider it as a motivation for consumers to engage in social media brand communication. The majority of the interviewees pointed out that they had never seen this kind of information on WeChat. For example:

"WeChat as an enclosed network of friends and acquaintances is not suitable for posting negative information, since it may adversely affect other's opinion towards you. Besides, if a problem really exists, it is advisable for you to seek a proper approach to solve it." (Interview 7)

"I think ordinary consumers only release negative emotions on social media rather than revenge on the brands." (Interview 9)

"I think vengeance and venting motivation can be combined into one as they are related, which are both negative reviews from consumers." (Interview 11)

In addition, another motivation is self-enhancement. According to the interviews, some of the interviewees considered self-enhancement as one of the motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication. The responses were in accordance with existing measurement items, i.e. "I want to show others my personality", "I want to show others my connoisseurship", "I want to gain attention from others", and "I feel good when I can tell others my buying success" (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). For instance:

"Because consumers can show off their wealth by posting brand-related information on social media." (Interview 3)

"Because it is a way to indicate consumer's fashion taste. For example, the ones who wear high street fashion brands look youthful and trendy, while the ones who wear high-end fashion brands look elegant and classy." (Interview 7)

"As a young adult, sometimes I come up with some funny ideas with some brand information I read online and I would like to create and post some amusing and original brand-related content on WeChat, which I think can attract my friends' attention." (Interview 8)

The fifth motivation is economic motivation. Based on the narratives, the majority of the interviewees considered economic motivation as one of the motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication. They clarified some reasons in line with the existing literature, i.e. "I interact with brands on social media in order to get vouchers or coupons", "I interact with brands on social media in order to get free products or other special offers", and "I want to receive financial compensation" (e.g. Azar et al., 2016; Baker et al., 2011). For example:

"Because sometimes brands launch some online promotional campaign, for example, users need to share some information to get the discount coupon." (Interview 6)

"Because by sharing brand's promotional information with their WeChat friends, it is beneficial for their friends so that it can strengthen their friendship. For example, my friend shared the discount information of H&M on WeChat." (Interview 8)

"Some of my WeChat friends post information regarding helping us to buy the discount clothes such as Zara, H&M, and Uniqlo. Because, in China, the brand promotion is not always nation-wide, it can be specific to certain areas in China, the price of the same brand may differ sometimes. Therefore, some people take advantage of it to sell products at a lower price to others."(Interview 10)

In addition, based on the responses during the in-depth interviews, apart from the above existing items, several informants clarified that they would like to bring some financial benefit to their friends, as is shown below:

"Because by sharing brand's promotional information with their WeChat friends, it is beneficial for their friends so that it can strengthen their friendship. For example, my friend shared the discount information of H&M on WeChat." (Interview 8)

Consequently, "I would like to bring some financial benefit to my friends" was added to the economic motivation's item pool, which served as a possible measurement item of economic motivation. As Churchill (1979, p. 64) suggested, "by incorporating

slightly different nuances of meaning in the statement in the item pool, the research provides a better foundation for eventual measures."

Through analysing the responses from interviews, five main categories as motivations for young Chinese consumers to engage in social media brand communication were identified: altruism, venting, vengeance, self-enhancement, and economic motivation. These results support the proposed model.

Social media brand communication: The interviewees were asked "what is your understanding of social media brand communication", in order to gain a deeper insight into the social media brand communication in the context of China from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. The results revealed that all the informants considered social media brand communication a way of brand communication and promotion by making use of the social media platform, but they explained it from different aspects, i.e. the brand information generated by users (consumers), the brand information generated by companies or the band information generated by both consumers and companies, which complied with the existing literature stated as follows: social media brand communication refers to the creation and exchange of brand-related information between users and companies through Internet based applications and tools that build on the foundations of Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 6; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). The representative statements are as follows:

"Companies release brand advertisement on social media to promote their products to consumers." (Interview 2)

"Consumers communicate and share some brand-related information on social media." (Interview 4)

"It is a way of communication and interaction between consumers and companies on the social media platform, which is based on the cutting-edge mobile network technology to promote and popularise brands and their products." (Interview 5)

However, to the best knowledge of the researcher, the dimensions of social media brand communication in the existing literature are merely user-generated social media brand communication and firm-generated social media brand communication (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Therefore, the co-creation of social media brand communication is an additional dimension of social media brand communication that emerged from this research.

As different social media has distinct characteristics, this research selected WeChat as the research context. Therefore, interviewees were asked to describe the phenomenon of brand communication on WeChat. The representative statements are as follows:

"In terms of companies, there are three types of brand communication on WeChat now. Firstly, advertisements can be launched on the Moments of WeChat, which is similar to the Newsfeed and timeline of FB. The targeted users are selected by user's age, gender, interest, living area and so on. This kind of advertisement is more effective to match the company's positioning, especially compared to traditional mass media advertising. Secondly, the brand's official account on WeChat has the menu function including options, such as the collection of previous articles, the link to official online store, and messaging and so on. Thirdly, the advent of the WeChat little app can largely strengthen the bond between users and companies, as it is a gathering of a wide variety of apps with different functions on WeChat. In terms of users, I always see my WeChat friends share some brand-related information on the Moments like articles, photos and videos, or sometimes they send messages or share information directly to my private chat. Besides, I also share product information sometimes, especially when I am into this product, I would like to add my comment and share the information I think is useful to my friends." (Interview 1)

"I have seen information regarding sales promotion and new arrival of products on the Moments of WeChat. For example, I have seen the advertisement of Starbucks on Moments, where I found discount information when I clicked it. Besides, I have followed some famous Chinese fashion bloggers' WeChat public accounts to obtain information about fashion brands. For instance, they always release articles

regarding the trendy clothes and how to match them properly. And it also provides links to the online shops so that users can buy what they like there, which is directional and convenient." (Interview 4)

"One of the major features of WeChat is that it is an enclosed circle of friends and acquaintances, as only your WeChat friends can send information to you as well as see the information you post on the Moments of WeChat. Therefore, a notable advantage of WeChat is the influence of friends on brand communication, which is based on the sense of trust." (Interview 7)

"WeChat business has become a popular phenomenon in China nowadays, which refers to the job that people work full-time or part-time as a freelance retail consultant who posts brand and product information and builds client networks by making use of WeChat." (Interview 8)

In summary, all the interviewees admitted that WeChat plays an increasingly significant role in brand communication and promotion, as it contains various ways such as the advertisement users receive automatically on their Moments of WeChat, brands' official accounts on WeChat, applets of WeChat, and the generation and exchange of brand-related information among WeChat users, of which, according to their replies, all the interviewees were aware. As social media possess the feature of interactivity, which is superior to traditional mass media, it facilitates the interaction between companies and consumers. In addition, it enables social media advertisements to become so interactive that users can like and comment on the advertisement. In addition, with the help of analysis of big data, which is used to screen the users based on their personal profiles and consumption habits, the social media advertisements can be delivered to their target consumers more accurately so that it can largely enhance the advertising effect. Furthermore, as WeChat is an enclosed circle of friends and acquaintances, in general, friends are much more trustworthy than strangers, the brand-related information created or shared by friends or the recommendations of some brand from friends are more useful and effective than those from strangers. Therefore, WeChat has strong advantages in brand communication and promotion towards consumers.

Firm-generated social media brand communication: Regarding the definition of firm-generated social media brand communication, it is defined as a way of communicating that the information is brand-related, created by firms for the purpose of developing and maintaining one-on-one relationships with existing and potential customers by means of social media's interactive feature (Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Kumar et al., 2016). The interviewees were asked "what is your understanding of firm-generated social media brand communication". The replies were in accord with the literature, for example:

"The brand-related information is created and released by companies on social media, which is a kind of marketing approach to targeting and interacting with customers." (Interview 1)

"It is a series of firm-designed consecutive marketing programmes posted on social media platforms, which targets consumers." (Interview 2)

"Companies create and release brand-related advertisements on social media." (Interview 4)

With respect to the measurement items of firm-generated social media brand communication, the interviewees were asked to clarify how firm-generated brand information is communicated on WeChat; the responses were in line with the existing measurement items, i.e. "I am satisfied with the content generated by companies about [brand] on social media", "The level of the content generated by companies about [brand] on social media meets my expectations", "The content generated by this company about [brand] on social media performs well, when compared with other companies", "The content generated by companies about [brand] is very attractive", "I can get enough information about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication", "I got recommendations from firm-generated social media brand communication to buy [brand]", "I only hear positive things about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication" (e.g. Bruhn, et

al., 2012; Magi, 2003; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Tsiros et al., 2004). Some representative statements are shown as follows:

"I am pretty into the innovative form of presentation of the advertisement on WeChat, since I can interact with it, such as giving like or comment. For example, a renowned Chinese cosmetic brand with nearly one hundred years history published an advertisement to display its representative and classic products launched in different time nodes. The innovation of the advertisement is even beyond my expectation, since it enables users to be the actors in the advertisement who can explore these products launched in different times, which obviously makes the advertisement interactive, interesting, and entertaining. I think it is even better than some advertisements of internationally renowned cosmetics brands I have seen before. In general, I am satisfied with the firm-generated social media brand communication on WeChat." (Interview 2)

"I have seen pop-up advertisements of Zara on my Moments of WeChat. As users can comment on the advertisement, and I saw the comments from my WeChat friends and we also replied to each other's comment on this advertisement to exchange our opinions. In addition, I prefer this kind of pop-up advertisement on WeChat, since it has various kinds of form, such as video clip, cartoon, and dynamic graph, which looks interesting and creative and always makes me feel relaxed. Besides, if you are interested in it, you can click it to see the whole advertisement, while if you are not interested in it, you can simply click the option of hiding it. Technically, I think it is superior to traditional mass media advertisements, so I prefer it." (Interview 7)

In addition, based on the responses during the in-depth interviews, apart from the above existing items, the word "useful" also occurred several times, as informants were asked to describe the phenomenon of firm-generated social media brand communication on WeChat, as is shown below:

"I think the advertisements that appear automatically on my Moments of WeChat are quite useful, you know, due to the big data technique to screen user, the

advertisements I receive are generally the brands that I am interested in or loyal to."
(Interview 4)

"I followed some brands' official accounts on WeChat, because I think they can offer me useful information, such as the introduction of latest products, the bestselling product ranking, and discount information and so on." (Interview 6)

Consequently, "the content generated by companies about [brand] is useful" was added to the firm-generated social media brand communication's item pool, which served as a possible measurement item of firm-generated social media brand communication. As Churchill (1979, p. 64) suggested, "by incorporating slightly different nuances of meaning in the statement in the item pool, the research provides a better foundation for eventual measures."

User-generated social media brand communication: The definition of user-generated social media brand communication refers to a way of communication in which the information is brand-related, publicly available, reflects some degree of creative effort, and is created outside professional routine through personal communication and information exchange by means of social media's interactive nature (OECD, 2007; Presi et al. 2014). Interviewees were asked "what is your understanding of user-generated social media brand communication". The replies of the interviewees were in accord with the literature, for instance:

"Users create and post some brand-related information on social media." (Interview 1)

"It is a kind of brand marketing through social media platforms. In China, social media brand communication often depends on the communication in the circle of friends, for example, consumers get to know some brand from friend's recommendation by means of social media platforms." (Interview 3)

With regard to the measurement items of user-generated social media brand communication, the interviewees were asked to clarify how the user-generated brand

information was communicated on WeChat. The responses were in line with the existing measurement items, i.e. "I am satisfied with the content generated by users about [brand] on social media", "The level of the content generated by users about [brand] on social media meets my expectations", "The content generated by users about this [brand] on social media performs well, when compared with other brands", "The content generated by users about [brand] is very attractive", "I can get enough information about [brand] through user-generated social media brand communication", "I got recommendations from user-generated social media brand communication to buy [brand]", "I only hear positive things about [brand] through user-generated social media brand communication" (e.g. Bruhn, et al. 2012; Magi, 2003; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Tsiros et al., 2004). Some representative statements are shown as follows:

"Some of my friends always post words and images about some products, such as cosmetics and clothes on the Moments to sell. I always find their posts attractive to me and want to buy. As they are my friends who have similar taste to me and I know them for quite a long time, I trust the quality of products they sell. So, I prefer to buy their products rather than strangers who sell the same products." (Interview 5)

"As WeChat enables users to set up a group chat and add their WeChat friends to the group. We always chat about some fashion brands as well as exchange some brand-related information in the group chat. I think it is really convenient for me to get some useful information, so I am quite satisfied with this kind of communication. In general, the content shared by others can meet my expectations or even exceed my expectations, therefore, I really prefer to get brand-related information by making use of social media." (Interview 7)

In addition, based on the responses from the in-depth interviews, the word "useful" appeared several times, as the participants were asked to describe the phenomenon of user-generated social media brand communication on WeChat. Some representative comments are shown as follows:

"My friends often send me brand-related messages to my WeChat when they are shopping and notice some discount information of brands I like, and of course this kind of information is quite useful to me. I really appreciate them." (Interview 2)

"As WeChat enables users to set up a group chat and add their WeChat friends to the group. We always chat about some fashion brands as well as exchange some brand-related information in the group chat. I think it is really convenient for me to get some useful information, so I am quite satisfied with this kind of communication." (Interview 7)

Accordingly, the content generated by users about [brand] is useful was added to the user-generated social media brand communication's items pool, which served as a possible measurement item of the user-generated social media brand communication.

Co-creation of social media brand communication: To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is a new dimension of the construct social media brand communication in the existing literature (e.g. Bruhn, et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). The researcher offered the definition of co-creation of social media brand communication to the interviewees first, which refers to a way of customer-brand interaction in which the brand-related conversations enable and stimulate customers to integrate their own experiences and thoughts into the brand story by means of social media's interactive nature (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). Then, the interviewees were asked whether they have seen this kind of brand communication on WeChat, if yes, please clarify how the co-creation of brand information is communicated on WeChat. As a result of the in-depth interviews, all the participants made a positive reply. For example:

"I think it is a way of communication between consumers and companies through social media platforms, which makes use of the currently most advanced mobile network technology to communicate and promote brands and their products. Besides, I think economic benefit is a main motivation for co-creation of social media brand communication. Because consumers will only be willing to engage in the co-

creation of brand-related content with companies if they can gain some benefit. For example, some companies give consumers rewards to attract them to engage in writing their own story with the brand and share this firm-generated advertising article on the Moments to present to other users." (Interview 4)

"I think it is a way of brand promotion through social media that is characterised by interactivity, therefore it enables interactions between brand and consumers. For example, I have seen users create brand-related information on the basis of existing firm-generated information on the Moments." (Interview 5)

Regarding the measurement items of the co-creation of social media brand communication, based on the answers of interviewees, the words or sentences "satisfied", "attractive", "useful", "meet my expectations", "I prefer this brand's information to others", "I've read a huge amount of information", "I've read some recommendations for the brand", "I've read some good brand stories written by some customers on this brand's WeChat platform" appeared several times. Some representative statements are shown as follows:

"I have seen that some public accounts started some brand activities with awards, for example, customers whose comment receives the maximum likes, the customer will gain a prize. So, I think this kind of information is really attractive. In other words, economic motivation is effective for me." (Interview 7)

"I have seen my WeChat friends commenting on some advertisements on the Moments of WeChat, which I think is a kind of co-creation of social media brand communication." (Interview 9)

"Users comment on the brand articles that are released on brands' official accounts. I find the comments receiving most likes are always useful for me and meet my expectations." (Interview 10)

"I think the co-creation between international fashion brands and famous Chinese fashion bloggers is a noticeable kind of co-creation of social media brand communication. For example, the fashion bloggers share some firm-generated

articles about latest products and then add captions to recommend the products, fulfilling their celebrity effect. In my opinion, I trust the recommendation from famous celebrities, and I think this kind of information is useful for me." (Interview 11)

"If I like a brand, I will follow its WeChat official account, and when it releases useful information, such as the discount information, I would like to share this article and add my experiences and thoughts of using this product, as it can show my taste and lifestyle. Besides, when I see an article about some new product introduction, if the consumers' comments, such as their usage experiences are positive, I will have a good first impression of it, which is superior to the homogeneous brand lacking consumers' positive comments." (Interview 13)

Consequently, "I am satisfied with the content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] on social media", "The level of content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] meets my expectations", "The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about this [brand] on social media performs well, when compared with other brands", "The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] is very attractive", "I can get enough information about [brand] through co-creation of user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication", "I got recommendations from co-creation of user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication to buy [brand]", "I only hear positive things about [brand] through co-creation of user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication", "the content generated by the co-creation of companies and users about [brand] is useful" were added to the co-creation of social media brand communication's items pool.

Consumer-based brand equity: The definition of consumer-based brand equity refers to the consumers' familiarity with the brand and associations with its value, which is reflected by the metrics of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty (Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Pappu et al., 2006). The interviewees were asked "what is your understanding of consumer-based brand equity", and the comments from the participants were in alignment with the existing literature, for example:

"Consumers' familiarity and loyalty to a brand in one's mind." (Interview 1)

"Consumers' awareness and associations with a brand." (Interview 4)
"An overall perception of product quality from a certain brand in the consumer's mind." (Interview 6)

The interviewees were also asked "what metrics do you think consumer-based brand equity contain." The following metrics were extracted from their responses: brand awareness ("brand recognition", "brand familiarity"), brand association ("brand knowledge", "brand understanding"), perceived quality ("value for money"), and brand loyalty ("brand attachment", "brand affect"). The results were in line with the existing literature, as the metrics, i.e. brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty (e.g. Aaker, 1991). The representative statements are shown as follows:

"Brand recognition, brand associations, and value for money." (Interview 3)

"Brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand attachment." (Interview 7)

"Brand familiarity, brand quality, brand knowledge." (Interview 9)

"Brand affect, brand understanding, and brand loyalty." (Interview 10)

Brand awareness: Brand awareness is defined as the strength of the presence of a brand in consumers' memory and the ability of consumers to recognise or recall a brand in its product category (Aaker, 1996; Pappu et al., 2005). The interviewees were asked "what is your understanding of brand awareness". According to the responses of the informants, their perspectives of brand awareness were in line with the literature, for instance:

"Consumers are aware of this brand and can recall or recognise it." (Interview 1)

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"Consumers are aware of the name and logo of the brand." (Interview 3)

"Consumers are aware of what this brand sells." (Interview 4)

With regard to the measurement items of brand awareness, the interviewees were asked to clarify how they are aware of one brand; the responses were in alignment with the existing measurement items, i.e. "I easily recognise [brand]", "I can recognise [brand] among other competing brands", "I easily memorise the symbol/logo of [brand]", "I have a very clear picture of [brand]", "Give own opinion of [brand]", "Be aware of this [brand]", "Correct discrimination of brand as having been previously seen or heard", "Correct identification of brand given product category or some other type of probe as cue" (e.g. Bruhn, et al., 2012; Keller, 1993; Murtiasih, et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000). Some representative statements are shown as follows:

"I am aware of what I can buy from this brand." (Interview 1)

"If hear about or see a new brand, I will form a first impression positive or negative towards it." (Interview 2)

"If you mention this brand's name, the brand image will come into my mind at once." (Interview 5)

"I have seen this brand in a shopping mall several times so I can remember its name and logo and I can easily recognise it from other brands in the same category." (Interview 7)

"I have seen this brand's advertisement on the Moments before so that I can recognise it." (Interview 9)

"I have heard of this brand before from my friend and I remember its name." (Interview 11)

Brand association: The definition of brand association refers to anything in the consumer's memory that can be linked to a brand, including attributes of the product/service, reputation of the company, and characteristics of the brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Wang and Li, 2012). The interviewees were asked "what is your understanding of brand association". Based on the comments from the participants during the in-depth interviews, their views of brand association were in alignment with the literature, for example:

"Consumer's knowledge about brand's various attributes." (Interview 2)

"It is the product category, positioning, style, and targeted consumers that people can associate with a brand." (Interview 4)

"Brand association is based on the preliminary awareness and cumulative knowledge about a brand." (Interview 7)

With regard to the measurement items of brand association, the participants were asked to clarify how they associate a brand. The responses were in alignment with the existing measurement items, i.e. "Several characteristics of [brand] instantly come to my mind", "Associating [brand] with dynamic properties", "Associating [brand] with uniqueness", "Associating [brand] with prestige", "I have a clear image of the type of person who would use [brand]", "This brand is made by an organization I would trust" (e.g. Bruhn, et al., 2012; Murtiasih, et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco, 2005; Wang and Li, 2012; Yoo et al., 2000). Some representative statements are shown as follows:

"When I see an advertisement about a new product for a luxury brand, I will always associate the product with some unique feature, high price and good quality and may long for it." (Interview 3)

"If a brand that I am loyal to launches a new product, normally I will be willing to buy, as I am familiar with the brand's quality that I can trust." (Interview 5)

"I am a fan of Nike, as I like its products, especially the sneakers. I consider it as the best sports brand worldwide with dynamic properties." (Interview 6)

"I am interested in cars and Benz is my favourite brand, as it is famous for driving performance and quality, I associate it with high reputation and credibility." (Interview 7)

"When I see a woman wearing Chanel suits, I will associate her with elegance and wealth, based on the positioning and targeted customers of Chanel." (Interview 8)

Perceived quality: The definition of perceived quality refers to the consumers' perception and evaluation of the overall quality or excellence of a product or service according to some desired objectives (Aaker, 1991; Bhuian, 1997; Moradi and Zarei, 2012). The interviewees were asked "what is your understanding of perceived quality". Based on the comments from the participants during the in-depth interviews, the comments from the participants were in accord with the literature, for example:

"The feelings and evaluation in the consumer's mind towards the product's function or usefulness." (Interview 1)

"Consumer's evaluation of the quality of a product based on the packaging of the product." (Interview 2)

"Consumers' first impression of the quality of a product based on the advertisement they saw." (Interview 6)

Regarding the measurement items of the perceived quality, the participants were asked to clarify how they evaluate the quality of a product; the responses were in alignment with the existing measurement items, i.e. "Products of [brand] are of great quality", "Products of [brand] are of consistent quality", "Products of [brand] are very durable", "Products of [brand] are very reliable", "Products of [brand] worth their price", "Products of [brand] have excellent features", "It is highly likely that [brand] will be functional" (e.g. Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih, et al., 2014; Pappu, et al., 2006;

Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Torres et al., 2015; Yoo et al., 2000). Some representative statements are shown as follows:

"I can only evaluate the quality of a product based on my own usage of the product, because I only believe the real using experience rather than advertising. For example, if I use a liquid foundation and it makes my skin look smoother, I will trust its function and quality." (Interview 3)

"Generally, my evaluation of the quality of a new product depends on the first impression made by the advertisement, if it fully shows the advantageous features of the product, I tend to think it has high quality." (Interview 6)

"I always buy Uniqlo's clothes, because the clothes are durable, which means they can be used for a relatively long time compared to other high street clothing brands." (Interview 7)

"Normally I evaluate the quality of a product based on its material or design, if the material seems durable or the design seems exquisite, I am likely to consider it has good quality." (Interview 9)

"If the packaging of the product looks reliable, I am more likely to think it has a good quality." (Interview 11)

Brand loyalty: Brand loyalty is defined as a commitment held by consumers to re-buy or re-patronise a certain brand constantly in the future as well as treat it as the first choice to purchase (Oliver, 1997; Wang and Li, 2012). Participants were asked "what is your understanding of brand loyalty", and the replies were in accordance with the literature, for instance:

"Consumers like and support this brand from the bottom of their heart, and it is hard for them to change their minds to buy other products that are in the same product category." (Interview 3)

"The top brand shown in consumers' mind list when consumers want to buy some product." (Interview 5)

"Consumers only buy this brand's products in a certain product category, and purchase repeatedly." (Interview 6)

With regard to the measurement items of brand loyalty, the participants were asked to clarify how they are loyal to a brand; the responses were in alignment with the existing measurement items, i.e. "The willingness to pay higher price for [brand] although other brands have similar characteristics", "I intend to remain the company's customer", "I consider myself to be loyal to [brand]", "The product of [brand] would be my first choice", "I will not buy other brands if [brand] is available at store", "I would love to recommend [brand] to my friends", "I will keep on buying [brand] as long as it provides me satisfactory products" (e.g. Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih, et al., 2014; Pappu, et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh, et al., 2009; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001). For example:

"As a loyal customer of H&M, I keep buying clothes of this brand. And if I find some clothes suitable for my friend, I would love to recommend it to my friend." (Interview 4)

"I think I am extremely loyal to Nike, as I have purchased its products for more than 10 years and I think I have already been accustomed to buying and using its products and will not switch to other sports brands in the future." (Interview 5)

"I am a super fan of Uniqlo, which means it is the absolute first choice in my mind when I want to buy some clothes. Even if sometimes some colour of t-shirt I like is out of stock, I would like to wait for it." (Interview 9)

Country-of-origin: The definition of country-of-origin refers to not only the tangible cues, such as packaging, logo, and labelling, from which country the product originates from, but also the intangible cues, such as emotions, feelings, and perception about the country the products are from (Roth and Romeo, 1992; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). The participants were asked "what is your understanding of

country-of-origin"; based on the comments from the participants, their views of the country-of-origin were in alignment with the literature, for example:

"The country where the brand originates." (Interview 3)

"The origin of the brand and where the brand story comes from, which can affect the culture of the brand." (Interview 6)

"It is where the brand story or background began." (Interview 7)

With regard to the measurement items of country-of-origin, participants were asked to clarify how they evaluate a brand country-of-origin; the responses were in alignment with the existing measurement items, i.e. "The [country] is a country that has a high level of technological advance", "The [country] is a country that has high quality in its workmanship", "The [country] is a country that is prestigious", "The [country] is a country that is innovative in manufacturing" (e.g. Moradi and Zarei, 2012). For instance:

"When someone mentions the brand country-of-origin of Uniqlo, I will associate it with Japan that is a country equipped with creativity and innovation so that it deserves extensive prestige worldwide." (Interview 3)

"I have associations with China that is dominant in manufacturing as Chinese labour is generally adept at crafts so that it is called world factory." (Interview 8)

Purchase intention: Purchase intention is defined as the consumer's personal preference towards a certain product or service or the likelihood to purchase a certain brand (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Payal et al., 2013). The participants were asked "what is your understanding of purchase intention"; according to the comments from the informants, their perspectives of purchase intention were in line with the existing literature, for instance:

"Consumers have personal preference towards certain brands, which significantly affects consumer's purchase behaviour." (Interview 2)

"The tendency of consumers to buy certain brand's products." (Interview 5)

With regard to the measurement items of purchase intention, the participants were asked to clarify what their purchase intentions are; the responses were in line with the existing measurement items, i.e. "I will buy from this brand in the near future", "I would consider buying from this brand in the future", "I have intention to buy this brand in the future", "I intend to buy products of [brand] frequently", "I plan to buy products of [brand] more often", "I plan to buy products of [brand] right away" (e.g. Khan et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2009; Wang and Li, 2012). For example:

"I made my mind to buy some brand's product the next time I go shopping." (Interview 4)

"I intend to buy some brand's product in the future." (Interview 7)

"I prefer some brands so that I plan to buy their products frequently." (Interview 8)

"My inclination to buying some brands' products more often, as I found they are really suitable and useful for me." (Interview 10)

"When I find the product I planned to buy, I will buy it without hesitance." (Interview 12)

"When I am satisfied with some new product I used, I may plan to buy it again the next time." (Interview 13)

Based on the analysis above, the items extracted from the in-depth interviews were approximately consistent with the existing measurement scales in the literature. Whereas, some new possible measurement items were found in the in-depth interviews, which can supplement the measurement items pool. Namely, "The content generated by companies about [brand] is useful", "The content generated by

users about [brand] is useful", "I am satisfied with the content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] on social media", "The level of content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] meets my expectations", "The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about this [brand] on social media performs well when compared with other brands", "The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] is very attractive", "I can get enough information about [brand] through co-creation of user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication", "I got recommendations from co-creation of user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication to buy [brand]", "I only hear positive things about [brand] through co-creation of user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication", "the content generated by the co-creation of companies and users about [brand] is useful", "I would like to bring some financial benefit to my friends".

In summary, although the responses of the interviewees were mainly in line with the definition from the existing literature, 11 new measurement items were attained (see Appendix B: The coding of the interviews). The findings indicate that although the investigatory constructs have similar meanings in distinct research contexts, to some extent, the measurement items of the constructs can be different. As emphasised earlier, it is crucial to pay attention to the equivalence and applicability of a construct and its measurement items when the construct and its measurement scales are applied in different research contexts, since a construct ascertained in one context may not exist in other contexts or it may have distinct meanings at the same time (Craig and Douglas, 2000). Hence, it is necessary to re-evaluate the relevance of the definition as well as the operationalisation of the existing measures when they are applied in different contexts (Craig and Douglas, 2000). In the following section, the results of focus groups are described.

5.3. RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUPS

Social media brand communication: All the participants considered social media brand communication to be a way of brand promotion by means of the social media platform, which can be initiated and implemented by consumers, firms or the interaction between consumers and firms. Therefore, it supported the findings from

the in-depth interviews, i.e. social media brand communication consists of firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication. Some representative statements are shown as follows:

"Companies promote brands and products to customers by employing social media platforms, such as social media advertisement and brand-related articles and so on, in order to enhance customers' awareness and motivate their purchase behaviour." *(FG1)*

"Users create, publish or share brand-related content with other users on social media, including words, images, videos and more." *(FG2)*

"Users share firm-generated information, comment on it, and post on social media, for example, users add their own thoughts, experiences, or stories about the brand to make co-creation of brand-related information." *(FG3)*

In terms of the question regarding the description of brand communication on WeChat, there was considerable discussion about the different forms of brand communication that appear on WeChat, as they impressed participants due to their uniqueness and superiority to traditional mass media marketing. The statements below are the specific examples to support the dimensions of social media brand communication that were proposed in the in-depth interviews.

"I always see WeChat businessmen/businesswomen (people who worked full-time or part-time as a freelance retail consultant post brand and product information and build client networks by making use of social media platforms) posting product information on the Moments, such as fashion clothes, sports shoes, cosmetics and so on. I think it at least can enhance my awareness of the brand or product." *(FG1)*

"WeChat is the most popular social media platform in China, which has been expanding its function from social media platform to electronic business platform that sellers and buyers both communicate brand or product information and it achieves final purchase through this kind of communication." *(FG2)*

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"In terms of famous brands, as they are well-known, I can buy the products directly from their WeChat official accounts. While in terms of some emerging brands, I could only trust my friends' recommendations and some fashion celebrities' endorsement." *(FG3)*

Firm-generated social media brand communication: With regard to the definition of firm-generated social media brand communication, the responses of the interviewees were in line with the definition in the existing literature (e.g. Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Kumar et al., 2016). For instance:

"It is a way of brand promotion on the social media platform, such as advertisement and promotional articles." *(FG1)*

"Advertising on social media to promote a brand, makes the public aware of this brand and enhances the awareness of it." *(FG2)*

Regarding the measurement items of firm-generated social media brand communication, the results of the focus groups supported the existing scales from the literature (e.g. Bruhn, et al., 2012; Magi, 2003; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Tsiros et al., 2004). In addition, some participants offered the answer regarding the new item, "The content generated by companies about [brand] is useful", which emerged in the in-depth interviews. Then the researcher asked other participants whether or not they agree, positive answers were received. As is stated below:

"I have followed some international high street fashion brands' official accounts on WeChat so that I can receive brand information every day. I have become used to reading fashion news on WeChat rather than TV or magazines, because I think the information is so useful and can meet my expectations. Generally speaking I am satisfied with the firm-generated brand information on WeChat and have become a loyal reader." *(FG2)*

"Companies always release information about their latest products, bestsellers or promotional campaigns on their WeChat official accounts. I am willing to read this kind of information, because I think it is useful and beneficial to me. For example, I have followed the H&M WeChat official account, as it always offers information about the current fashion trend and its latest products in a timely manner, which always meets my fashion taste and expectations. As a loyal customer to H&M, I think its firm-generated content is much better than most other fashion brands." (FG3)

User-generated social media brand communication: Regarding the definition of user-generated social media brand communication, the replies of the participants were in alignment with the definition in the existing literature (e.g. OECD, 2007; Presi et al. 2014, p. 1600). For example:

"With the help of the interactive nature of social media, users can easily create brand-related information as well as exchange information with other users, which reflects some extent of creativity of an individual." (FG2)

"Users create and post or share brand-related information on social media, which is available to other users and can facilitate interactions among individuals." (FG3)

With respect to the measurement items of user-generated social media brand communication, the results of the focus groups complied with the existing scales from the literature (e.g. Bruhn, et al., 2012; Magi, 2003; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Tsiros et al., 2004). In addition, one participant offered an answer containing the new item, "The content generated by users about [brand] is useful", which occurred in the in-depth interviews, and was proposed in the in-depth interviews. Then the researcher asked other participants whether or not they agree; positive answers were received. As is shown below:

"When my friends see some discount information regarding the brands I like, they always share that information with me on WeChat, and of course, I feel satisfied with that useful information for me." (FG1)

"If I need to buy some cosmetics, I would like to search information about the bestseller of different brands. I find I trust user-generated content more than firm-generated content, especially the content regarding consumer's usage experience, which I think is much more trustworthy than firm-generated content. Therefore, I am more likely to be attracted by user-generated brand information." (FG2)

Co-creation of social media brand communication: This, according to the best of the researcher's knowledge, is a new metric of social media brand communication, and is put forward by the researcher for the first time. Therefore, the researcher explained the definition of co-creation of social media brand communication to the participants in the focus groups first, and then asked them whether they agree that it is a dimension of social media brand communication and whether they have seen this form of brand communication on the social media WeChat. If yes, they were asked to describe it. As a result of the focus groups, all the informants agreed with it and described cases and situations that they were aware of. For instance:

"The brand-related content is both created by users and companies. There are two different forms of co-creation. First, the companies create content and then encourage consumers to add information on the basis of existing firm-generated content. Second, the consumers share firm-generated information and then create content, such as comment and adaptation of the firm-generated content." (FG2)

"It is a way of interaction between consumers and companies, which enables and motivates consumers to compose their own experiences or thoughts into the brand-customer story on social media." (FG3)

With regard to the measurement items of the co-creation of social media brand communication, according to the comments of participants, the words or sentences "useful", "satisfied", "attractive", "meet my expectation" all appeared once or more. Consequently, it complied with the existing scales as well as the new items presented in the in-depth interviews. For example:

"Some of my WeChat friends are WeChat businessman/businesswoman, they always post some firm-generated content with their clients' feedback. I think this kind of co-creation of content is attractive and the feedback from consumers is especially useful for me. Therefore, I have become used to buying products from them and the majority of products meet my expectations." (FG1)

"In general, I trust the co-creation brand-related information posted by my WeChat friends, as I trust this individual's moral quality. And the content always contains what I want to know, therefore I am satisfied with this kind of brand communication." (FG2)

"Sometimes I see my WeChat friends comment on the advertisement as it appears automatically in my Moments of WeChat. Usually the advertisements that received positive comments from my friends can also meet my expectations and I will consider that this brand performs better than other similar brands." (FG3)

Consumer-based brand equity: All the participants considered that consumer-based brand equity is consumers' perception and evaluation of the value of a brand, which consists of brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Therefore, it is in line with the existing literature (e.g. Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Pappu et al., 2006). For example:

"It is the long-term accumulation of understanding and knowledge of the brand." (FG2)

"It is an intangible value that consists of brand awareness, brand association, and brand loyalty" (FG3)

In terms of the question regarding the understanding of the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, the responses were in accord with the existing literature (e.g. Aaker, 1991). The statements below are the specific examples to support the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, which were proposed in the in-depth interviews.

"Brand awareness, brand knowledge, and brand loyalty." (FG1)

"Brand recognition, brand quality, and brand loyalty." (FG2)

"Brand familiarity, brand understanding, brand quality, and value for money." (FG3)

Brand awareness: Regarding the definition of brand awareness, the responses of participants were in alignment with the definition of the existing literature (e.g. Aaker, 1996; Pappu et al., 2005). For example:

"Consumers get to know the brand through advertisements or hear from others." (FG1)

"Consumers have heard of this brand before and therefore can recognise it." (FG2)

With respect to the measurement items of brand awareness, the result of the focus groups complied with the existing scales from the literature (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Keller, 1993; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000). For instance:

"I can recall the brand category and logo when the brand name is mentioned." (FG1)

"I can recognise the brand from other brands in the same category." (FG2)

"I have been exposed to this brand before and therefore I am aware of its existence." (FG3)

Brand association: With respect to the definition of brand association, the replies of the participants were in line with the definition of the existing literature (e.g. Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Wang and Li, 2012). For example:

"It is an accumulation of knowledge in different aspects of a brand." (FG1)

"When you see a brand, what associations you will form immediately." (FG2)

With regard to the measurement items of brand association, the findings of the focus groups complied with the existing scales from the literature (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco, 2005; Wang and Li, 2012; Yoo et al., 2000). For instance:

"I am a fan of Adidas, which means I am quite familiar with its style, quality, positioning, and price and so on." (FG1)

"When Apple launches a new mobile phone, I will always associate it with its innovative features." (FG2)

Perceived quality: Regarding the definition of perceived quality, the responses of the participants were in line with the definition in the existing literature (e.g. Aaker, 1991; Bhuian, 1997; Moradi and Zarei, 2012). For example:

"Consumer's evaluation of the quality of a product based on its material and design." (FG2)

"Consumer's perception of the overall quality of a product or service." (FG3)

With regard to the measurement items of perceived quality, the findings of the focus groups complied with the existing scales from the literature (e.g. Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih, et al., 2014; Pappu, et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Torres et al., 2015; Yoo et al., 2000). For example:

"After I have used the skincare for more than one month, I feel my skin condition becomes better and better, therefore I can evaluate that it really has a great quality and I can firmly trust its quality." (FG1)

"The variously innovative functions and distinctive features of iPhone make me believe it has high quality." (FG2)

Brand loyalty: Regarding the definition of brand loyalty, the responses of the participants were in alignment with the definition in the existing literature (e.g. Oliver, 1997; Wang and Li, 2012). For instance:

"Customers trust the brand, and every time the brand launches a new product, customers are willing to buy it." (FG1)

"Customers build positive evaluation and form affection for a brand so that they make repeat purchases." (FG3)

With regard to the measurement items of brand loyalty, the findings of the focus groups complied with the existing scales from the literature (e.g. Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh et al., 2009; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001). For example:

"I am obsessed with Pandora's bracelets, although it is more expensive than other jewellery brands, I only buy this brand's bracelets." (FG1)

"I am a huge fan of iPhone, and have only used this brand for more than six years and I never considered trying other brands." (FG2)

Country-of-origin: With respect to the definition of country-of-origin, the responses of the participants were in alignment with the definition of the existing literature (e.g., Roth and Romeo, 1992; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). For instance:

"The consumers' overall perception of the country where the brand was established and brand story started." (FG1)

"The consumers' feelings or stereotypes towards a country where the brand originated." (FG2)

With regard to the measurement items for country-of-origin, the findings of the focus groups complied with the existing scales in the literature (e.g. Moradi and Zarei, 2012). For example:

"When someone mentions the brand country-of-origin of Coca-Cola, I will immediately associate it with America, which is the most powerful and prestigious country in the world and is renowned for its distinguished technology." (FG2)

"I have associations with Japan, which is famous for exquisite and user-friendly products, such as household appliances and electronic products. Therefore, I prefer Japanese household appliances to other countries' products." (FG3)

Purchase intention: With respect to the definition of purchase intention, the responses of the participants were in alignment with the definition in the existing literature (e.g. Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Payal et al., 2013). For instance:

"Inclination of consumers to purchase a particular brand." (FG1)

"Consumers intend to purchase a certain brand's products or services." (FG2)

With regard to the measurement items for purchase intention, the results of the focus groups complied with the existing scales in the literature (e.g. Khan et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2009; Wang and Li, 2012). For example:

"I intend to buy this brand's products in the near future." (FG1)

"I am really fond of this brand and would like to purchase this brand frequently." (FG3)

In summary, based on the analysis above, the findings of focus groups were consistent and similar to those of in-depth interviews and therefore no new item was found in the focus groups. The researcher ceased to implement more focus groups when the information saturation was achieved. Finally, the total of 11 new items were identified from the qualitative research and were afterwards added to the item pool for measuring the studied constructs.

5.4. SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the qualitative research that aimed to address the research objectives and the research questions by explaining the data analysis and results from the in-depth interviews and focus groups. The results were outlined based on the main themes identified from the relevant existing literature. In the next chapter, the analyses for the main survey data are presented in detail.

CHAPTER 6: DATA ANALYSIS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 6, the research findings of the main study are presented. As discussed in the previous chapter about the scale purification, some items were eliminated with the remaining items applied to the questionnaire of the main study. In this chapter, based on the main study conducted before, the sampling and data examination are assessed at the beginning in order to ensure that the required data assumptions satisfy the multivariance factor analysis. The data from the main survey are used to conduct CFA in order to evaluate the validity and reliability of the scales. At last, the findings, combined with the results from the tests on the hypotheses and the model are examined using SEM, and are explicated and discussed.

6.2. MAIN STUDY

The remaining items of the questionnaire, which were screened by scale purification were applied to the main study (Churchill, 1979), see Figure 6.1 (overleaf). The researcher conducted the survey in Chengdu, China, aiming to acquire essential data for evaluating the construct validity as well as to test the proposed hypotheses and the structural model. In the previous chapter, the procedure for the data collection and the techniques of the data analysis of the main survey were discussed. In the following sections, the analysis of the main survey data is provided in detail.

Figure 6.1: Procedure for developing measurement scales


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│  │   Specify domain   │  │    │  │  The exploratory phase            │  │
│  │   of construct     │  │    │  │                                   │  │
│  └ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┘  │    │  │  Literature search                │  │
│           │             │    │  │                                   │  │
│           ▼             │    │  │  Qualitative study:               │  │
│  ┌ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┐  │    │  │      •  In-depth interview        │  │
│  │  Generate sample   │  │    │  │                                   │  │
│  │  of items          │  │    │  │      •  Focus groups              │  │
│  └ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┘  │    │  │                                   │  │
│           │             │    │  │      •  Expert judgement          │  │
│           ▼             │    │  │  Pilot study:                     │  │
│  ┌ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┐  │    │  │      •  Co-efficient alpha        │  │
│  │   Collect data     │  │    │  │                                   │  │
│  └ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┘  │    │  │      •  Exploratory factor        │  │
│           │             │    │  │         analysis                  │  │
│           ▼             │    │  └ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┘  │
│  ┌ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┐  │    │                                        │
│  │  Purify measures   │  │    │  Main survey                          │
│  └ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┘  │    │  Quantitative study:                  │
│           │             │    │      •  Co-efficient alpha            │
│           ▼             │    │      •  Confirmatory factor           │
│  ┌ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┐  │    │         analysis                      │
│  │   Collect data     │  │    │                                        │
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│  │  Assess validity  │  │
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│   *  The dashed lines represent the stages discussed in the previous chapters
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Source: adapted from Churchill (1979)

6.2.1. Sampling

For the main survey, 585 mobile online questionnaires were distributed to young Chinese consumers in Chengdu who are WeChat users. Within seven weeks of the

data collection process, 520 qualified questionnaires were collected (see Table 6.1, overleaf), which resulted in a response rate of 89%. Data gathered from the main survey questionnaires were first input into a statistical program (SPSS), and were examined to ensure that the data qualified for the multivariate data analysis technique (Hair et al., 2010). This will be discussed in the next section.

6.2.2. Data examination

Data examination is crucial for guaranteeing that the data under analysis satisfies all the requirements of the multivariate data analysis technique and the examination of the data for preparing multivariate data analysis helps deepen researchers' understanding of the features of the data (Hair et al., 2010). The frequency tables are designed to determine whether any mistake is made during the process of inputting codes to the SPSS data sheet, and once the examination is completed, the next step is to check the descriptive statistics of all the variables (Narissara, 2012).

Table 6.1: The population of the main survey (n=520

Study population:		Young Chinese consumers (21-30)	
Sample population:		Young Chinese consumers (21-30) in Chengdu city	
Sampling frame:		n/a	
Sampling technique: Judgemental sampling		Young Chinese consumers (21-30) in Chengdu who are WeChat users	
Sample size required		515	
Distributed questionnaires		585	
Response rate (returned questionnaires)		89%	
Usable questionnaires		520	
Respondents' profile		No. of respondents	%
Gender	Female	53	%
	Male	47	%
Age	21—30	100	%
	Bachelor's degree	62	%

Level of education	Master's degree	36	%
	PhD	2	%

In order to examine the descriptive statistics, the researcher first checked the sufficiency of the sample size to meet the requirement of conducting multivariate data analysis. According to Hair et al. (2010), the sample size for conducting multivariate data analysis should be at least five respondents for each item. Accordingly, the ratio of the respondents per item in the research is eligible. In addition, the researcher examined the anti-image correlation matrix together with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and the p-values for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The results revealed that the variables had KMO values in a wide spectrum and that all the values were above 0.8 (Hutcheson and Sofroniou, 1999). The p-value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was highly significant (p-value < 0.01), which indicated that the R-matrix was not an identity matrix as there were some relationships between the variables (Field, 2009). Consequently, these results uphold the satisfactory factorability of all the items.

Furthermore, according to Hair et al. (2010), multivariate analysis demands sophisticated assumptions, therefore the data should be examined by a series of data examination techniques, such as the missing data analysis, the normality analysis, and the outlier analysis and so on. As a result, apart from the sampling adequacy analysis discussed earlier, the researcher also conducted missing data analysis, outlier analysis, normality analysis, homoscedasticity assessment, multicollinearity assessment, and linearity assessment. The results of the data are presented in the following sections.

6.2.2.1. Missing data analysis

Missing data refers to the valid values on one or more variables that are not available for analysis (Hair et al., 2010). According to Hair et al. (2010), missing data may have an adverse effect on the generalisability of the findings. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct missing data analysis. Identifying the patterns and relationships underlying the missing data plays a significant role in maintaining, as much as possible, the original distribution of values when any remedy is

implemented (Hair et al., 2010). According to Hair et al. (2010), there are two types of missing data. One is classified as ignorable missing data, which is treated as part of the research design and no remedies for missing data are needed as the allowance for missing data are intrinsic to the technique used. The other type is the nonignorable missing data, which is classified as the known process or unknown process based on the sources. In terms of the known process, missing data can be identified due to procedural factors, such as the failure to complete the entire questionnaire or errors in data entry. In these cases, the researcher lacks the control of the missing data process, but some remedies may be applicable when the missing data are random (Hair et al., 2010). With regard to the unknown process, missing data cannot be easily identified because the causes are related directly to the respondents, such as the refusal to respond to some private questions. Irrespective of whether the missing data process is known or unknown, the researcher should assess the extent and patterns of the missing data and then select the appropriate remedies for the missing data (Hair et al., 2010).

In this study, mobile online surveys were conducted where the technical mechanism allowed for no missing values, as the respondents could not submit the questionnaire unless each question was completed.

6.2.2.2. Outlier analysis

Outlier refers to observations with a unique combination of characteristics identifiable as distinctly different from the other observations (Hair et al., 2010). The outliers may be extreme values and may cause non-normality of data and distorted statistics (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). According to Field (2009, p. 97), outlier analysis is designed to examine whether any variable has "a score very different to the rest" in a study. Outliers can be identified by using univariate, bivariate, and multivariate methods based on the number of variables considered. Hair et al. (2010) suggested that researchers should conduct as many of these identifications as possible to ascertain outliers in a consistent format. To identify outliers using the univariate method, the researcher examines the distribution of observations for each variable and selects the cases with an extreme value as outliers. According to Hair et al. (2010), the data values should be converted to standard scores. In the case of a

small sample size (80 or fewer observations), outliers are the observations with a standard score of 2.5 or greater. If the sample size is larger than 80 cases, the standard score is up to 4 (Hair et al., 2010). In this research, the researcher used SPSS to calculate the standardised value of all the variables and the result indicated that univariate outliers were absent from the data. In line with Field (2009), the researcher also employed the boxplot in SPSS to detect outliers; the result revealed that the data contained a number of outliers (see Appendix E).

With regard to the multivariate method, the researcher used the Mahalanobis D^2 measure, which "measures each observation's distance in multidimensional space from the mean centre of all observations, providing a single value for each observation no matter how many variables are considered" (Hair et al., 2010). According to Hair et al. (2010), an observation with a D^2/df value exceeding 2.5 in small samples and 3 or 4 in larger samples can be treated as possible outliers. In this analysis, as the sample has 520 observations, a threshold value of 4 is appropriate. The result of employing the Mahalanobis D^2 measure revealed the presence of outliers.

According to Hair et al. (2010), outliers should be retained unless the researcher has demonstrable proof that they were "truly aberrant and not representative of any observations in the population" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 67). The researcher decided not to remove the outliers that emerged from the plot box in order to "ensure generalisability to the entire population" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 67).

6.2.2.3. Normality analysis

Following the evaluation of the missing data and the detection of outliers', the normality of the data distribution was assessed. Normality is the most fundamental assumption in multivariate analysis, which refers to "the shape of the data distribution for an individual metric variable and its correspondence to the normal distribution" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 72). There are two dimensions that affect the severity of nonnormality: the shape of the data distribution and the sample size. Therefore, researchers must not only examine the extent to which the distribution is non-normal, but also take the sample size into consideration (Hair et al., 2010). A

normal probability plot is a graphical method to assess the normality of data distribution, which compares the cumulative distribution of the empirical data distribution with that of the normal data distribution. Normal distribution appears as a diagonal line and the actual data distribution forms a plotted line for comparison with the diagonal line. The more normal the distribution is, the more closely the actual data distribution follows the diagonal line (Hair et al., 2010). Through visual inspection, the distribution of the values for some variables (VG1, VG2, VG3, VG4, VG5) evidently depart from the straight diagonal line, which indicated that there were some deviations from normal distribution for some variables. Through the examination of the histograms, the same results appeared (see Appendix F).

In addition to examining the normal probability plot and histogram, the researcher also used skewness and kurtosis measurement as statistical tests to assess normality. Kurtosis and skewness measures are used to describe the shape of any distribution. Kurtosis is a measure for the height of the distribution compared with the normal distribution and skewness is a measure for describing the balance of the distribution (Hair et al., 2010). In most statistical programs, the kurtosis and skewness of a normal distribution are endowed with the values of zero, while the departures of distribution are denoted by values above or below zero. To be more specific, positive kurtosis values indicate a flatter distribution, while negative values denote a peaked distribution. Similarly, positive skewness values denote that the distribution shifted to the left whereas negative values indicate the distribution shifted to the right (Hair et al., 2010). According to Field (2009), in a large sample size, the z values for the skewness and kurtosis should be in the range of $|2.58|$ and in very large samples, even small deviations from normality will cause significant values, as the larger the sample, the smaller the standard errors. Therefore, it is critical to check the visual shape of the distribution rather than calculate their significance. In this study, the results showed that the z values for the skewness and kurtosis of some variables (CO4, CO8, BA2, BA4, BA5, BA6, BAS2, BAS3, PQ2, PQ3, BL5, VG1, VG2, VG3, VG4, VG5, EC2, COO1, COO2, COO3, COO4, COO5, COO7) were outside the range of $|2.58|$ (see Appendix G). Therefore, in conjunction with the visual inspection of the data distribution, except for the items (VG1, VG2, VG3, VG4, VG5), there was no evident violation of normality distribution for the items (CO4,

CO8, BA2, BA4, BA5, BA6, BAS2, BAS3, PQ2, PQ3, BL5, EC2, COO1, COO2, COO3, COO4, COO5, COO7).

6.2.2.4. Homoscedasticity

According to Hair et al. (2010), homoscedasticity is another significant statistical assumption that should be tested before conducting multivariate analysis. It refers to "the assumption that dependent variable(s) exhibit equal levels of variance across the range of predictor variable(s)" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 74). Homoscedasticity can be assessed graphically and statistically (Field, 2009). First, the researcher examined the scatterplots, where the patterns did not exhibit any obvious pattern of heteroscedasticity. The data were scattered evenly around the horizontal line of the plots. Second, the researcher employed the Levene's test (Levene, 1960), which is widely used to evaluate whether the variances of the metric variables are equal across a nonnumeric variable (gender). If Levene's test is non-significant ($p > 0.05$), the homogeneity of the variance assumption is tenable. In this study, these items (FG1, FG4, FG8, CO1, CO5, CO8, BL6, EC3, EC4, COO4, and COO5) indicated a lack of homoscedasticity (see Appendix H). However, when the sample size is large, a small difference can make it sensitive and significant (Field, 2009). Therefore Field (2009) suggests that the Levene's test should be interpreted in conjunction with the variance ratio. This refers to the ratio of the variances in which the biggest variance is divided by the smallest variance of the group. When the sample size of each group is larger than 60 and two variances are compared, the ratio should be below 1.67 (Field, 2009). The results showed that all the variance ratios were smaller than the critical value, therefore, the above mentioned items remained for further analysis.

6.2.2.5. Linearity

Linearity refers to "the mean values of the outcome variable for each increment of the predictor(s) lie along a straight line" (Field, 2009, p. 76). According to Hair et al. (2010), linearity is an essential assumption of all multivariate techniques, as, since the correlations only represent linear relationships between variables, nonlinear effects will not be represented in the correlation value. Therefore, it is necessary to examine all the relationships to identify any departures that may affect the correlation. According to Hair et al. (2010), examining the scatterplots of the

variables is the most common way to assess linearity. In alignment with Hair et al. (2010), examining the scatterplots of individual variables facilitates nonlinear patterns of the data to be identified, which enables the linearity of the relationships to be evaluated. Hence, the researcher examined the scatterplots using a straight line to express the linear relationship. The results showed that some variables (VG1, VG2, VG3, VG4, and VG5) displayed non-linear patterns (see Appendix I).

In addition, according to Hair et al. (2010, p. 77), "the residuals reflect the unexplained portion of the dependent variable; thus, any nonlinear portion of the relationship will show up in the residuals." Therefore, the researcher examined the residuals by conducting the linear regression analysis, with PI being the dependent variable; the results presented the relationship among the dependent and independent variables. Figure 6.2 displays the normal p-p plot of the regression standardised residual, which indicated the linearity between the independent and dependent variables.

Figure 6.2: Linearity between the independent and dependent variables
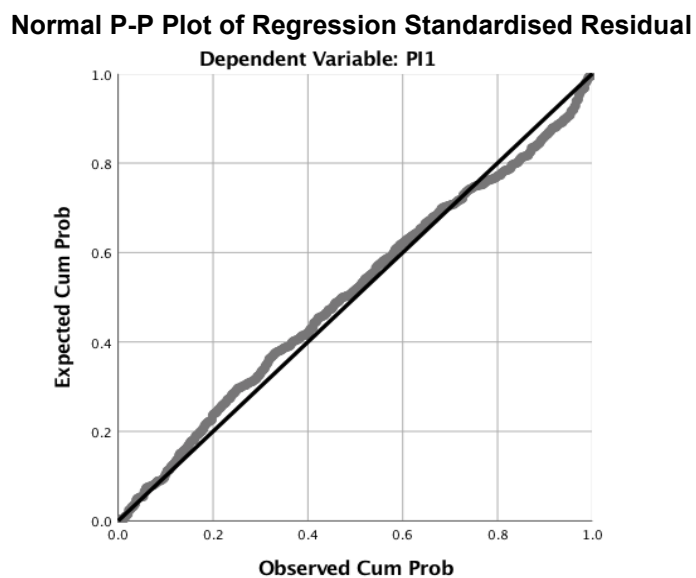
6.2.2.6. *Multicollinearity*

Multicollinearity is a statistical assumption of the "extent to which a variable can be explained by the other variables in the analysis" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 93). It occurs when there is a strong correlation between two or more predictors in a regression model (Field, 2009). A high level of multicollinearity can pose a threat to the model,

as it will increase the standard errors of the b-coefficients, which means these b-values are more variable across samples, leading to a problem as to whether these coefficients can truly represent the population (Field, 2009). Besides, multicollinearity can limit the size of R, which is a measure of the multiple correlation between the predictor variables and the outcome variable. This is because if the second predictor variable accounts for almost the same part of the variance with that of the first predictor variable, the overall variance in the outcome variable accounted for by the two predictor variables is little more than when only one predictor variable is used (Field, 2009). Moreover, multicollinearity leads to difficulty in assessing the individual importance of a predictor variable, as it is hard to identify which of the predictor variables is important when the predictor variables are highly correlated with similar variances in the outcome variable (Field, 2009).

The variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance statistic is a widely-used method of collinearity diagnostics (Hair et al., 2010). The VIF indicates whether a predictor variable has a strong linear relationship with other predictor variables. The tolerance statistic is the reciprocal of VIF (1/VIF) (Field, 2009). According to Myers (1990), if the VIF value is greater than 10 and the tolerance value is below 0.1, a serious problem of multicollinearity exists. In this study, some items (VG1, VG2, VG3, VG4, and VG5) exceeded the threshold value of 10 (see Appendix J). In conjunction with the former examination of normality and homoscedasticity, five items were deleted (VG1, VG2, VG3, VG4, VG5).

In summary, the researcher examined the general statistical properties of the data sets, i.e. missing data analysis, outlier analysis, normality, homoscedasticity, linearity, and multicollinearity. The overall results met the required assumptions for conducting multivariate analysis. However, it also indicated some problems with the data. First, some outliers were detected, however, as discussed above, the researcher decided not to remove any of the outliers without demonstration that they were "truly aberrant and not representative of any observations in the population" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 67). Besides, the retention of outliers is a way "to ensure generalisability to the entire population" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 67). Second, some extent of departure from normal distribution was found. According to Bentler and

Chou (1987), it is acceptable to examine the non-normal distribution data by means of the maximum likelihood (ML) method in SEM. In the next step, the construct validity is discussed.

6.2.3. Confirmatory factor analysis

As discussed in Chapter 4, SEM was conducted to examine the measurement model and the structural model. Based on Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a two-step approach in SEM was adopted in this study. CFA was performed first using AMOS 25 to test how well the measured variables represent the underlying theoretical constructs (measurement model); the relationships between the underlying exogenous and endogenous constructs (structural model) were investigated in the next step.

Prior to testing the relationships among the constructs, it is necessary to develop an acceptable measurement model. Therefore, CFA was employed to examine the validity of the constructs. As some researchers emphasised (e.g. Steenkamp and van Trijp, 1991), the validity of a construct is a vital condition for testing and developing theory. The validity of a construct indicates that "the constructs represent the theoretical latent construct they are designed to measure" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 631). The construct validation comprises the unidimensionality of a construct, the reliability of a construct, convergent validity, discriminant validity and nomological validity (Steenkamp and van Trijp, 1991).

CFA is a statistical method that is widely used to identify whether the theoretically applied structure of the underlying constructs exists in the observed data (Anderson and Gerbing, 1982). It enables one to examine whether the indicators of a specific construct share or converge a high proportion of variance in common, i.e. convergent validity through the calculation of the factor loadings (Hair et al., 2010). Besides, CFA is employed to examine the discriminant validity of a construct, i.e. the extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs (Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, CFA allows for testing whether the constructs have nomological validity, i.e. the extent of the correlational relationship between the constructs (Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991). According to Hair et al. (2010, p. 631), "the constructs

represent the theoretical latent construct they are designed to measure." Therefore, after conducting the data examination, CFA was employed to assess the validity of the construct.

The researcher applied Amos 25 to conduct CFA. All the constructs were combined into a group, which consisted of 13 variables: (1) firm-generated social media brand communication, (2) user-generated social media brand communication, (3)co-creation of social media brand communication, (4) brand awareness, (5) brand association, (6) perceived quality, (7) brand loyalty, (8) altruism, (9) venting motivation, (10) self-enhancement, (11) economic motivation, (12) purchase intention, and (13) country-of-origin. The constructs were measured by 76 items. With regard to the parameter estimate-to-observation ratio, Vorhies and Morgan (2005) suggest that the ratios should be at least five observations per parameter. The ratio of this survey was 6.8 observations per parameter (520/76; the sample size of this study was 520 observations). Therefore, it met the criteria.

After the model was specified, the maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) method, one of the most widely employed estimation techniques in most SEM programmes, was selected to identify estimates for each free parameter, which is more efficient and unbiased than other estimation techniques when the assumption of multivariate normality is met (Hair et al., 2010). Although the MLE approach is sensitive to non-normality, some researchers have demonstrated that it is fairly robust to violations of the normality assumption (e.g. Bentler and Chou, 1987; Olsson et al., 2004). In addition, this survey met the criterion of having at least five observations for each variable (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, the researcher decided to use the MLE approach to estimate the model.

In order to resolve the possible problem of standard errors due to the MLE method, the researcher evaluated the model fit indices first. The problem can be settled when the model fit indices expose reliable results (Bentler and Chou, 1987). Before assessing the model fit, the researcher evaluated the overall measurement model and then assessed the measurement model validity by examining the model fit

indices, and the reliability and validity of the constructs. The details of the examinations are presented in the next section of this chapter.

6.2.3.1. Overall measurement model estimation

The first run of CFA for the measurement model showed that not all the model fit indices were in an acceptable range for determining the overall model fit. The CMIN/DF is 3.155; RMSEA value is 0.064; goodness of fit index (GFI) value is 0.693; adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) value is 0.667; Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) value is 0.82, and the comparative fix index (CFI) is 0.829. Considering the standardised regression weight, according to Hair et al. (2010), loadings should be at least 0.5 or ideally 0.7 or greater; all the item loadings are more than 0.5.

According to Hair et al. (2010), standardised residuals, modification indices, and specification search are useful model diagnostic cues to identify problems with the measures. Residuals refer to "the individual differences between observed covariance terms and the fitted covariance terms, and the standardised residuals are the raw residuals divided by the standard error of the residual" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 690). Standardised residual values can be used to identify item pairs for which the specified measurement model does not precisely predict the observed covariance between those two items (Hair et al., 2010). As a rule of thumb, standardised residuals of less than |2.5| do not indicate a problem, while residuals greater than |4| do, which suggests a potentially unacceptable degree of error. Standardised residuals between |2.5| and |4| deserve some attention, but may not suggest any changes unless other problems are found to be connected with these two variables (Hair et al., 2010).

The researcher investigated the standardised residual values and found some item pairs (EC6 & AL1, EC6 & CO5, EC6 & CO4, EC6 & CO2, AL1 & BL7, and BL2 & PQ4) with the standardised residual values above |4|. After inspection, a consistent pattern of large standardised residuals was associated with certain variables (EC6, BL2, PQ4, and AL1) and a number of other variables were found, which suggested

problems (Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, the value of a number of item pairs were between |2.5| and |4|, and several consistent large residuals were associated with BAS7 and BA1, which were also the variables with low loading estimates (BAS7=0.637, BA1=0.524). Therefore, EC6, BL2, PQ4, AL1, BAS7, BA1 were deleted.

In addition, the modification index was also examined. "A modification index is calculated for every possible relationship that is not free to be estimated. It shows how much the overall model χ^2 would be reduced by freeing that single path" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 712). According to Hair et al. (2010), the modification indices' value of approximately 4.0 or greater suggest that the model fit can be improved by freeing the corresponding paths. However, doing so may cause inconsistency with the theoretical foundation of CFA and SEM. Therefore, any change should be made in conjunction with other residual diagnostics (Hair et al., 2010). The researcher deleted the item FG1, which was corresponding to the largest value of the modification index.

After deletion of the items mentioned above, the model fit improved. Chi-square (χ^2)=6349.196, DF=2199, P-value=0.000, CMIN/DF=2.887, CFI=0.866, TLI=0.857, RMSEA=0.060, GFI=0.741; AGFI=0.715, NFI=0.809. According to Hair et al. (2010), the index cut-off values can be adjusted based on the model characteristics, such as sample size and model complexity. As this research contains 520 responses and 69 items, it can receive a wider range of acceptable index values.

Chi-square (χ^2) is the most fundamental measure of differences between the estimated and observed covariance matrices (Hair et al., 2010). The chi-square statistic (χ^2) is the only statistically-based overall fit measure in SEM, which provides "the key value in assessing the GOF (goodness-of-fit) of any SEM model" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 648). Whereas, the χ^2 GOF statistic is prone to be affected by two mathematical properties, sample size as well as the number of indicators; as the sample size or the number of observed variables increases so does the χ^2. Consequently, the χ^2 GOF test is not often used alone, and researchers have developed considerable alternative measures of fit to avoid this bias (Hair et al., 2010).

First, the value of the normed chi-square was 2.887, which was in the acceptable range of between 2 and 5 (Marsh and Hovecar, 1985). RMSEA is one of the most informative criteria in SEM analysis, as it takes the error of approximation in the population into account (Byrne, 1989). Values < 0.05 indicate a good fit, values from 0.08 to 0.10 indicate a mediocre fit, and values > 0.10 indicate a poor fit (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, the value of RMSEA (RMSEA=0.060) was in the acceptable range. In addition, the value of GFI was 0.741. According to Hair et al. (2010), GFI is "an early attempt to produce a fit statistic that was less sensitive to sample size, even though sample size is not included in the formula, this statistic is still sensitive to sample size due to the effect of sample size on sampling distributions," "no statistical test is associated with the GFI, only guidelines to fit. The possible range of the GFI is 0 to 1, with the higher values indicating better fit" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 667).

6.2.3.2. Unidimensionality

According to Hair et al. (2010), unidimensionality indicates that a set of measured variables can be explained by only one underlying construct. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) emphasise that it is crucial to achieve unidimensional measurement for testing and developing theory. In CFA, the overall fit of the model is tested as a necessary condition to examine whether a set of measurement items are unidimensional (Kumar and Dillon, 1987). Hence, the researcher first assessed the unidimensionality of the scales by conducting CFA for the measurement model.

To conduct the CFA, the group was hypothesised to be a 13-dimensional model (altruism, venting motivation, self-enhancement, economic motivation, firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, co-creation of social media brand communication, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty, purchase intention, country-of-origin). After running the CFA, as presented in Table 6.2 (overleaf), the unidimensionality showed that each measurement item loaded on only one corresponding dimension of the model (Netemeyer et al., 2003). The results of the factor loadings show that all the items have significant factor loadings with t-values exceeding 1.96. All the constructs have high alpha coefficients greater than 0.7.

Furthermore, some items show SMC of less than 0.5, which indicates that the constructs explained less than half the variance in the item.

Table 6. 2: Results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the main survey

Items	SMC	Loadings	T-values	Alpha
Altruism				0.915
AL2	0.681	0.826	22.317	
AL3	0.746	0.863	23.869	
AL4	0.635	0.797	21.196	
AL5	0.67	0.819	22.041	
AL6	0.69	0.831	22.421	
Venting motivation				0.928
VT1	0.796	0.892	20.829	
VT2	0.908	0.953	22.289	
VT3	0.862	0.928	21.736	
VT5	0.533	0.73	19.791	
Self-enhancement				0.91
SE3	0.668	0.817	22.021	
SE4	0.663	0.814	21.268	
SE5	0.765	0.875	23.487	
SE6	0.773	0.879	23.644	
Economic motivation				0.923
EC1	0.644	0.803	21.015	
EC2	0.71	0.842	22.069	
EC3	0.785	0.886	23.681	

EC4	0.775	0.881	23.471	
EC5	0.628	0.792	20.286	
Firm-generated social media brand communication				0.9
FG2	0.599	0.774	21.661	
FG3	0.537	0.732	19.881	
FG4	0.823	0.907	28.54	
FG5	0.532	0.729	19.743	
FG8	0.756	0.869	25.81	
User-generated social media brand communication				0.945
UG1	0.768	0.876	28.405	
UG2	0.864	0.93	32.207	
UG3	0.766	0.875	28.215	
UG4	0.78	0.883	28.744	
UG5	0.64	0.8	23.765	
UG8	0.647	0.805	24	
Co-creation of social media brand communication				0.948
CO1	0.825	0.908	33.952	
CO2	0.853	0.923	35.328	
CO3	0.667	0.816	26.233	
CO4	0.821	0.906	33.548	
CO5	0.629	0.793	24.752	
CO8	0.744	0.863	29.634	
Brand awareness				0.884
BA2	0.526	0.725	16.472	
BA3	0.568	0.753	16.92	
BA4	0.572	0.756	17.24	

BA5	0.634	0.796	18.236	
BA6	0.755	0.869	19.95	
Brand association				0.861
BAS1	0.643	0.802	19.752	
BAS2	0.627	0.792	19.347	
BAS3	0.565	0.752	18.155	
BAS4	0.471	0.687	16.262	
BAS5	0.415	0.644	15.079	
BAS6	0.377	0.614	14.263	
Perceived quality				0.93
PQ1	0.711	0.843	22.071	
PQ2	0.72	0.849	24.35	
PQ3	0.777	0.881	25.95	
PQ5	0.566	0.752	20.15	
PQ6	0.653	0.808	22.48	
PQ7	0.717	0.847	24.264	
Brand loyalty				0.888
BL1	0.425	0.652	13.824	
BL4	0.695	0.834	16.055	
BL5	0.744	0.863	16.462	
BL6	0.659	0.812	15.729	
BL7	0.588	0.767	15.044	
Purchase intention				0.894
PI1	0.702	0.838	22.521	
PI2	0.728	0.853	23.688	
PI3	0.523	0.723	18.599	

PI4	0.608	0.78	20.71	
PI5	0.411	0.641	15.866	
PI6	0.537	0.733	18.953	
Country-of-origin				0.936
COO1	0.69	0.83	22.922	
COO2	0.721	0.849	23.916	
COO3	0.798	0.893	25.986	
COO4	0.75	0.866	24.682	
COO5	0.682	0.826	22.882	
COO7	0.633	0.796	21.619	

Source: developed by the researcher

6.2.3.3. Items per construct and model identification

According to Hair et al. (2010), it is necessary to conduct model identification to ascertain whether enough information exists to identify a solution to a set of structural equations. Although three items per construct is acceptable, four items per construct is preferable (Hair et al., 2010). As presented in Table 6.2, each construct in this study was measured by at least four indicators. Besides, the result of the calculation for the degrees of freedom demonstrated it was an over-identified model, which refers to a measurement model in which a solution can be found with positive degrees of freedom and a corresponding chi-square value (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, it was appropriate to conduct further analysis.

6.2.3.4. Common method bias

According to Hair et al. (2010, p. 764), common method bias means that "the covariance among measured items is influenced by the fact that some or all of the responses are collected with the same type of scale." As the data in this research were all collected by the same questionnaires during the same period of time, this research might have been influenced by common method bias (Hair et al., 2010). As outlined by Podsakoff and Organ (1986), Harman's (1967) one-factor test was conducted to examine the presence of common method variance bias among the

observed variables. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was applied to all the items. According to Podsakoff and Organ (1986, p. 536), a common method variance exists when "either (a) a single factor will emerge from the factor analysis, or (b) one "general" factor will account for the majority of the covariance in the dependent and criterion variables." In this study, no single factor emerged from the factor analysis and each factor explained less than fifty percent of the variance in the data.

In addition, the variance and inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance statistic were employed to test the collinearity of each latent variable (Hair et al., 2010). According to Myers (1990), if the VIF value is greater than 10 and the tolerance value is below 0.1, a serious problem of multicollinearity exists. The results showed that all the VIF values were below 5, which indicates that no common method bias existed.

6.2.3.5. Validity and reliability assessment

In the CFA, it is necessary to examine the validity and reliability of the measurement. The content validity and face validity were tested and discussed in Chapter 4. In addition, the construct validity should be examined, as it is a crucial condition for testing and developing a theory (Steenkamp and van Trijp, 1991). It deals with the theoretical relationship between one variable and other variables and indicates the degree to which the construct is empirically represented by its indicators (Steenkamp and van Trijp, 1991).

In order to claim that a construct is valid, the convergent validity and discriminant validity as the subset of construct validity were evaluated. According to Hair et al. (2010), a factor loading of ≥ 0.5 is considered the minimum level for convergent validity that can be suggested. Any factor loading whose corresponding t-value was greater than 1.96 at the 0.05 significance level for discriminant validity was considered statistically significant (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Besides, in order to confirm that the constructs were valid, the researcher also evaluated the unidimensionality of the construct and the nomological validity (Steenkamp and van Trijp, 1991). The assessment of the undimensionality of the constructs is presented

in Section 6.2.3.2. The evaluation of the construct validity is elaborated in the next section.

Convergent validity: Convergent validity refers to the degree to which the indicators of the constructs that are theoretically related to each other are observed to be related in reality (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991). Convergent validity is assessed by performing the t-value tests to evaluate the factor loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair et al., 2010). According to Hair et al. (2010), a factor loading should be 0.5 or higher, where 0.7 or higher is more ideal, and an AVE should be 0.5 or higher. The result exhibited that the factor loading of each item was satisfactory, and all the t-values were above 1.96 (p=0.05).

The researcher also tested the composite reliability indices of each construct. According to Hair et al. (2010), the desirable minimum level of the composite reliability index is 0.7. The result showed that the composite reliability indices were satisfactory (from 0.864 to 0.949). Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) of each factor was also satisfactory (from 0.517 to 0.774) (See Table 6.3, overleaf). Consequently, it demonstrated that the model has a satisfactory construct reliability and convergent validity.

Discriminant validity: Discriminant validity refers to the degree to which the indicators of the constructs that are theoretically distinct from others are observed to be unrelated to each other in reality (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991). It can be assessed by comparing the squared correlation between two constructs with the average variance extracted values of these two constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The AVE value should be greater than the squared correlation estimates in order to achieve discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010). In this study, the results revealed the discriminant validity for all the latent constructs (see Table 6.4, below).

Nomological validity: Nomological validity refers to the examination of the hypothesised relationships between the constructs and the empirical links between the indicators and the underlying dimensions (Peter, 1981; Peter and Churchill,

1986). It is tested to verify whether the correlations between the constructs in the measurement theory make sense (Hair et al., 2010). According to Hair et al. (2010), the nomological validity can be assessed in the light of the constructs correlation matrix. The results are presented in Table 6.5 (below), which exhibited that correlations between the constructs existed. Therefore, it demonstrated the validity of the proposed relationships between the constructs.

Table 6.3: Composite reliability and variance extracted

	Composite reliability	Variance extracted
Firm-generated social media brand communication	0.902	0.649
User-generated social media brand communication	0.946	0.744
Co-creation of social media brand communication	0.949	0.756
Brand awareness	0.886	0.611
Brand association	0.864	0.517
Perceived quality	0.93	0.691
Brand loyalty	0.891	0.623
Altruism	0.916	0.685
Venting motivation	0.932	0.774
Self-enhancement	0.91	0.717
Economic motivation	0.924	0.708
Country-of-origin	0.937	0.712
Purchase intention	0.893	0.585

Source: developed by the researcher

Table 6.4: Results of the discriminant validity test

	PI	FG	UG	CO	BA	BAS	PQ	BL	AL	VT	SE	EC	COO
PI	0.765												
FG	0.335	0.805											
UG	0.22	0.546	0.863										
CO	0.339	0.736	0.54	0.87									
BA	0.41	0.198	0.09	0.138	0.781								
BAS	0.545	0.335	0.215	0.316	0.596	0.719							
PQ	0.497	0.228	0.254	0.23	0.259	0.419	0.831						
BL	0.691	0.414	0.165	0.314	0.339	0.45	0.52	0.789					
AL	0.434	0.324	0.313	0.405	0.269	0.468	0.3	0.366	0.827				
VT	0.178	0.105	0.109	0.108	0.136	0.218	0.183	0.151	0.347	0.88			
SE	0.272	0.219	0.153	0.259	0.157	0.239	0.088	0.176	0.308	0.379	0.847		
EC	0.251	0.217	0.126	0.274	0.146	0.289	0.086	0.131	0.276	0.218	0.436	0.842	
COO	0.635	0.273	0.167	0.197	0.33	0.586	0.454	0.403	0.37	0.032	0.149	0.197	0.844

Note: FG=Firm-generated social media brand communication; UG=User-generated social media brand communication; CO=Co-creation of social media brand communication; BA=Brand awareness; BAS=Brand association; PQ=Perceived quality; BL=Brand loyalty; AL=Altruism; VT=Venting motivation; SE=Self-enhancement; EC=Economic motivation; COO=Country-of-origin; PI=Purchase intention

Source: developed for the current study

Table 6.5: The constructs correlation matrix

	COO	PI	EC	SE	VT	AL	BL	PQ	BAS	BA	CO	UG	FG
COO	1												
PI	0.635	1											
EC	0.197	0.251	1										
SE	0.149	0.272	0.436	1									
VT	0.032	0.178	0.218	0.379	1								
AL	0.37	0.434	0.276	0.308	0.347	1							
BL	0.403	0.691	0.131	0.176	0.151	0.366	1						
PQ	0.454	0.497	0.086	0.088	0.183	0.3	0.52	1					
BAS	0.586	0.545	0.289	0.239	0.218	0.468	0.45	0.419	1				
BA	0.33	0.41	0.146	0.157	0.136	0.269	0.339	0.259	0.596	1			
CO	0.197	0.339	0.274	0.259	0.108	0.405	0.314	0.23	0.316	0.138	1		
UG	0.167	0.22	0.126	0.153	0.109	0.313	0.165	0.254	0.215	0.09	0.54	1	
FG	0.273	0.335	0.217	0.219	0.105	0.324	0.414	0.228	0.335	0.198	0.736	0.546	1

Note: FG=Firm-generated social media brand communication; UG=User-generated social media brand communication; CO=Co-creation of social media brand communication; BA=Brand awareness; BAS=Brand association; PQ=Perceived quality; BL=Brand loyalty; AL=Altruism; VT=Venting motivation; SE=Self-enhancement; EC=Economic motivation; COO=Country-of-origin; PI=Purchase intention

Source: developed for the current study

Based on the results of the construct validity tests, it revealed valid constructs for the measurement model, which were suitable for testing the next stage of the structural model. Therefore, the researcher then examined the structural equation model and discussed the results of the hypotheses testing.

6.2.4. The evaluation of the structural model

The structural model contributes to specify which latent constructs directly or indirectly affect the values of the other latent constructs in the model (Byrne, 1989). The structural model examination is based on the validated measurement model and satisfactory model fit (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Therefore, the proposed model based on the research hypotheses was tested on the basis of the structural model. The model consisted of 13 latent variables (identified by 69 items). The theoretical model has been specified to test 29 causal paths, which are represented by the hypotheses (H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, H2a, H2b, H2c, H3a, H3b, H3c, H4a, H4b, H4c, H5a, H5b, H5c, H6, H7, H8, H9, H10, H11, H12, H13, H14, H15, H16a, H16b, and H16c). Firstly, the structural model was tested by examining the covariance matrix, path estimates, and t-values. The results showed that 15 out of 29 paths were statistically significant and in the hypothesised direction. The values of R^2 (variance explained) indicated that the model explained 11.4 percent of the variance in user-generated social media brand communication, 4.5 percent of that in brand awareness, 53.2 percent of that in brand association, 24.4 percent of that in perceived quality, 42.5 percent of that in brand loyalty, and 56.5 percent of that in purchase intention. Further details of the hypotheses are discussed in the following section.

In the proposed theoretical model elaborated in Chapter 3, the latent constructs were classified into two types, i.e. exogenous constructs and endogenous constructs. In this research, altruism, venting motivation, self-enhancement, economic motivation, country-of-origin, firm-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication are exogenous constructs. User-generated social media brand communication, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and purchase intention are endogenous constructs.

In order to assess the structural model, coefficient parameter estimates were examined in conjunction with the goodness-of-fit indices to evaluate whether the hypothesised structural model fits the data sets. According to Hair et al. (2010), if it

does not fit, the model needs to be re-specified until it achieves both an acceptable statistical fit as well as a theoretically meaningful representation of the data.

The hypothesised model testing showed the results (see Table 6.6, overleaf) that hypotheses H1a, H2a, H5a, H4b, H3c, H6, H8, H9, H11, H13, H14, H15, H16a, H16b, H16c were supported. The standardised estimate for these hypotheses were all significant. However, hypotheses H1b, H1d, H1e, H3a, H4a, H2b, H3b, H5b, H2c, H4c, H5c, H7, H10, and H12 were rejected because they were not statistically significant.

The model was defined by 69 items, which identified 13 constructs. The covariance matrix among the variables was employed to test the model. Figure 6.3 (below) showed the results for each hypothesised path and goodness-of-fit statistics, which indicated that the overall structural model was accepted. The TLI value (0.848) and RMSEA value (0.062) are accepted within the thresholds for indicating a good fit (Hair et al., 2010). As a complement to these findings, the chi-square ratio index (3.007) was in the acceptable range of between 2 and 5 (Marsh and Hovecar, 1985).

The structural model demonstrated that the motivation of altruism has a positive impact on user-generated social media brand communication, while the impact of other hypothesised motivations, such as venting motivation, self-enhancement, and economic motivation were not supported. With regard to the relationships among social media brand communication consisting of firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication and co-creation of social media brand communication, and the consumer-based brand equity including brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, the results showed that firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on band awareness and brand loyalty but not on brand association and perceived quality. User-generated social media brand communication only has a positive impact on perceived quality and not on brand awareness, brand association, or brand loyalty. Co-creation of social media brand communication only has a positive impact on brand association and not on brand awareness, perceived quality, or brand loyalty. Consequently, the impacts of these three dimensions of social

media brand communication are on the different dimensions of consumer-based brand equity.

In addition, regarding the causal relationships among the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, brand awareness has a positive impact on brand association and brand loyalty and not on perceived quality. Brand association has a positive impact on perceived quality and not on brand loyalty. Perceived quality has a positive impact on brand loyalty. Although the results were not exactly the same as the traditional hierarchy of effects model (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975), they still reflect the hierarchy of the learning process. Furthermore, with regard to the relationships among country-of-origin and the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, the results showed that country-of-origin has a positive impact on brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, respectively, therefore the proposed hypotheses were all supported. Finally, regarding the outcome of the consumer-based brand equity dimensions, except for brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty have a positive impact on purchase intention. Among them, brand loyalty has the strongest effect on purchase intention (γ=0.622, t-value=9.539). The derived model explains 56.5% of the variance in purchase intention, 4.5% for brand awareness, 53.2% for brand association, 24.4% for perceived quality, 42.5% in brand loyalty, and 11.4% in user-generated social media brand communication.

Figure 6.3: The structural model
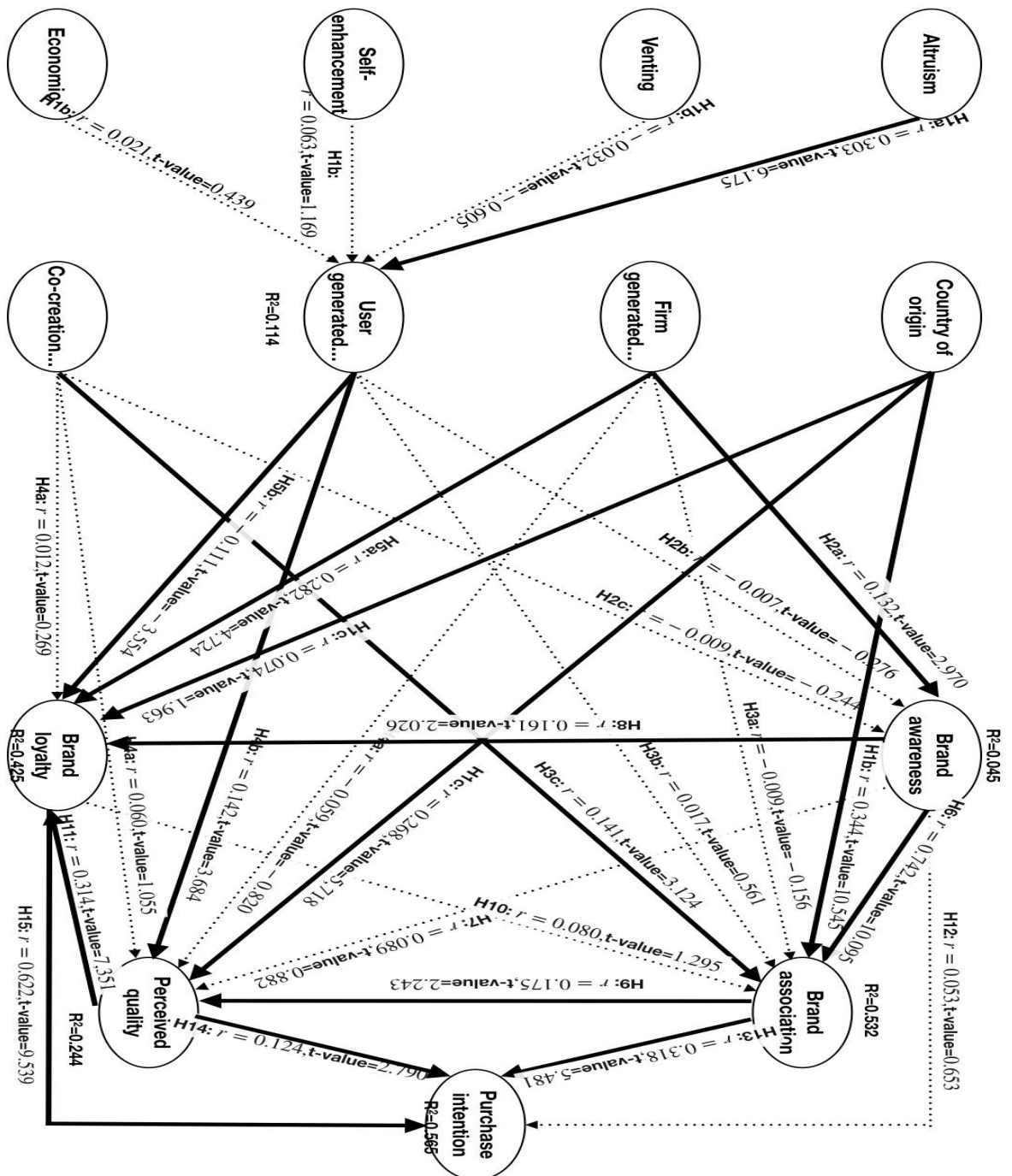
Note: Solid lines indicate significant relationships, and dotted lines indicate nonsignificant relationships. T-values greater than 1.96 were significant at 0.95. γ=standardised coefficient. R^2= coefficient of determination. X^2=6696.671; DF=2227; χ^2/df=3.007; CFI=0.856; TLI=0.848; AGFI=0.710; GFI=0.732; RMSEA=0.062

Source: developed for the current study

6.2.5. Results of Testing the Hypotheses

Table 6. 6: Results of testing the hypotheses

Research questions	Hypotheses	Path estimates	t-value	P	Test results
(1) From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are consumers' motivations to engage in user-generated social media brand communication?	H1a: Altruism has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication	0.303	6.172	***	Accepted
	H1b: Venting motivation has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication	-0.032	-0.603	0.546	Rejected
	H1c: Self-enhancement has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication	0.063	1.164	0.245	Rejected
	H1d: Economic motivation has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication	0.021	0.446	0.656	Rejected
(2) From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of social media brand communication affect each dimension of consumer-based brand equity?	H2a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness	0.131	3.404	***	Accepted
	H2b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness	-0.011	-0.453	0.651	Rejected
	H2c: A positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness	-0.012	-0.347	0.729	Rejected

	H3a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand association	-0.007	-0.143	0.887	Rejected
	H3b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand association	0.017	0.559	0.576	Rejected
	H3c: A positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand association	0.14	3.234	0.001	Accepted
	H4a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality	-0.052	-0.821	0.412	Rejected
	H4b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality	0.142	3.693	***	Accepted
	H4c: A positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality	0.058	1.053	0.292	Rejected
	H5a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand loyalty	0.233	4.511	***	Accepted
	H5b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand loyalty	-0.111	-3.543	***	Rejected
	H5c: A positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a	0.031	0.718	0.473	Rejected

	positive effect on brand loyalty				
(3) From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions?	H6: Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand association	0.742	10.071	***	Accepted
	H7: Brand awareness has a positive effect on perceived quality	0.09	0.892	0.373	Rejected
	H8: Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand loyalty	0.158	1.973	0.048	Accepted
	H9: Brand association has a positive effect on perceived quality	0.175	2.244	0.025	Accepted
	H10: Brand association has a positive effect on brand loyalty	0.08	1.288	0.198	Rejected
	H11: Perceived quality has a positive effect on brand loyalty	0.313	7.329	***	Accepted
(4) From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of consumer-based brand equity affect purchase intention?	H12: Brand awareness has a positive effect on purchase intention	0.053	0.646	0.518	Rejected
	H13: Brand association has a positive effect on purchase intention	0.318	5.481	***	Accepted
	H14: Perceived quality has a positive effect on purchase intention	0.124	2.78	0.005	Accepted
	H15: Brand loyalty has a positive effect on purchase intention	0.623	9.548	***	Accepted
(5) From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does brand country-of-origin affect the consumer-based brand equity dimensions?	H16a: Country-of-origin has a positive effect on brand association	0.344	10.547	***	Accepted
	H16b: Country-of-origin has a positive effect on perceived quality	0.268	5.715	***	Accepted
	H16c: Country-of-origin has a positive effect on brand loyalty	0.077	2.03	0.042	Accepted

Source: developed by the researcher for the current study

Altruism and user-generated social media brand communication

As shown earlier, hypothesis H1a explained the relationship between the exogenous variable (altruism) and endogenous variable user-generated social media brand communication. As outlined in Table 6.6, the hypothesised relationship was found to be significant ($\gamma=0.303$, t-value=6.175).

Venting motivation and user-generated social media brand communication

Hypothesis H1b, representing the relationship between venting motivation and user-generated social media brand communication, was rejected, as the parameter estimates were non-significant ($\gamma=-0.032$, t-value=-0.605) (see Table 6.6).

Self-enhancement and user-generated social media brand communication

Hypothesis H1c, representing the relationship between self-enhancement and user-generated social media brand communication, was rejected, as the parameter estimates were non-significant ($\gamma=0.063$, t-value=1.169) (see Table 6.6).

Economic motivation and user-generated social media brand communication

Hypothesis H1d explained the relationship between economic motivation and user-generated social media brand communication. Based on Table 6.6, the hypothesis was rejected because it was found to be nonsignificant in the hypothesised direction ($\gamma=0.021$, t-value=0.439).

Firm-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness

As shown in Table 6.6, hypothesis H2a, explaining the relationship between firm-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness, was supported as the hypothesised relationship was found to be significant ($\gamma=0.132$, t-value=2.970).

User-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness

Hypothesis H2b represented the relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness. As Table 6.6 displayed, hypothesis H2b was nonsignificant ($\gamma=-0.007$, t-value=-0.276). Thus, this hypothesis was rejected.

Co-creation of social media brand communication and brand awareness

Hypothesis H2c explained the relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and brand awareness. Based on Table 6.6, the hypothesis was rejected because it was found to be nonsignificant (γ=-0.009, t-value=-0.244).

Firm-generated social media brand communication and brand association

Hypothesis H3a explained the relationship between firm-generated social media brand communication and brand association. As Table 6.6 displayed, hypothesis H3a was nonsignificant (γ=-0.009, t-value=-0.156). Thus, this hypothesis was rejected.

User-generated social media brand communication and brand association

Hypothesis H3b represented the relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand association. According to the results presented in Table 6.6, it was found to be nonsignificant (γ=0.017, t-value=0.561), and thereby the hypothesis was rejected.

Co-creation of social media brand communication and brand association

Hypothesis H3c, representing the relationship between co-creation of social media brand communication and brand association, was supported, as the parameter estimates were significant (γ=0.141, t-value=3.124) (see Table 6.6).

Firm-generated social media brand communication and perceived quality

Hypothesis H4a represented the relationship between firm-generated social media brand communication and perceived quality. This hypothesised relationship was found to be nonsignificant (γ=-0.059, t-value=-0.820), thus refuting this hypothesis (see Table 6.6).

User-generated social media brand communication and perceived quality

As shown in Table 6.6, hypothesis H4b, explaining the relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and perceived quality, was supported,

as the hypothesised relationship was found to be significant (γ=0.142, t-value=3.684).

Co-creation of social media brand communication and perceived quality

Hypothesis H4c represented the relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and perceived quality. According to the results presented in Table 6.6, it was found to be nonsignificant (γ=0.060, t-value=1.055), and thereby the hypothesis was rejected.

Firm-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty

As shown in Table 6.6, hypothesis H5a, explaining the relationship between firm-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty, was supported as the hypothesised relationship was found to be significant (γ=0.282, t-value=4.724).

User-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty

Hypothesis H5b explained the relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty. As Table 6.6 displayed, hypothesis H5b was significant in the opposite hypothesised direction (γ=-0.111, t-value=-3.554). Thus, this hypothesis was rejected.

Co-creation of social media brand communication and brand loyalty

Hypothesis H5c represented the relationship between co-creation of social media brand communication and brand loyalty. This hypothesised relationship was found to be nonsignificant (γ=0.012, t-value=0.269), thus refuting this hypothesis (see Table 6.6).

Brand awareness and brand association

As shown in Table 6.6, hypothesis H6, explaining the relationships between firm-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness, was supported as the hypothesised relationship was found to be significant (γ=0.742, t-value=10.095).

Brand awareness and perceived quality

Hypothesis H7 represented the relationship between brand awareness and perceived quality. This hypothesised relationship was found to be nonsignificant (γ=0.089, t-value=0.882), thus refuting this hypothesis (see Table 6.6).

Brand awareness and brand loyalty

Hypothesis H8, representing the relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty, was supported, as the parameter estimates were significant (γ=0.161, t-value=2.026) (see Table 6.6).

Brand association and perceived quality

Hypothesis H9, representing the relationship between brand association and perceived quality, was supported, as the parameter estimates were significant (γ=0.175, t-value=2.243) (see Table 6.6).

Brand association and brand loyalty

Hypothesis H10 represented the relationship between brand loyalty and brand association. According to the results presented in Table 6.6, it was found to be nonsignificant (γ=0.080, t-value=1.295), and thereby the hypothesis was rejected.

Perceived quality and brand loyalty

As shown in Table 6.6, hypothesis H11, explaining the relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty, was supported as the hypothesised relationship was found to be significant (γ=0.314, t-value=7.351).

Brand awareness and purchase intention

Hypothesis H12 represented the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention. This hypothesised relationship was found to be nonsignificant (γ=0.089, t-value=0.882), thus refuting this hypothesis (see Table 6.6).

Brand association and purchase intention

As shown in Table 6.6, hypothesis H13, explaining the relationship between brand association and purchase intention, was supported as the hypothesised relationship was found to be significant (γ=0.318, t-value=5.481).

Perceived quality and purchase intention

Hypothesis H14, representing the relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention, was supported, as the parameter estimates were significant (γ=0.124, t-value=2.790) (see Table 6.6).

Brand loyalty and purchase intention

As shown in Table 6.6, hypothesis H15, explaining the relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention, was supported as the hypothesised relationship was found to be significant (γ=0.622, t-value=9.539).

Country-of-origin and brand association

As shown in Table 6.6, hypothesis H16a, explaining the relationship between firm-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness, was supported as the hypothesised relationship was found to be significant (γ=0.344, t-value=10.545).

Country-of-origin and perceived quality

Hypothesis H16b represented the relationship between country-of-origin and perceived quality. This hypothesised relationship was found to be significant (γ=0.268, t-value=5.718), thus supporting this hypothesis (see Table 6.6).

Country-of-origin and brand loyalty

As shown in Table 6.6, hypothesis H16c, explaining the relationship between country-of-origin and brand loyalty, was supported as the hypothesised relationship was found to be significant (γ=0.074, t-value=1.963).

6.2.6. Moderating effect (gender)

In order to evaluate the possible influences of the moderating variable, i.e. gender, multi-group analysis was performed in SPSS Amos. It was found that significant

differences between the genders of young Chinese consumers existed in four proposed hypotheses. First, gender has a moderating effect on the hypothesis H3b that user-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand association (χ^2/df=4.224, p=0.040). The results further suggested that the effect of user-generated social media brand communication on brand association is stronger on females (t-value=2.691) than males (t-value=-1.117), however, it is a negative rather than positive effect of user-generated social media brand communication on brand association for males. Second, it has a moderating effect on the hypothesis H4b that user-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on perceived quality (χ^2/df=5.687, p=0.017), and it indicated that the effect of user-generated social media brand communication on perceived quality is stronger on males (t-value=3.977) than females (t-value=-0.018). However, it is a negative rather than positive effect of user-generated social media brand communication on perceived quality for females. Third, there is a moderating effect on the hypothesis H5b that user-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand loyalty (χ^2/df=15.523, p=0.000). The results further proved that the influence of user-generated social media brand communication is stronger on males (t-value=-5.006) than females (t-value=0.890). Whereas, it is a negative influence of user-generated social media brand communication on perceived quality for males. Finally, there is a moderating effect on the hypothesis H3c that co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand association (χ^2/df=11.859, p=0.001), and it further indicated that the effect of co-creation of social media brand communication on brand association is stronger on males (t-value=3.978) than females (t-value=-0.311). Whereas, it is a negative impact of co-creation of social media brand communication on brand association for females.

6.3. SUMMARY

This chapter reported the results of the data analysis for this thesis. Following this, the demographic characteristics of this sample were described. Missing data analysis was conducted first. The results showed that no missing data were identified, as the mobile online survey technique prevented such an occurrence. Then the four assumptions for multivariate analysis were examined respectively. The normality examination, such as skewness and kurtosis showed that some variables

were slightly non-normally distributed, however, as this research had a large sample size (n=520), the results were considered acceptable. SEM analysis involved the test of the measurement model and the structural model was employed. CFA was conducted in the first stage to evaluate the measurement model fit. The results showed that the overall goodness-of-fit indices were not met accurately. Therefore, some items were deleted based on the criteria of the standardised regression weight, standardised residual, and modification indices in order to improve the model fit. Each construct was examined for reliability and validity. The Cronbach's alpha, average variance extracted, and composite reliability were tested. The convergent construct, discriminant construct, and nomological construct were all confirmed. The evaluation of the structural model was conducted in the second stage of the SEM analysis. The results showed that some hypotheses were accepted while others were rejected, i.e. 15 out of 29 hypotheses were supported. Figure 6.4 (overleaf) illustrated the final model.

The next chapter elaborates on the above results in order to answer the five research questions outlined in Chapter 1. In addition, it also draws the implications for both the theory and practice of this study, discusses the limitations of this research, suggestes the directions for the future research, and presents the final conclusions.

Figure 6.4: Final model
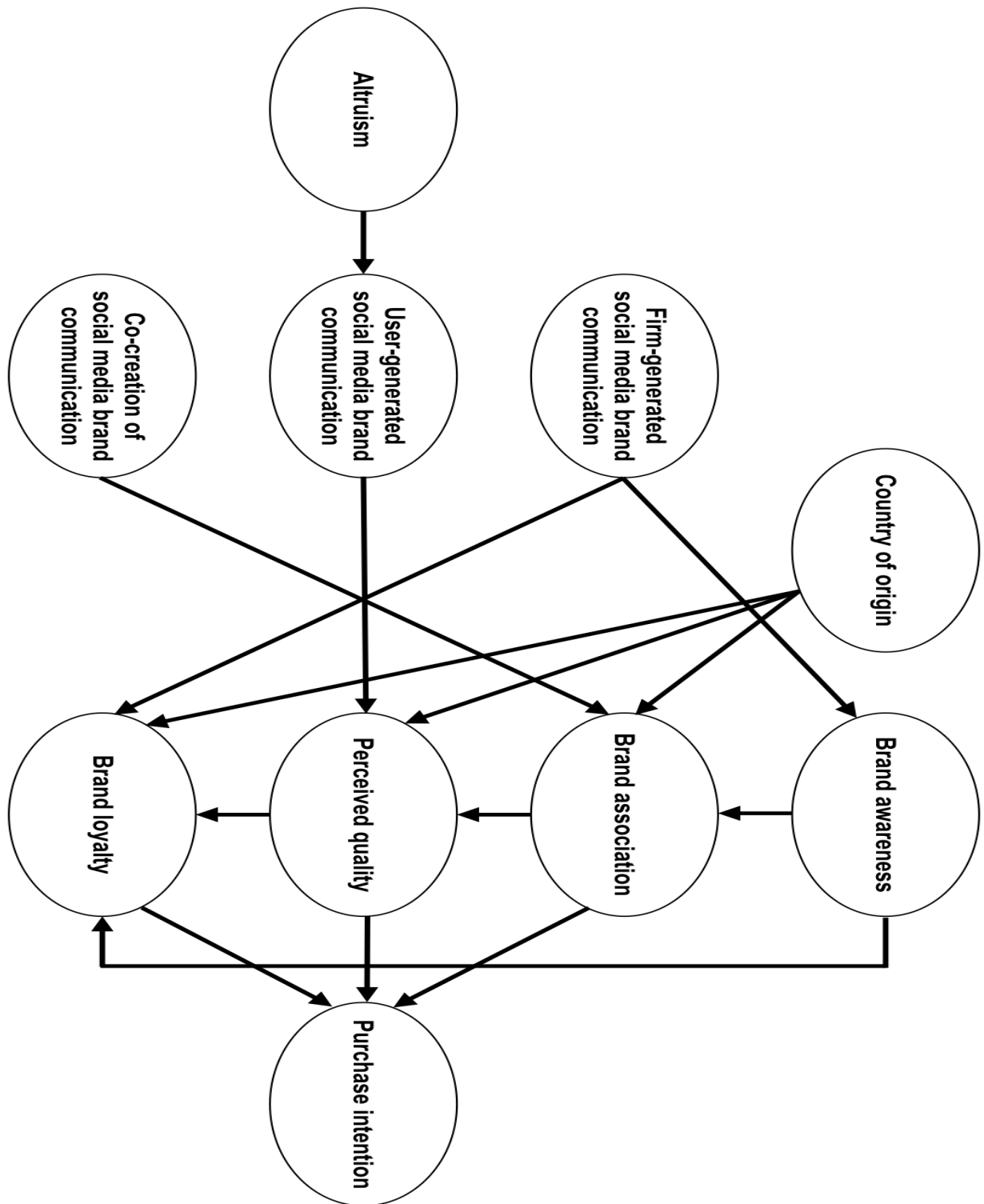
CHAPTER 7: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

7.1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this thesis is to investigate the relationships between the motivations and user-generated social media brand communication, the relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the interrelationships among the consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the relationships between country-of-origin and the consumer-based brand equity dimensions, and the relationships among the consumer-based brand equity dimensions and purchase intention. This chapter aims to analyse and interpret the test results in detail in order to fulfil the research objectives by answering the research questions.

In this chapter, an overview of the study including the results of the hypothesis testing is presented in Section 7.2. Following this, hypotheses on the factors that positively influence user-generated social media brand communication from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers (antecedents of user-generated social media brand communication) (H1a-H1d) are analysed in Section 7.3. Next, Section 7.4 presents and analyses the results of the hypotheses on the positive impact of social media brand communication dimensions on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers (H2a-H5c). Then, Section 7.5 discusses the results of the hypotheses on the intercorrelations among consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers (H6-H11). In the following Section (7.6), the results of the hypotheses on the positive influence of consumer-based brand equity dimensions on purchase intention from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers (outcome of consumer-based brand equity dimensions) (H12-H15) are analysed. Next, Section 7.7 discusses the results of the hypotheses on the positive impact of country-of-origin on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions (H16a-H16c). Finally, the summary of this chapter is presented in Section 7.8.

7.2. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This thesis investigates the relationships from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers between the motivations including altruism, venting motivation, self-enhancement, and economic motivation and user-generated social media brand

communication; social media brand communication including firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication and co-creation of social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity including brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty; country-of-origin and brand association; country-of-origin and perceived quality; country-of-origin and brand loyalty; the metrics of consumer-based brand equity and purchase intention. As presented in the previous chapter, the research questions of this thesis are (1) from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are consumers' motivations to engage in user-generated social media brand communication; (2) from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of social media brand communication affect each dimension of consumer-based brand equity; (3) from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are the causal relationships among the consumer-based brand equity dimensions; (4) from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of consumer-based brand equity affect purchase intention; (5) from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does country-of-origin affect the consumer-based brand equity dimensions?

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher adopted the mixed-methods approach. The researcher first identified the concepts of interest from the existing literature in order to establish the measurement scales (Churchill, 1979). Subsequently, additional items were obtained from the qualitative research including in-depth interviews and focus groups. During the in-depth interviews, the researcher also evaluated and confirmed the content validity of the measurement scales (Churchill, 1979).

The researcher implemented a pilot study before conducting the main study, in order to collect data for refining the measurement scales. During the measurement scale refinement, the researcher conducted exploratory factor analysis in the pilot study and confirmatory factor analysis in the main survey. The reliability and construct validity tests indicated that the measurement of the studied constructs (altruism, venting motivation, self-enhancement, economic motivation, firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, co-

creation of user-generated social media brand communication, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty, purchase intention, country-of-origin) were satisfied. In addition, the satisfactory fit indices were supported in both the measurement and the structural model.

According to hypothesis tests, 15 hypotheses were supported (H1a, H2a, H3c, H4b, H5a, H6, H8, H9, H11, H13, H14, H15, H16a, H16b, H16c) and 14 hypotheses were rejected (H1b, H1c, H1d, H2b, H2c, H3a, H3b, H4a, H4c, H5b, H5c, H7, H10, H12). It was found that altruism had a positive influence on user-generated social media brand communication. Firm-generated social media brand communication was positively related to brand awareness. Co-creation of social media brand communication and country-of-origin were positively related to brand association. User-generated social media brand communication, country-of-origin, and brand association positively affect perceived quality. Firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, country-of-origin, perceived quality, and brand awareness were positively related to brand loyalty. Brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty positively influence purchase intention.

However, some unexpected outcomes appeared, comprising the following relationships: venting motivation, self-enhancement, and economic motivation were not positively related to user-generated social media brand communication. User-generated social media brand communication and co-creation of social media brand communication did not positively affect brand awareness. Firm-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication were not positively related to brand association. Firm-generated social media brand communication, co-creation of social media brand communication and brand awareness had no positive impact on perceived quality. Co-creation of social media brand communication, and brand association were not positively related to brand loyalty. Brand awareness was not positively related to purchase intention. More details of these unexpected outcomes are elaborated below. In the next section, the discussions of the hypotheses tests are presented.

7.3. ANTECEDENTS OF USER-GENERATED SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION

In this study, there were several antecedents for user-generated social media brand communication that were derived from the literature review that would motivate the users to create brand related information on social media, such as altruism, venting motivation, vengeance, self-enhancement, and economic motivation. However, the findings of the qualitative study including the in-depth interviews and focus groups showed that vengeance was not an important motivation for user-generated social media brand communication; this construct was eliminated in the CFA analysis as all the items for it failed to pass the normality test, linearity test, and collinearity test. In the structural model, these antecedents were represented as latent exogenous constructs. However, with altruism being the sole exception, venting motivation, self-enhancement, and economic motivation were all rejected.

7.3.1. Altruism: a motivation of user-generated social media brand communication

With regard to hypothesis H1a, the impact of altruism on user-generated social media brand communication was examined on the basis of the acknowledgement that altruistic actions occur spontaneously and selflessly from human's affection and love (Ho and Dempsey, 2010). Based on the existing literature, altruism is widely recognised as an intrinsic motivation for WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ho and Dempsey, 2010). It is a motivation that occurs spontaneously from wanting to help others (Smith and Kollock, 1999). People share information with others in order to express friendship and affection (Dichter, 1966). Substantial studies demonstrate that altruism is a key driver of user-generated social media brand communication (e.g. Parra-Lopez et al., 2011; Phelps et al., 2004; Poch and Martin, 2015). Evidence supports that consumers are driven by altruistic motivations both in the offline environment (Sundaram et al., 1998) and the online environment (Phelps et al., 2004). Poch and Martin (2015) find that an individual with high altruism is more likely to create brand-related content. Internet users, who have benefited from other users' information sharing online in the past, feel they would better repay the benefit by helping others (Parra-Lopez et al., 2011).

In addition, in terms of the altruism construct, based on the previous empirical research findings, items such as AL2: 'I would like to share my own positive experiences' (Price et al., 1995; Yoo and Gretzel, 2011; Presi et al., 2014), AL3: 'I would like to share what I have', AL5: 'I would like to contribute to a pool of information' (Price et al., 1995; Yoo and Gretzel, 2011; Presi et al., 2014), and AL6: 'I want to give others the opportunity to buy the right product' (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Rensink, 2013) indicate that altruism is a motivation that occurs spontaneously from wanting to help others (Smith and Kollock, 1999). Items, such as AL4: 'information other people posted helped me, so I would like to return the favour' indicates that some Internet users who benefited from other's information are willing to repay the benefit (Parra-Lopez et al., 2011).

Furthermore, in terms of the qualitative findings, all the participants of the in-depth interviews and focus groups agreed that altruism is one of the motivations for users to engage in user-generated social media brand communication. They stated that:

"If I use a product which is really good, I would like to tell my friends through social media platforms such as WeChat." (Interview 3)

"I always send my friends some information of the brand that they really like, because I think it is beneficial to them." (Interview 4)

"As they are my friends, I am willing to share good things with them, which is of course altruistic." (Interview 9)

"I always send discount information about some products with my friends on WeChat." (FG 2)

The discussion above signifies an important role of altruism in user-generated social media brand communication. Therefore, companies should put more effort into effectively stimulating consumers' sense of altruism to create positive brand-related content for their WeChat friends. Based on the findings of the qualitative research, as consumers are willing to share discount information with their friends, it is

important for companies to spread this kind of information to the consumers as widely as possible. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between venting motivation and user-generated social media brand communication are elaborated.

7.3.2. Venting motivation: a motivation of user-generated social media brand communication

The notion that venting motivation is an antecedent of user-generated social media brand communication (H2a) is not supported by the statistical data in this study. The path unexpectedly showed a negative relationship between these two variables ($γ$=-0.032, t-value=-0.605) and they were not statistically significantly (p=0.546). This finding is not consistent with some previous research (e.g. Engel et al., 1995; Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). For example, Murtiasih et al. (2014) find that disappointed consumers are likely to complain by writing comments about their negative experiences through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, etc., which can be read by other consumers thousands of times or even more. However, some other previous studies cannot prove this relationship either (e.g. Presi et al., 2013; Rensink, 2013). In addition, the findings of the qualitative study show that some participants disagree that venting is a motivation for engaging in user-generated social media brand communication. The statements are presented as follows:

"I would not like to release negative emotions and being noticed by others on WeChat. It is not my personality." (Interview 4)

"I do not prefer to vent my complaint on WeChat, as it cannot help me to resolve the problem. I am quiet." (Interview 9)

Therefore, a possible reason for the rejected hypothesis may be the fact that it is useless to post complaints or unsatisfactory experience on WeChat or someone would like to keep their unpleasant experience a secret. In the next section, the findings of relationship between self-enhancement and user-generated social media brand communication are discussed.

7.3.3. Self-enhancement: a motivation for user-generated social media brand communication

The notion that self-enhancement is a motivation for user-generated social media brand communication (H4a) is not supported by the statistical data in this study. This finding is not consistent with some previous studies (e.g. Dichter, 1966; Sundaram et al., 1998; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). For instance, Dichter (1966) finds that people shape their sense of self by creating WOM to gain attention from others. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) identify that creating consumption-related WOM enables consumers to show connoisseurship, gain attention, and imply superiority to others. However, the results of some previous studies are not supported by the data either (e.g. Matikainen, 2015; Rensink, 2013). In addition, the findings of the qualitative study show that some participants disagree that self-enhancement is a motivation for engaging in user-generated social media brand communication. The explanation is stated as follows:

"The high street fashion clothes are not expensive and is a common thing in our life, therefore I don't think it can help enhance my identity. If I have some luxury products, of course, I would like to post it on WeChat." (Interview 5)

Therefore, a possible reason for the rejected hypothesis may be the fact that in young Chinese consumers' opinions, high street fashion clothes are too average to show their identity, personality or fashion taste. In the next section, the findings of relationship between economic motivation and user-generated social media brand communication are discussed.

7.3.4. Economic motivation: a motivation of user-generated social media brand communication

The notion that economic motivation is an antecedent effect of user-generated social media brand communication (H5a) is not supported by the statistical data in this study. This is a surprising result, which is not in line with previous research (e.g. Hamilton et al., 2016; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Rohm et al., 2013). Although

considerable studies demonstrate the positive relationship between economic motivation and user-generated social media brand communication, some research (e.g. Daugherty et al., 2008) cannot confirm this relationship either. In addition, the findings of the qualitative study show that some participants disagree that economic motivation is a motivation for engaging in user-generated social media brand communication. The statements are presented as follows:

"I only share information of the brand that I really like to get some discount, if I do not like it, the discount still cannot attract me." (Interview 7)

"I don't think the economic awards offered by the companies on WeChat are so attractive to me that I would like to share this brand-related information with my WeChat friends or post it on my WeChat account." (Interview 10)

Therefore, the insignificant relationship between economic motivation and user-generated social media brand communication may be possibly because the promotion or incentives are not attractive enough for young Chinese consumers and they may refuse to offer a positive comment on a product that they dislike for the sake of economic benefit. In the following sections, the relationships among social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions are discussed in detail.

7.4. SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION DIMENSIONS AND CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY DIMENSIONS

Social media brand communication dimensions including brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, and consumer-based brand equity dimensions including firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication are focal constructs of this research. The hypothesised relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity are based on the schema theory (Eysenck, 1984), which suggests that consumers are likely to compare communication incentives with existing knowledge about pertinent communication activities and that the fit level can affect the

subsequent processing of the stimuli and shape the attitude of the consumers. Consequently, communication incentives contribute to an impact on consumers, which can positively influence consumer-based brand equity when the communication stimuli cause positive consumers' perception of a brand (Yoo et al., 2000). However, based on the results of CFA, 14 out of 29 relationships have not been supported. The details are discussed in the following sections.

7.4.1. The influences of social media brand communication dimensions on brand awareness

7.4.1.1. Firm-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness

The test result of hypothesis H2a supports the assertion that a positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness. The result is in line with the existing literature that consumers' positive perceptions of firm-generated social media brand commutation have a positive influence on brand awareness (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). The results of the research conducted by Bruhn et al. (2012) show that the perception of firm-generated social media brand communication positively influences consumers' perception of brand awareness. In order to transmit positive brand-related information as much as possible, marketers always utilise firm-generated social media brand communication which is under full control to achieve this goal (Bruhn et al., 2012).

In addition, based on the existing literature, firm-generated social media brand communication refers to the way of communication in which the information is brand-related, and created by firms for the purpose of developing and maintaining one-on-one relationships with existing and potential customers by means of social media's interactive feature (Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Kumar et al., 2016). The brand information, such as pictures, specifications, and prices, is posted by firms on their social media pages (Kumar et al., 2016). Therefore, in terms of the measurement items of the firm-generated social media brand communication construct, and based on the previous empirical research findings and the qualitative research findings, some items were extracted, such as FG2: 'The level of the content generated by this

company about [brand] on social media meets my expectations' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Magi, 2003; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Tsiros et al., 2004), FG3: 'The content generated by this company about [brand] on social media performs well, when compared with other companies' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Magi, 2003; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Tsiros et al., 2004), FG4: 'The content generated by this company about [brand] is very attractive' (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015), FG5: 'I can get enough information about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication' (Sri et al., 2014), and FG8: 'The content generated by companies about [brand] is useful (extracted from qualitative research).

Brand awareness refers to the strength of the presence of a brand in consumers' memory and the ability of consumers to recognise or recall a brand in its product category (Aaker, 1996; Pappu et al., 2005). Communication stimuli have proven to be able to positively affect consumers as long as the communication content achieves a positive consumer perception of the brand (Yoo et al., 2000). The consumers' perception of a [brand] can be explained by the measurement items of brand awareness, such as BA2: 'I can recognise [brand] among other competing brands' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), BA3: 'I easily recall the symbol/logo of [brand]' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), BA4: 'I know what [brand] looks like' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), BA5: 'I can give my own opinion of [brand]', and BA6: 'I am aware of [brand] presence' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yoo et al., 2000).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of firm-generated social media brand communication on brand awareness, as follows:

"Yes, I think so. Because if consumers see the official description of the product repeatedly, consumers will be influenced subconsciously and gain deeper and deeper memory on it." (Interview 3)

"Yes, I agree. Because social media users can get to know a brand through the firm-generated social media brand communication, which contains an introduction of what the brand is." (Interview 4)

"Yes, I agree. Because if the firm-generated content is interesting or novel, I will be fond of it and the result of it is that I will be willing to get to know it further." (Interview 7)

"Yes, I think so. Because if I do not know a brand, when I read the firm-generated content on social media, I will get to know it." (FG 1)

The discussion above points to the significant role of firm-generated social media brand communication, as it has a positive impact on consumers' brand awareness which is the starting point of making a brand identifiable to consumers and building brand equity (Keller, 2001). Thus, companies should put more effort into firm-generated social media brand communication, especially in enhancing the level that consumers recognise the brand among other competing brands, the level that consumers recall the symbol or logo of the brand, and the impression of the brand. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between another social media brand communication dimension – user-generated social media brand communication – and brand awareness are elaborated.

7.4.1.2. User-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness

The assertion that a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness (H2b) is not supported by the statistical data in this study. The path unexpectedly showed a negative relationship between these two variables (γ=-0.011, t-value=-0.651) and they were not statistically significant (p=0.651).

This finding is not consistent with some previous studies (e.g. Hutter et al., 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015), which demonstrate a positive relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness. However,

some other previous studies show the opposite result. For example, the results of Bruhn et al.',s (2012) research reveal that user-generated social media brand communication does not have a significant effect on brand awareness in the overall data set, which covers the tourism, telecommunications, and pharmaceutical industries. According to Bruhn et al. (2012), consumers often express their feelings about a brand in general, and their comments are more likely to be abstract statements rather than specific product features. In other words, their comments are more likely to describe the brand's hedonic image, such as its desirability and attractiveness. Therefore, user-generated content may not properly introduce what the product or the brand is to other consumers who do not know it at all.

In addition, the findings of the qualitative study show that some participants disagree that user-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand awareness. The explanations are stated as follows:

"In terms of brand awareness, I think firm-generated social media brand communication is much more important and effective than user-generated social media brand communication. Because companies have deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the brands' positioning, the attributes of the products and targeting consumers and so on. While consumers just know some partial and fragmented information about the brand. As a result, it is not effective to increase consumers' awareness of an unknown brand." (Interview 5)

"In my opinion, I think the high street fashion clothes brands are similar to each other with regard to the fashion style, so I won't pay much attention to the brand itself but the design and price of the clothes. The distinction of brands is not as important as luxury brands." (Interview 7)

Therefore, the possible reasons for the rejected hypothesis may be the fact that as brand awareness is only the starting point of consumers' learning process about a brand, consumers are more like to be aware of a brand with the help of firm-generated social media brand communication rather than user-generated social media brand communication. Furthermore, from the perspectives of young Chinese

consumers, the distinction of international high street fashion brands is less than that of luxury fashion brands, therefore they tend to pay attention to the products rather than the brands. In the next section, the findings of relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and brand awareness are discussed.

7.4.1.3. Co-creation of social media brand communication and brand awareness

The notion that a positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness (H2c) is not supported by the statistical data in this study. The path unexpectedly showed a negative relationship between these two variables (γ=-0.012, t-value=-0.347) and they were not statistically significantly (p=0.729).

To date, this study on the relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and brand awareness is the first to be empirically tested. Therefore, there are no previous empirical research findings to refer to. Based on the findings of the qualitative research, some participants disagree that the co-creation of social media brand communication can affect brand awareness, the reasons are as follows:

"I think the co-creation of social media brand communication contributes more to brand association than brand awareness. Because compared to consumers, companies are better at advertising the brand or product to targeting consumers, consumers are more likely to have a first impression on this brand. While co-creation of social media brand communication is more useful to disseminate various attributes of the brand and thus affect consumers' brand association." (Interview 4)

"I remember the co-creation information about fashion brands I've read on WeChat is always about the brand-customer stories, brand-customer online interactive activities and customers' feedback, which is more useful to increase consumers' associations rather than awareness of the brand." (Interview 8)

Therefore, one possible cause may be similar to that of the above relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness. As co-creation of social media brand communication consisted of the action of user-

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generated social media brand communication and firm-generated social media brand communication, the abstract and hedonic description or comment on a high street fashion brand has less effect on arousing consumer's awareness of the brand. In the following sections, the findings of relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions and brand association are discussed in detail.

7.4.2. The influences of social media brand communication dimensions on brand association

7.4.2.1. Firm-generated social media brand communication and brand association
The notion that a positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness (H3a) is not supported by the statistical data in this study. The path unexpectedly showed a negative relationship between these two variables (γ=-0.007, t-value=-0.143) and they were not statistically significant (p=0.887).

This is a rather surprising result, which is inconsistent with previous research findings. For example, Bruhn et al. (2012) find an important impact of firm-generated social media brand communication on functional brand image. However, the findings of the qualitative study show that some participants disagree that firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand association. The explanations are stated as follows:

"I don't think I can get enough useful and attractive firm-generated international high street fashion brands' information on WeChat. Companies should put more effort into the strategies of fully taking advantage of firm-generated social media brand communication. I think there is still a long way to go." (Interview 2)

"Although I know lots of international fashion brands have built their WeChat official accounts, I'm used to gaining fashion information from fashion magazines or TV variety shows rather than social media. So, their WeChat marketing should be improved to attract consumers like me to follow their account on WeChat." (Interview 5)

Therefore, one possible reason is maybe related to the access to the brand association. Young Chinese consumers may acquire brand association mainly from the traditional media or the department stores. Or it is because the firm-generated brand communication on WeChat is not fully functional yet, and has not provided enough useful or attractive information, especially the specific characteristics of the brand and product to young Chinese consumers. In the next section, the findings of relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and brand association are discussed.

7.4.2.2. User-generated social media brand communication and brand association
The notion that a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand association (H3b) is not supported by the statistical data in this study, which is not in line with some previous research (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2013). For instance, Bruhn et al. (2012) find that user-generated social media brand communication has a significant impact on hedonic brand image.

However, the findings of the qualitative study show that some participants disagree that user-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand association. The statements are presented as follows:

"It depends on whether I like the fashion style or not. If I like the fashion style, the post may increase my association of this brand, and vice versa. Besides, I think it has less effect on brand association than firm-generated social media brand communication, because the user-generated content is relatively narrow, abstract and unspecific, for example, comments like 'it looks good', 'it looks cool', 'I like it a lot' and so on, the associations are so limited." (Interview 7)

"I don't think so. Because if WeChat users post some brand-related information, the content is usually unidimensional, which is hard to increase my association with the brand." (Interview 11)

Therefore, one possible reason is maybe similar to the last hypothesis that firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand association. Young Chinese consumers may accumulate brand association mainly from the traditional mass media like the fashion magazines or TV shows. Besides, they may think user-generated content is too simple, abstract, and repetitive. In the next section, the findings of relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and brand association are discussed.

7.4.2.3. Co-creation of social media brand communication and brand association

The test result of hypothesis H3c supports the statement that a positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand association. Based on the existing literature, the co-creation of social media brand communication is a way of customer-brand interaction that brand-related conversations enable and stimulate customers to integrate their own experiences and thoughts into the brand story depending on social media's interactive nature (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), firm-generated social media brand communication can be used to motivate the user-generated content: marketers can build a framework or provide a platform so that consumers have access to expressing their opinions, reviews, experiences, and information about a brand (Mangold and Faulds, 2009), which contributes to building consumers' brand awareness, associations, recognition, and empathy (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). However, previous studies (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015) only consider firm-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication rather than the co-creation of social media brand communication as the metrics of social media brand communication. To date, the current study is the first to postulate that the co-creation of social media brand communication is also a metric of social media brand communication. Based on the qualitative research, some participants explained their understanding of the co-creation of the social media brand communication that they have experienced on social media WeChat, as follows:

"I think it is a way of communication between consumers and companies through social media platforms, which makes use of the currently most advanced mobile

network technology to communicate and promote brands and their products."
(Interview 4)

"I think it is a way of brand promotion through social media that is characterised by interactivity, therefore it enables interactions between the brands and consumers. For example, I have seen users create brand-related information on the basis of existing firm-generated information on the Moments." (Interview 5)

"I think the brand-related content is created by both the user and the company. There are two different forms of co-creation. First, the company creates content and then leads consumers to add information on the basis of existing content. Second, the consumer shares the information created by the company and then adds content, such as comments or makes adaptation of the firm-generated content." (FG3)

Regarding the question of "how do you describe the co-creation of social media brand communication on WeChat?" Some representative responses are presented as follows:

"I have seen my WeChat friends commenting on some advertisements on the Moments of WeChat, which I think is a kind of co-creation of social media brand communication." (Interview 9)

"I think the co-creation between international fashion brands and famous Chinese fashion bloggers is a noticeable kind of co-creation of social media brand communication. For example, the fashion bloggers share some firm-generated articles about latest products and then add captions to recommend the products, fulfilling their celebrity effect. In my opinion, I trust the recommendation from famous celebrities, and I think this kind of information is useful for me." (Interview 11)

"If I like a brand, I will follow its WeChat official account, and when it releases useful information, such as the discount information, I would like to share this article and add my experiences and thoughts of using this product, as it can show my taste and

lifestyle. Besides, when I see an article about some new product introduction, if the consumers' comments such as their usage experiences are positive, I will have a good first impression of it, which is superior to the homogeneous brand lacking consumers' positive comments." (Interview 13)

Therefore, the measurement items for the co-creation of social media brand communication were extracted from qualitative research, such as CO1: "I am satisfied with the content generated by the co-creation of users and companies about [brand] on social media", CO2: "The level of content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] meets my expectations", CO3: "The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about this [brand] on social media performs well, when compared with other brands", CO4: "The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] is very attractive", CO5: "I can get enough information about [brand] through the co-creation of user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication", and CO8: "the content generated by the co-creation of companies and users about [brand] is useful".

Furthermore, based on the in-depth interviews, the majority of the interviewees and focus group participants considered that a positive evaluation of the co-creation of social media brand communication can positively influence brand association. The reasons are as follows:

"Generally speaking, firm-generated content is always more professional and comprehensive than user-generated content, while user-generated content can be more trustworthy than firm-generated content, therefore integrating these two forms of communication into one, i.e. co-creation brand communication, can achieve a better effect." (Interview 1)

"For example, I have seen a brand marketing campaign named 'the date between Dafu Zhou and me', where customers can write a story about this brand to win a prize. So, I wrote a short story about me and this brand." (Interview 4)

One interviewee mentioned an important point, which is presented as follows:

"I think it only has a little influence on brand association. Because I'll consider whether this co-creation is based on the economic benefits that companies offer to customers. I think it is not trustworthy enough." (Interview 7)

The discussion above points to the important role of co-creation of social media brand communication, as it has a positive influence on consumers' brand association. Therefore, companies should pay more attention to the co-creation of social media brand communication including enhancing the efficiency and trustworthiness of the co-creation of social media brand communication. In the following sections, the findings of the impact of the dimensions of social media brand communication on perceived quality are discussed in detail.

7.4.3. The influences of social media brand communication dimensions on perceived quality

7.4.3.1. Firm-generated social media brand communication and perceived quality
The current study exhibits no support for hypothesis H4a regarding the effect of firm-generated social media brand communication on perceived quality. The path unexpectedly showed a negative relationship between these two variables (γ=-0.052, t-value=-0.821) and they were not statistically significantly (p=0.412). This finding is not consistent with some previous studies that indicate firm-generated social media brand communication positively affects consumers' perception of brand quality (e.g. Hutter et al. 2013). However, some other studies (e.g. Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015) do not support this hypothesis either. They find that firm-generated social media brand communication has no significant impact on perceived quality, but that user-generated social media brand communication does.

In addition, the findings of the qualitative study show that some participants disagree that firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on perceived quality. Their reasons are almost the same in that, in terms of quality, they only believe their real experience or their friends' experiences. Some statements are presented as follows:

"I don't think firm-generated social media brand communication can influence my perception of brand quality. I only trust my own experience or the comments from a person I trust." (Interview 3)

"I think firm-generated social media brand communication has an impact on brand awareness and brand association, but it has nothing to do with perceived quality. Because companies won't release negative information about themselves, I only trust my own experience or user-generated social media brand communication." (FG2)

Therefore, one possible reason for the rejected hypothesis is the source of credibility, in that the consumers trust and rely more heavily on their own experience or people that they trust rather than the companies, which is a distinction between firm-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between user-generated social media brand communication and perceived quality are elaborated.

7.4.3.2. User-generated social media brand communication and perceived quality
The test result of hypothesis H4b supports the assertion that a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality. This finding is consistent with the previous studies (e.g. Riegner, 2007; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco, 2005). For example, Riegner (2007) finds that user-generated social media brand communication can provide information about a product or service quality for consumers. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) examine the effects of user-generated content (e.g. Facebook fan pages) on the consumers' perception of product quality. The results show that user-generated social media brand communication affects the perception of product quality of other consumers.

In addition, in terms of the measurement items of user-generated social media brand communication, based on the previous empirical research findings and the

qualitative research findings, certain items were extracted, such as UG1: 'I am satisfied with the content generated by users about [brand] on social media' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Magi, 2003; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Tsiros et al., 2004), UG2: 'The level of the content generated by users about [brand] on social media meets my expectations' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Magi, 2003; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Tsiros et al., 2004), UG3: 'The content generated by users about this [brand] on social media performs well, when compared with other brands' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Magi, 2003; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Tsiros et al., 2004), UG4: 'The content generated by users about [brand] is very attractive' (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015), UG5: 'I can get enough information about [brand] through user-generated social media brand communication' (Sri et al., 2014), and UG8: 'The content generated by users about [brand] is useful' (extracted from qualitative research).

User-generated social media brand communication is a crucial means for consumers to express their opinions, communicate, and exchange information with other consumers online (Boyd and Ellison, 2007), which is considered more trustworthy than firm-generated content as it is out of company's direct control over the content. Therefore, it is considered to have an influence on consumers' perception of the quality of a brand, and includes items, such as PQ1: 'Products of [brand] are of great quality' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ2: 'Products of [brand] are very durable' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ3: 'Products of [brand] are very reliable' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ5: 'Products functioned as well as I expected' (Khan et al., 2015), and PQ6: 'The materials used by the [brand] are comfortable' (Khan et al., 2015). Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of user-generated social media brand communication on perceived quality as follows:

"I think so. Because I trust my WeChat friends much more than companies. If they tell me the clothes are good quality, I will definitely believe them." (Interview 6)

"I agree with it. Because I can get to know whether the clothes are good or not based on other WeChat users' posts, comments, and feedback." (Interview 9)

Although some of them also pointed out that the influence of user-generated social media brand communication on perceived quality is still limited, they think it has more influence on perceived quality than firm-generated social media brand communication, because they consider that the determinant factor of perceived quality relies on the real using experience.

The discussion above indicates a significant role of user-generated social media brand communication, as it has a positive influence on consumers' perception of brand quality. Therefore, companies should not underestimate the importance of user-generated social media brand communication, especially the negative user-generated content regarding the brand. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between another social media brand communication dimension – co-creation of social media brand communication – and perceived quality are discussed in detail.

7.4.3.3. Co-creation of social media brand communication and perceived quality

The empirical result of this study shows that the co-creation of social media brand communication has no significant relationship with perceived quality (H4c). As the existing literature lacks any investigation of the relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and perceived quality, no existing literature can be referred to. In terms of the findings of the qualitative research, one participant maintained that the co-creation of social media brand communication has no effect on perceived quality. The explanation is presented as follows:

"In terms of firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication, only my own using experience and my friends' recommendation can affect my judgement of quality." (Interview 3)

Therefore, one possible reason for this hypothesis refused may be similar to the aforementioned hypothesis that a positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality. That is because of the credibility of the source, consumers are more likely to trust their families and friends rather than companies and strangers. Therefore, the marketing managers of a company can launch an activity to attract consumers to engage in and complete the co-creation of social media brand communication, which may lead to less trustworthiness from other consumers. In the following sections, the findings of relationships among social media brand communication dimensions and brand loyalty are discussed in detail.

7.4.4. The influences of social media brand communication dimensions on brand loyalty

7.4.4.1. Firm-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty

The test result of hypothesis H5a supports the notion that a positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand loyalty. This finding is in line with the previous studies that demonstrate that the relationship between firm-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty is positive (e.g. Ha et al., 2011; Yoo et al., 2000). For instance, Yoo et al. (2000) find that advertising spending is positively related to brand loyalty, since it strengthens consumers' brand associations and attitudes towards the brand.

In terms of the measurement items of firm-generated social media brand communication, as mentioned before, some items, such as FG2: 'The level of the content generated by this company about [brand] on social media meets my expectations' (Bruhn et al. 2012; Magi, 2003; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Tsiros et al., 2004), FG3: 'The content generated by this company about [brand] on social media performs well, when compared with other companies' (Bruhn et al. 2012; Magi, 2003; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Tsiros et al., 2004), FG4: 'The content generated by this company about [brand] is very attractive' (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015), FG5: 'I can get enough information about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication' (Sri et al., 2014), and FG8: 'The

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content generated by companies about [brand] is useful (extracted from qualitative research).

While brand loyalty refers to a favourable relationship between the consumer and the brand and is a commitment held by consumers to rebuy or repatronise a certain brand consistently in the future as well as treat it as the first choice to purchase (Aaker, 1996; Oliver, 1997; Wang and Li, 2012). According to Palmatier et al. (2007), brand loyalty is based on the values consumers receive from interactions with the company. Firm-generated social media brand communication is effective for lowering information asymmetry when consumers are seeking product information, which helps consumers to make purchase decisions (Goh et al., 2013) as well as develop and maintain consumer-brand relationships (Kumar et al., 2016).

Therefore, it is considered to influence consumer's brand loyalty, and the following items were extracted from the existing literature and qualitative research: BL1: 'I am willing to pay a higher price for [brand] although other brands have similar characteristics' (Khan et al., 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh et al., 2009), BL2: 'I intend to remain the [brand]'s customer' (Khan et al., 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh et al., 2009), BL4: 'I consider myself to be loyal to [brand]' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), BL5: 'The product of [brand] would be my first choice' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), BL6: 'I will not buy other brands if [brand] is available at store' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), and BL7: 'I would like to choose [brand] when purchasing clothes' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of firm-generated social media brand communication on brand loyalty as follows:

"The firm-generated brand communication on social media offers me an approach to becoming more and more familiar and knowledgeable with the brand; if this brand information is acceptable to me, it will heighten my loyalty to the brand." (Interview 4)

"The firm-generated content can be the most detailed and comprehensive, and companies can implement certain strategies, such as offering a special service or discount to their loyal customers to strengthen customer loyalty to the brand." (Interview 7)

The discussion above indicates the crucial role of firm-generated social media brand communication, as it helps increase consumers' brand loyalty. Therefore, companies should put more effort into enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of firm-generated social media brand communication for reinforcing consumers' brand loyalty. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between another social media brand communication dimension – user-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty – are elaborated.

7.4.4.2. User-generated social media brand communication and brand loyalty

The current study exhibits no support for hypothesis H5b regarding the effect of firm-generated social media brand communication on perceived quality. The path unexpectedly showed a negative relationship between these two variables (γ=-0.111, t-value=-3.543) and was statistically significant (p=0.000), therefore it is rejected. This is a surprising result, which is inconsistent with the findings supported by many previous studies (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). For example, Bruhn et al. (2012) demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between consumer interactions in brand communities (i.e. Facebook brand fan page) and consumers' perception of brand loyalty, as such interactions are able to boost the experiential, functional and symbolic brand community benefits. In a similar vein, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) reveal the same result that user-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand loyalty.

However, based on the findings of the qualitative study, some participants disagree that user-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on

brand loyalty. Their reasons are almost the same in that, in terms of loyalty, they rely more on their real using experience and the product quality rather than other people's comments. Some statements are presented as follows:

"I think user-generated social media brand communication only has a very little effect on my loyalty to a certain brand. Because I think loyalty is a much deeper insight into a brand compared to brand awareness and brand association. It mainly relies on my real using experience and exposure to the brand." (Interview 2)

"I don't think user-generated social media brand communication can affect my brand loyalty. Because a product that suits someone else may not suit me, other consumers' opinions cannot affect my perception of a brand and has nothing to do with my brand loyalty." (Interview 8)

Therefore, one possible reason for this rejected hypothesis may be that the user-generated content is from both people you know and strangers. In terms of brand loyalty, consumers tend to rely more on their own experience rather than the brand-related information created by strangers. In the next section, the findings of relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and brand loyalty are discussed.

7.4.4.3. Co-creation of social media brand communication and brand loyalty

The current study exhibits no support for hypothesis H5c regarding the effect of the co-creation of social media brand communication on brand loyalty. To date, this study on the relationship between the co-creation of social media brand communication and brand awareness is the first to be empirically tested. Therefore, no previous empirical research findings can be referred to. The possible cause may be similar to that of the above hypothesis that user-generated social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand loyalty, which is in line with one participant's answer in the in-depth interview.

"Because consumer's loyalty to a brand is mainly based on the actual using experiences of consumers themselves. Their own experience plays the most important role in loyalty." (Interview 3)

Another possible reason may be found in another participant's response:

"It is hard for me to trust the co-creation of brand-related information, because I may speculate that this kind of cooperation is motivated by economic stimuli. Only my own experience can affect my brand loyalty." (FG1)

Therefore, one possible reason for the rejection of this hypothesis may be similar to the aforementioned hypothesis that a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand loyalty. That is because, from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, the formation of brand loyalty depends heavily on their own using experience and long-term exposure to the brand instead of relying on others' experiences and evaluations. In the following section, the findings of relationships among consumer-based brand equity are discussed in detail.

7.5. INTERCORRELATIONS AMONG CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY METRICS

7.5.1. Brand awareness and brand association

The test result of hypothesis H6 supports the assertion that brand awareness has a positive effect on brand association. This finding is consistent with the traditional hierarchy of effects model, also known as the standard learning hierarchy, which postulates that subjective norms and attitudes influence intentions, and, in turn, influence behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975). This model suggests that consumers build beliefs about a product by searching information regarding relevant attributes and then evaluate the beliefs about the product to make decisions about purchasing or refusing the brand (Solomon et al., 2006). It is considered a consumer learning process. The learning process of the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity starts with making consumers aware of a brand and then increasing

consumers' associations with the brand, then, once the brand awareness and brand associations are formed, the continuous communication with the brand will influence consumers' perceptions of brand quality as well as brand loyalty (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). According to Aaker (1991), brand awareness is the foundation of overall brand equity and an antecedent to the other three dimensions, i.e. brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Brand awareness, therefore, is a prerequisite for the creation of brand association.

In addition, this finding is in line with previous studies demonstrating that brand awareness has a positive effect on brand association (e.g. Kumar et al., 2013; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005). For example, Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco (2005) find that brand awareness positively influences the formation of consumers' association about the product's brand image. Kumar et al. (2013) identify the hierarchical relationship between brand awareness and brand association that brand awareness leads to brand association. The findings from the current study show the positive effect of brand awareness on brand association. Therefore, it is consistent with the previous literature.

In terms of the measurement items of brand awareness, based on the previous empirical research findings and qualitative research findings, items were extracted such as BA2: 'I can recognise [brand] among other competing brands' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), BA3: 'I easily recall the symbol/logo of [brand]' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo, et al., 2000), BA4: 'I know what [brand] looks like' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), and BA5: 'I can give my own opinion of [brand]', and BA6: 'I am aware of [brand] presence' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yoo et al., 2000).

Brand association is closely related with brand awareness, as both dimensions originate from consumers' contact with the brand (Fournier, 1998). Brand awareness enables a brand to be linked to different associations in consumers' memories

(Keller, 2003). Therefore, it is considered to have an influence on brand association. The following items were extracted from the existing literature and qualitative research: BAS1: 'Several characteristics of [brand] instantly come to my mind' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-France, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), BAS2: 'I associate [brand] with functions' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS3: 'I associate [brand] with uniqueness' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS4: 'I associate [brand] with prestige' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS5: 'I associate [brand] with creativity' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), and BAS6: I have a clear image of the type of person who would use [brand]' (Wang and Li, 2012).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of brand awareness on brand association, as follows:

"I think brand awareness is the first step for me to know a brand. If the brand leaves me with a good impression, I would like to know more about it." (Interview 1)

"I always get some information about a new brand on the fashion accounts I follow on WeChat. Usually, the information released on these accounts can attract me a lot, so I would like to take some time to know more about this brand, such as its brand country-of-origin and price range." (Interview 4)

The discussion above signifies an important role of brand awareness in brand association. Therefore, companies should put more effort into efficiently converting brand awareness into brand association. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between brand awareness and perceived quality are discussed in detail.

7.5.2. Brand awareness and perceived quality

The notion that brand awareness has a positive impact on perceived quality is not supported in this study. The result of this study is not in alignment with some prior studies (e.g. Aaker, 1991; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo and Donthu, 2001). The relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions are based on the traditional hierarchy of effects model, which is a learning process with hierarchy

(Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975). The learning process of the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity starts with making consumers aware of a brand and then increasing consumers' associations with the brand, then, once the brand awareness and brand associations are formed, the continuous communication with the brand will influence consumers' perceptions of brand quality as well as brand loyalty (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Perceived quality is influenced by brand awareness, because a visible brand may be regarded as being more likely to offer superior quality (Zeithaml, 1988). However, some previous studies (e.g. Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo and Donthu, 2001) combined brand awareness with brand association to become a new construct named brand awareness, which forms a specific brand image (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Therefore, it contains not only the effect of awareness but also the effect of association on the perceived quality. However, based on the qualitative findings, although some interviewees considered that brand awareness can positively influence perceived quality, they all argue that it has less influence on perceived quality. The reasons are as follows:

"Compared with an unknown brand, I'm more likely to believe that the brand I know has a better quality and would like to choose the known brand. For me the most important factor affecting my perception of quality is my own using experience. Therefore, brand awareness only has a little impact on my perception of brand quality." (*Interview 2*)

"I think it should be combined with brand association so that they can affect perceived quality, brand awareness itself cannot affect perceived quality, as it is merely the starting point to get to know something, which is so primary that it cannot affect perceived quality, which is a higher level of cognition." (*Interview 5*)

Therefore, one possible reason for the refusal of this hypothesis may be because from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, brand awareness is only a primary stage of the hierarchical learning process, they prefer to depend more on other factors, such as own using experience and familiarity with the brand. In the following section, the findings of the relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty are discussed.

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7.5.3. Brand awareness and brand loyalty

The test result of hypothesis H8 supports the notion that brand awareness has a positive effect on brand loyalty. This finding is in accordance with the standard learning hierarchy, which suggests that subjective norms and attitudes influence intentions, and, in turn, influence behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975). It is considered a consumer learning process, which starts with making consumers aware of a brand and then increasing consumers' associations with the brand, then, once the brand awareness and brand associations are formed, the continuous communication with the brand will influence consumers' perceptions of brand quality as well as brand loyalty (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Based on Aaker (1991), brand awareness is an antecedent to the other three dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, i.e. brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty. Brand awareness, therefore, is a foundation of the formation of consumers' brand loyalty.

In addition, the test result is in line with previous studies demonstrating that brand awareness has a positive effect on brand loyalty (e.g. Krystallis and Chrysochou, 2014; Liu et al., 2012). For instance, Khan et al. (2015) investigate the causal relationship among the metrics of brand equity in the context of the Malaysian fashion clothing industry and they find that brand awareness has a positive impact on brand loyalty. Similarly, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) investigate how brand awareness influences brand loyalty through Facebook and they confirm the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between brand awareness and brand loyalty.

In terms of the measurement items of brand awareness, as mentioned before, items were extracted such as BA2: 'I can recognise [brand] among other competing brands' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), BA3: 'I easily recall the symbol/logo of [brand]' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), BA4: 'I know what [brand] looks like' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo et

al., 2000), and BA5: 'I can give my own opinion of [brand]', and BA6: 'I am aware of [brand] presence' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yoo et al., 2000).

According to Keller (2001), building brand awareness is the first step to make a brand identifiable to consumers and the first step in building brand equity. The continuous communication with the brand will influence consumers' perceptions of brand loyalty (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). The items of brand loyalty were extracted from the existing literature and qualitative research such as BL1: 'I am willing to pay a higher price for [brand] although other brands have similar characteristics' (Khan et al., 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh et al., 2009), BL2: 'I intend to remain the [brand]'s customer' (Khan et al., 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh et al., 2009), BL4: 'I consider myself to be loyal to [brand]' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), BL5: 'The product of [brand] would be my first choice' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), BL6: 'I will not buy other brands if [brand] is available at store' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), and BL7: 'I would like to choose [brand] when purchasing clothes' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of brand awareness on brand loyalty. All of them agreed that brand awareness is the prerequisite of brand loyalty, but many of them pointed out that if consumers only have brand awareness but lack the later accumulation of associations, the brand awareness will only have a minor impact on the formation of brand loyalty. Some representative statements are as follows:

"Compared with the unknown brands, I am more likely to develop loyalty gradually to the brands I am aware of, but for me the most important factor of cultivating loyalty is my own using experience. Therefore, brand awareness only has a small influence on brand loyalty." (Interview 5)

"Yes, I agree, but it only has a small influence on brand loyalty. Because I think strengthening loyalty heavily relies on the marketing strategy of the company regarding loyalty intensification as well as my actual experience of using the product." (Interview 7)

"Yes, I think so, but I think the influence of brand awareness on brand loyalty is limited, because it is the initial stage of cognition, which means you only have little knowledge or understanding of the brand." (Interview 11)

The discussion above signifies the important role of brand awareness in brand loyalty. Therefore, companies should put more effort into efficiently converting brand awareness into brand loyalty. As with the findings of the qualitative research, it is necessary for companies to make consumers not only aware of a brand but also know more about the brand with the help of frequent information acquisition. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between brand association and perceived quality are discussed in detail.

7.5.4. Brand association and perceived quality

The test result of hypothesis H9 supports the assertion that brand association has a positive effect on perceived quality, which is in line with the aforementioned hierarchy of effects model, which suggests that the order of the metrics of consumer-based brand equity is considered to be a consumer learning process; once the brand awareness and brand associations are formed, the continuous communication with the brand will influence consumers' perceptions of brand quality (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975).

In addition, this finding is in alignment with previous studies demonstrating that brand association has a positive effect on perceived quality (e.g. Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo and Donthu, 2001). For instance, Yoo et al. (2000) investigate the interrelationship among the dimensions of brand equity on the product categories of athletic shoes, colour television sets, and camera film; the results confirm that there is a positive relationship between brand association and perceived quality. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) investigate the causal relationship among consumer-based

brand equity dimensions through Facebook across three different industries: non-alcoholic beverages, clothing and mobile network providers, and they find that brand association positively influences customers' perception of brand quality.

In terms of the measurement items of brand association, based on the previous empirical research findings and qualitative research findings, items were extracted such as BAS1: 'Several characteristics of [brand] instantly come to my mind' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-France, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), BAS2: 'I associate [brand] with functions' mind' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS3: 'I associate [brand] with uniqueness' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS4: 'I associate [brand] with prestige' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS5: 'I associate [brand] with creativity' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), and BAS6: I have a clear image of the type of person who would use [brand]' (Wang and Li, 2012).

Consumer's brand association have influence on the perception of inferiority or superiority of brand's offering. The more positive a consumer is associated with the brand, the better the perception of the brand quality will be (Kumar et al., 2015). The items for perceived quality were extracted from the existing literature and qualitative research, such as PQ1: 'Products of [brand] are of great quality' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ2: 'Products of [brand] are very durable' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ3: 'Products of [brand] are very reliable' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ5: 'Products functioned as well as I expected' (Khan et al., 2015), and PQ6: 'The materials used by the [brand] are comfortable' (Khan et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of brand association on perceived quality. All the interviewees and focus group participants considered that brand association can positively influence perceived quality. The reasons are as follows:

"I think it has more influence on perceived quality than brand awareness, because the level of cognition of brand association has become higher than that of brand awareness." (Interview 3)

"Because the more associations with this brand I have, the more familiar I am with this brand, which can help me judge its quality." (Interview 5)

"I think the more well-known the brand is, the better quality it is. For example, if I know an apparel brand is from Italy, I will think it has a good quality." (FG3)

The discussion above indicates a significant role of brand association in brand loyalty. Therefore, companies should put more effort into efficiently converting brand association into brand loyalty. Based on the findings of the qualitative research, it is crucial for companies to deliver effective information about brand quality frequently to consumers in order to strengthen the perception of brand quality from the consumers. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between brand association and brand loyalty are discussed in detail.

7.5.5. Brand association and brand loyalty

The notion that brand association has a positive impact on brand loyalty is not supported in this study. The result of this study is not in alignment with some prior studies (e.g. Aaker, 1991; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo and Donthu, 2001). As mentioned above, based on the traditional hierarchy of effects model, which is a consumer learning process with hierarchy (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975), brand association is positively related to brand loyalty. According to Aaker (1991), once consumers have been aware of a brand and associate it in their memories to build specific brand associations, the continuous exposure to the brand will affect the consumers' attitudinal brand loyalty. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) find that brand association has a significant impact on brand loyalty for the clothing industry. However, based on the qualitative findings, some interviewees and focus group participants did not consider that brand association can positively influence brand loyalty. The reasons are as follows:

"I do not think brand association can foster my loyalty to a brand, because in my opinion, it is a low level of understanding of a brand. If I become a loyal customer to a brand, I need to know this brand very well. In other words, I need to use its product for a long time and know exactly whether it is good or not." (Interview 4)

"I will become loyal to a brand only due to the fact that I really like it, which largely depends on its quality. Although I have so many associations with a brand, if the quality is not good enough for me, I will definitely not become a loyal customer to it." (Interview 6)

Therefore, one possible reason for the refusal of this hypothesis may be because from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, brand association is not important enough to influence their loyalty to a brand, and they consider quality as a key factor to foster the formation of loyalty to a brand. In the following section, the findings of the relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty are discussed.

7.5.6. Perceived quality and brand loyalty

The test result of hypothesis H11 supports the notion that perceived quality has a positive effect on brand loyalty, which is in line with the aforementioned hierarchy of effects model, which suggests that the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity exist in a hierarchy, which is considered as a consumer learning process, and that, once the brand awareness and brand associations are formed, the continuous communication with the brand will influence consumers' brand loyalty (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975). According to Aaker (1991), perceived quality is not merely another brand association, but an association regarded as having special significance, thus it becomes a separate dimension of brand equity.

In addition, this finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that perceived quality has a positive effect on brand loyalty (e.g. Bang et al., 2005; Konecnik and Gartner, 2007; Yaseen et al., 2011). For example, Erdogmus and Büdeyri-Turan (2012) examine the effect of perceived quality on brand loyalty in the ready-to-wear industry from the perspective of young consumers. They identify that

perceived quality, influenced by consumers' self-image congruity, positively influences consumers' brand loyalty. Khan et al. (2015) investigate the causal relationship among the metrics of brand equity in the context of the Malaysian fashion clothing industry and they find that perceived quality has a positive impact on brand loyalty.

In terms of the measurement items of perceived quality, based on the previous empirical research findings and qualitative research findings, items were extracted such as PQ1: 'Products of [brand] are of great quality' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ2: 'Products of [brand] are very durable' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ3: 'Products of [brand] are very reliable' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ5: 'Products functioned as well as I expected' (Khan et al., 2015), and PQ6: 'The materials used by the [brand] are comfortable' (Khan et al., 2015).

Since perceived quality affects consumers' satisfaction and trust of the brand, which, in turn, helps develop brand loyalty. According to Oliver (1997), the consumers' perception of high-quality products leads to brand loyalty, as it is the foundation of consumer satisfaction. Based on Yee and Sidek (2008), the perception of the product quality is the most significant factor that influences brand loyalty. The items of brand loyalty were extracted from the existing literature and qualitative research such as BL1: 'I am willing to pay a higher price for [brand] although other brands have similar characteristics' (Khan et al., 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh et al., 2009), BL2: 'I intend to remain the [brand]'s customer' (Khan et al., 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh et al., 2009), BL4: 'I consider myself to be loyal to [brand]' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), BL5: 'The product of [brand] would be my first choice' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), BL6: 'I will not buy other brands if [brand] is available at store' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006;

Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), and BL7: 'I would like to choose [brand] when purchasing clothes' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of perceived quality on brand loyalty. The majority of the interviewees and focus group participants considered that perceived quality can positively influence brand loyalty. The majority of them also pointed out that perceived quality has the most important effect on brand loyalty. The reasons are as follows:

"Because good quality can make consumers satisfied and willing to buy the product repeatedly, as a result, it will strengthen the consumer's adhesion to the brand and the brand loyalty." (Interview 2)

"Because my loyalty to a certain brand is mainly based on whether it has good value for money, so price and quality are my first consideration. The better value for money of the brand, the more loyal I will be." (Interview 7)

"Because when my perception of the quality matches my identity and taste, I will be more loyal to it." (Interview 11)

The discussion above signifies the crucial role of perceived quality in brand loyalty. Therefore, companies should not underestimate the significance of perceived quality. As the findings of qualitative research indicate that perceived quality is likely to have the most important effect on the formation of consumers' brand loyalty, companies should emphasise and deliver more information about brand quality to consumers. In the following sections, the findings of the relationships among the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity and purchase intention are discussed in detail.

7.6. PURCHASE INTENTION AS AN OUTCOME OF CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY

7.6.1. Brand awareness and purchase intention

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The findings of this study provide no support for hypothesis H12 that brand awareness has a positive impact on purchase intention. This result is not in line with some prior studies (e.g. Khan et al., 2015; Liao and Wang, 2009; Macdonald and Sharp, 2000). For example, Khan et al. (2015) investigate the causal relationship among the metrics of brand equity in the context of the Malaysian fashion clothing industry and they find that brand awareness has a positive impact on purchase intention. Liao and Wang (2009) find that brand awareness plays a crucial role in the brand choice of Chinese consumers. However, some other studies (e.g. Sasirekha and Sathish, 2017) do not support this hypothesis either. They find that there is no positive relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention.

One possible reason for the rejected hypothesis can be acquired from the respondents' comments during the exploratory stage. The statements are as follows:

"I think it should be combined with brand association so that they can affect purchase intention, brand awareness itself cannot affect purchase intention, since it is merely the threshold of knowing something, which is so primary that it cannot affect purchase intention." (Interview 5)

"I think the effect of brand awareness on purchase intention is limited. Because awareness is just the first step of cognition, which means it is lacking of knowledge and understanding of the brand." (Interview 8)

"I think it only has small impact on purchase intention, because if I heard about a brand, I may want to know more about it, but it cannot guarantee my final purchase." (FG1)

These respondents were likely to consider that brand awareness has no significant or limited significant impact on purchase intention. As brand awareness is just the first step of the decision-making process. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between brand association and purchase intention are elaborated.

7.6.2. Brand association and purchase intention

The test result of hypothesis H13 supports the notion that brand association has a positive effect on purchase intention, which is in line with previous studies (e.g. Hsu, 2000; Petruzzellis, 2010; Qi et al., 2009). For example, Kamins and Marks (1991) explain the relationship between brand association and purchase intention in that the more brand associations consumers have, the higher the purchase intention. Jarvelainen (2007) finds that positive brand associations contribute to the consumers' trust of the intangibility and invisibility of the e-commerce environments and elevate consumers' intentions to purchase online.

In terms of the measurement items of brand association, based on the previous empirical research findings and qualitative research findings, various items were extracted, such as BAS1: 'Several characteristics of [brand] instantly come to my mind' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-France, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), BAS2: 'I associate [brand] with functions' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS3: 'I associate [brand] with uniqueness' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS4: 'I associate [brand] with prestige' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS5: 'I associate [brand] with creativity' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), and BAS6: I have a clear image of the type of person who would use [brand]' (Wang and Li, 2012).

According to Keller (1993), both product-related and non-product-related attributes facilitate the formation of consumers' brand association, which contributes to consumers' purchase intention. Positive brand associations enable favourable consumer behaviours to develop (Petruzzellis, 2010). Therefore, it is considered that brand association has an influence on purchase intention, and the items of purchase intention were extracted from the existing literature and qualitative research, such as PI1: 'It is possible that I will buy [brand] in the near future' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Grewal et al., 1998), PI2: 'It is highly likely that I will buy [brand] in the future' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Grewal et al., 1998), PI3: 'I will seriously consider buying [brand] in the future' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Grewal et al., 1998), PI4: 'I plan to buy products of [brand] more often' (Kim et al., 2009), PI5: 'I plan to buy products of [brand] right away' (Wang and Li, 2012), and PI6: 'I have intention to buy [brand] in the future' (Khan et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of brand association on purchase intention. The majority of the interviewees and focus group participants considered that brand association can positively influence purchase intention, and that the majority of them also pointed out that it has a greater influence on purchase intention than brand awareness. The reasons are as follows:

"I think it has more impact on purchase intention than brand awareness, because consumers have become more familiar with the products, which can enhance their purchase intention to some extent." (Interview 4)

"Because consumers' understanding of the brand becomes deeper, which can help consumers to make the judgement whether it is worth purchasing or not." (Interview 5)

The discussion above signifies the crucial role of brand association in purchase intention. Thus, companies should pay more attention to brand association. As the findings of the qualitative research indicate that brand association is considered to influence young Chinese consumers' purchase intention, companies should deliver more useful and attractive information about the brand to stimulate and facilitate consumers' purchase behaviour. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention are elaborated.

7.6.3. Perceived quality and purchase intention

The test result of hypothesis H14 supports the assertion that perceived quality has a positive effect on purchase intention, which is in line with previous studies (e.g. Kumar et al., 2009; Moradi and Zarei, 2012). For example, Hoyer and Brown (1990) find that although a wide variety of factors are considered by consumers when they make a purchase decision, perceived quality is of the greatest importance among those factors, especially for unfamiliar brands. Khan et al. (2015) investigate the causal relationship among the metrics of brand equity in the context of the Malaysian fashion clothing industry and they find that perceived quality has a positive impact on purchase intention.

In terms of the measurement items of brand association, based on the previous empirical research findings and qualitative research findings, various items were extracted, such as PQ1: 'Products of [brand] are of great quality' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ2: 'Products of [brand] are very durable' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ3: 'Products of [brand] are very reliable' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ5: 'Products functioned as well as I expected' (Khan et al., 2015), and PQ6: 'The materials used by the [brand] are comfortable' (Khan et al., 2015).

According to Aaker (1991), brands with high perceived quality tend to be evaluated positively by consumers, and thus, lead to consumers' purchase behaviour. Perceived high quality stimulates consumers to purchase a certain brand over other competing brands (Na et al., 1999). Therefore, it is considered that perceived quality has an influence on purchase intention, and the items for purchase intention were extracted from the existing literature and qualitative research, such as PI1: 'It is possible that I will buy [brand] in the near future' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Grewal et al., 1998), PI2: 'It is highly likely that I will buy [brand] in the future' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Grewal et al., 1998), PI3: 'I will seriously consider buying [brand] in the future' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Grewal et al., 1998), PI4: 'I plan to buy products of [brand] more often' (Kim et al., 2009), PI5: 'I plan to buy products of [brand] right away' (Wang and Li, 2012), and PI6: 'I have intention to buy [brand] in the future' (Khan et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of perceived quality on the purchase intention. All the interviewees and focus group participants considered that perceived quality can positively influence purchase intention. Moreover, some of them also argued that perceived quality was the most important and fundamental effect on purchase intention. The reasons are as follows:

"Yes, I agree. Because good quality can make consumers satisfied and willing to buy the product repeatedly." (Interview 2)

"Yes, I agree. Because when the perceived quality matches my identity and taste, I will be willing to buy." (Interview 5)

"Because perceived quality is about the quality and price, the better the value for money, the more willing I will be to buy it." (Interview 6)

"Yes, I agree. Even if I have never used this product, if I feel it has good quality, I will be willing to try it to confirm whether or not it is good." (Interview 9)

The discussion above indicates the important role of perceived quality in purchase intention. Therefore, companies should pay more attention to perceived quality. As the findings of qualitative research indicate that perceived quality is considered to influence young Chinese consumers' purchase intention, companies should deliver more and emphasise the brand quality to stimulate and facilitate consumers' purchase behaviour. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention are elaborated.

7.6.4. Brand loyalty and purchase intention

The test result of hypothesis H15 supports the assertion that brand loyalty has a positive effect on purchase intention, which is in line with previous studies (e.g. Bennett and Rundle-Thiele, 2004; Grover and Srinivasan, 1992; Khan et al., 2015). For instance, Grover and Srinivasan (1992) find that consumers tend to unconditionally favour the brand they are loyal to, and that such strong attachment cannot be either formed or erased in the short term but can be built up by means of elaborately designed long-term marketing activities. Khan et al. (2015) investigate the relationship among the dimensions of brand equity as well as the effect of each dimension of brand equity on the purchase intention of Malaysian consumers in the fashion industry. They find that brand loyalty has the strongest influence on purchase intention, successively followed by perceived quality, brand image, and brand awareness.

In terms of the measurement items of brand association, based on the previous empirical research findings and qualitative research findings, various items were extracted, such as BL1: 'I am willing to pay a higher price for [brand] although other brands have similar characteristics' (Khan et al., 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh et al., 2009), BL2: 'I intend to remain the [brand]'s customer' (Khan et al., 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh et al., 2009), BL4: 'I consider myself to be loyal to [brand]' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), BL5: 'The product of [brand] would be my first choice' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), BL6: 'I will not buy other brands if [brand] is available at store' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), and BL7: 'I would like to choose [brand] when purchasing clothes' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001).

As brand loyalty is a favourable relationship between the consumer and the brand, consumers invariably re-purchase a preferred product in the future (Aaker, 1996). According to Oliver (1997), in spite of the situational influences and marketing strategies to cause switching behaviour, brand loyalty is a commitment to re-purchasing a favourable product or service consistently in the future. Therefore, it is considered that brand loyalty has an influence on purchase intention, and various items of purchase intention were extracted from the existing literature and qualitative research, such as PI1: 'It is possible that I will buy [brand] in the near future' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Grewal et al., 1998), PI2: 'It is highly likely that I will buy [brand] in the future' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Grewal et al., 1998), PI3: 'I will seriously consider buying [brand] in the future' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Grewal et al., 1998), PI4: 'I plan to buy products of [brand] more often' (Kim et al., 2009), PI5: 'I plan to buy products of [brand] right away' (Wang and Li, 2012), and PI6: 'I have intention to buy [brand] in the future' (Khan et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of brand loyalty on purchase intention. All the interviewees and focus group participants considered that brand loyalty can positively influence purchase intention, and the majority of them also argued that it was the most important factor. The reasons are as follows:

"Because if the consumer is loyal to a brand, it means the consumer will buy the products of this brand repeatedly, and, therefore, loyal customers are especially important for a company." (Interview 5)

"Because the more loyal I am to a brand, the more likely I will purchase products of this brand again and again." (Interview 7)

"At least in the short term I can keep loyal to one brand, but, in the long term, I will buy its products with more rationality. In other words, I will buy products that I need rather than the new product it launches." (Interview 8)

The discussion above indicates the significant role of brand loyalty in purchase intention. Therefore, companies should pay more attention to brand loyalty. As the findings of the qualitative research indicates that brand loyalty is considered to influence young Chinese consumers' purchase intention, companies should deliver more useful and attractive brand-related information and employ marketing strategies to maintain consumers' loyalty. In the following sections, the findings of the relationships among the country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity dimensions are elaborated.

7.7. COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN AND CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY METRICS

7.7.1. Country-of-origin and brand association

The test result of hypothesis H16a supports the assertion that country-of-origin has a positive effect on brand association. This finding is in line with the previous studies that demonstrate that the relationship between the country-of-origin and brand association is positive (e.g. Moradi and Zarei, 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Paswan

and Sharma, 2004). For example, Murtiasih et al. (2014) investigate the impact of country-of-origin on brand equity in the Indonesian car market, and the results show that the ability to escalate the image of country-of-origin can largely increase consumers' brand knowledge regarding the differential effect. This is also in line with the finding (Moradi and Zarei, 2012) that consumers perceive that brands that originated from a country with a desirable image are more reliable than brands from a country with a less favourable image. As a result, these brands are more likely to be selected during the purchase decision process. In the context of China, many studies (e.g. Hu and Dickerson, 1997; Zhang, 1996) reveal that Chinese consumers have long been known for their positive attitude towards foreign brands, especially those originating from developed countries and the perception that foreign products are superior to domestic products. For example, Meng-Lewis et al. (2013) investigate the Chinese consumers' reaction to foreign sports companies. They find that the brands from developed countries could be more acceptable and preferable for Chinese consumers than domestic sports brands.

In terms of the measurement items of country-of-origin, based on the previous empirical research findings and the qualitative research findings, various items were extracted, such as COO1: 'The [country] is a rich developed country' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO2: 'The [country] is a country that has high quality in its workmanship' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO3: 'The [country] is a country that is prestigious' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO4: 'The [country] is a country that is innovative' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO5: 'The [country] is a country that is competent in design' (Murtiasih et al., 2014), and COO7: 'The [country] is technologically advanced' (Ar and Kara, 2014).

According to Aaker (1991), country-of-origin is able to form an association embedded in consumers' minds. This association is derived from consumers' stereotypes about a country, which, in turn, influences consumers' perceptions of the brand. Keller (1993) argues that the associations of country-of-origin are secondary associations to brand associations. Therefore, as it is considered to have an influence on brand association, the items of brand association were extracted from the existing literature and qualitative research, such as BAS1: 'Several

characteristics of [brand] instantly come to my mind' (Bruhn et al., 2012; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-France, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), BAS2: 'I associate [brand] with functions' mind' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS3: 'I associate [brand] with uniqueness' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS4: 'I associate [brand] with prestige' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), BAS5: 'I associate [brand] with creativity' (Murtiasih et al., 2014; Yasin et al., 2007), and BAS6: I have a clear image of the type of person who would use [brand]' (Wang and Li, 2012).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of country-of-origin on brand association. Although all the participants considered that country-of-origin can positively influence brand association, some of them also pointed out that country-of-origin only has limited influence on brand loyalty. The reasons are as follows:

"Because I think we Chinese people have some stereotypes that the products from developed countries have better quality and design than those from developing countries. But with the rapid development of China, this kind of stereotype becomes weaker and weaker." (Interview 1)

"The reason is that usually the famous international brands are superior to domestic brands in brand communication, which leads to a better evaluation for the international brands." (Interview 5)
"For example, if you mention an apparel brand that is from Italy, I will infer that the clothes are well-designed and are of premium quality." (Interview 8)

The discussion above signifies the crucial role of country-of-origin in brand association. Therefore, companies should pay more attention to the country-of-origin. As the findings of qualitative research indicates that country-of-origin is likely to have more impact on brand association for consumers from developing countries, companies should emphasise and deliver more information about the brand country-of-origin to the consumers. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between country-of-origin and perceived quality are elaborated.

7.7.2. Country-of-origin and perceived quality

The test result of hypothesis H16b supports the assertion that country-of-origin has a positive effect on perceived quality. This finding is in line with the hierarchy of biases theory, which suggests that the level of economic development of a country has a positive impact on consumers' evaluations of the product from this country, and, as a result, consumers in developing countries tend to believe that the products from developed countries have better quality than domestic goods (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001). If a brand is accessible globally, it is supposed to be superior in quality globally (Sharma, 2017).

In addition, this finding is consistent with previous studies that demonstrate a positive relationship between country-of-origin and perceived quality (e.g. Hu et al., 2012; Kwok, 2014; Murtiasih et al., 2014). For example, Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) find that country-of-origin has the strongest impact on perceived quality among the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity. Pappu et al. (2006) observe that the difference in the impact of country-of-origin on perceived quality is the largest among that of the impact of country-of-origin on the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity.

In terms of the measurement items of country-of-origin, as mentioned above, it includes items such as COO1: 'The [country] is a rich developed country' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO2: 'The [country] is a country that has high quality in its workmanship' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO3: 'The [country] is a country that is prestigious' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO4: 'The [country] is a country that is innovative' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO5: 'The [country] is a country that is competent in design' (Murtiasih et al., 2014), and COO7: 'The [country] is technologically advanced' (Ar and Kara, 2014).

As the products imported from developed countries are usually more expensive and rarer than the domestic products in developing countries, consumers in developing countries are more likely to believe that products made in developed countries are of better quality than domestic products (Batra et al., 2000). Therefore, the country-of-

origin is considered to positively influence the perceived quality. The items for perceived quality were extracted from the existing literature and qualitative research, such as PQ1: 'Products of [brand] are of great quality' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ2: 'Products of [brand] are very durable' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ3: 'Products of [brand] are very reliable' (Aaker, 1991; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), PQ5: 'Products functioned as well as I expected' (Khan et al., 2015), and PQ6: 'The materials used by the [brand] are comfortable' (Khan et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of country-of-origin on perceived quality. The majority of the interviewees and focus group participants considered that country-of-origin can influence perceived quality, and they mentioned the same reason, that is, stereotype. Some representative responses are as follows:

"Yes, I agree. Because usually Chinese people have a stereotype that the products from developed countries are of better quality than Chinese products." (Interview 3)

"Yes, I think so, because of the stereotype, which is a kind of directed thinking." (Interview 8)

The discussion above indicates the significant role of country-of-origin in consumers' perception of brand quality. Therefore, companies should put more effort into effectively delivering the information for brand country-of-origin to target consumers to build a more favourable perception of brand quality in consumers' minds. In the next section, the findings of the relationship between country-of-origin and brand loyalty are discussed in detail.

7.7.3. Country-of-origin and brand loyalty

The test result of hypothesis H16c supports the statement that country-of-origin has a positive effect on brand loyalty. The finding is in alignment with previous studies

that demonstrate the influence of country-of-origin on brand loyalty (e.g. Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006). For instance, Lu and Xu (2015) examine the impact of country-of-origin on young Chinese consumers brand loyalty towards sportswear brands. They confirm that young Chinese consumers hold a stronger brand loyalty towards global brands than domestic Chinese brands. The findings of this study are in line with previous studies.

In terms of the measurement items of country-of-origin, as mentioned before, it includes items such as COO1: 'The [country] is a rich developed country' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO2: 'The [country] is a country that has high quality in its workmanship' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO3: 'The [country] is a country that is prestigious' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO4: 'The [country] is a country that is innovative' (Moradi and Zarei, 2012), COO5: 'The [country] is a country that is competent in design' (Murtiasih et al., 2014), and COO7: 'The [country] is technologically advanced' (Ar and Kara, 2014).

As consumers absorb more and more knowledge about or have increasing experience of the superiority or benefits from a brand established in a specific country, consumers are likely to develop the brand loyalty (Pappu et al., 2006). Therefore, country-of-origin is considered to have a positive influence on brand loyalty. The items for brand loyalty were extracted from the existing literature and qualitative research, such as BL1: 'I am willing to pay a higher price for [brand] although other brands have similar characteristics' (Khan et al., 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh et al., 2009), BL2: 'I intend to remain the [brand]'s customer' (Khan et al., 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Walsh et al., 2009), BL4: 'I consider myself to be loyal to [brand]' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), BL5: 'The product of [brand] would be my first choice' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), BL6: 'I will not buy other brands if [brand] is available at store' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu, 2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), and BL7: 'I would like to choose [brand] when purchasing clothes' (Khan et al., 2015; Lu and Xu,

2015; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001).

Furthermore, the participants in the exploratory stage also gave opinions about the impact of country-of-origin on brand loyalty. The majority of the interviewees and focus group participants considered that country-of-origin can influence brand loyalty. The reasons are as follows:

"Because the country image can affect my brand loyalty. For example, if a country is antagonistic to China and does some harm to China unjustifiably, I will resist the brands from that country." (Interview 2)

"Because I think we have some stereotypes that the products from developed countries are of better quality and design than those from developing countries. So, I favour international brands more than domestic brands." (Interview 5)

"I think the reason is that, usually, the famous international brands are superior to domestic brands in brand communication, which leads to a better evaluation for the international brands." (Interview 7)

However, some of them also pointed out that country-of-origin only has a limited influence on brand loyalty, as stated as follows:

"Yes, I agree, but I think it only has a limited influence on me, because using and perceiving the product by myself is much more important than brand country-of-origin." (Interview 6)

The discussion above signifies the important role of country-of-origin in young Chinese consumers' brand loyalty. Therefore, international companies should maintain and improve their superiority of products in order to retain young Chinese consumers as their loyal customers. In the next section, the summary of this chapter is presented.

7.8 SUMMARY

In summary, this chapter discusses the results of hypotheses testing. The revealed relationships are analysed based on the existing literature, measurement items, and the findings from the qualitative research. The findings partially support the impact of the social media brand communication dimensions on the consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the impact of consumer-based brand equity dimensions on purchase intention and the impact of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity dimensions. However, the statistical result shows that only one motivation, altruism, has a positive impact on user-generated social media brand communication, which is an unexpected result and different from previous study results. This might be because venting motivation focuses more on releasing individual's personal negative feelings, which cannot contribute to attractive or useful user-generated content to others; self-enhancement focuses heavily on showing oneself off, which also has less positive influence on others; economic motivation is directly related to user's personal benefit, which may be regarded as being less trustworthy information.

The next chapter discusses the implications of the research in terms of the theoretical and managerial aspects. In addition, the research limitations are also presented. Finally, some possible future research directions are provided.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

8.1. INTRODUCTION

This section aims to fill the research gaps: (1) lack of researchers consider co-creation of social media brand communication as a dimension of social media brand communication; (2) deficient investigations of the effect of brand communication on

consumer-based brand equity through social media platforms instead of traditional mass media; (3) lack of researchers investigate the communication about international high street fashion brands through Chinese social media among young Chinese consumers. This study tested the social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity theories in China, a different setting from Western countries, in order to examine the applicability of these theories, as Western contexts predominated in this field. The current study employed a mixed-methods approach that consisted of a less dominant qualitative method including in-depth interviews and focus groups and a dominant quantitative method (a questionnaire). In the first phase, in-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted, and in the second phase, the online survey was implemented, followed by data analysis using the multivariate analysis technique of structural equation modelling (SEM).

According to the discussion chapter, the findings of this study obtain a number of implications, which are especially valuable for marketing managers of international high street fashion brands who want to enhance brand equity among young Chinese consumers with the help of brand communication on Chinese social media. The findings identify that firm-generated social media brand communication can positively influence young Chinese consumers' brand awareness and brand loyalty. User-generated social media brand communication is found to have a positive impact on young Chinese consumers' perceived quality. Co-creation of social media brand communication is proven to have a positive effect on young Chinese consumers' brand association. Besides, the findings also identify that brand awareness can positively influence young Chinese consumers' brand association and brand loyalty. Brand association has a positive effect on young Chinese consumers' perceived quality. Perceived quality has a positive impact on young Chinese consumers' brand loyalty. Furthermore, altruism is proven to be a motivation for young Chinese consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, which is considered to be an antecedent of this research model. Moreover, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty are found to have a positive influence on young Chinese consumers' purchase intention, which is regarded as the outcome of this research model. Finally, the results indicate that country-of-origin has a positive

impact on all the hypothesised dimensions of consumer-based brand equity (brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty).

This chapter discusses the research contributions (theoretical and managerial) in detail. It elaborates the implications of the research findings in Section 8.2. In the following, the limitations of this research and the recommendations for the future research are presented in Section 8.3. Finally, some conclusions are summarised in Section 8.4.

8.2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The implications of the research findings are discussed in the next section. The theoretical implications are presented first, followed by the managerial implications.

8.2.1. Theoretical implications

Based on the research objectives of this study: (1) to identify the antecedents of young Chinese consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication; (2) to develop a conceptual model to explain the relationship among social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers; (3) to identify the causal relationships among the consumer-based brand equity metrics; (4) to investigate the possible impact of consumer-based brand equity dimensions on the purchase intention as an outcome; and (5) to investigate the impact of brand country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity, five research questions were posed: (1) from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are consumers' motivations to engage in user-generated social media brand communication; (2) from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of social media brand communication affect each dimension of consumer-based brand equity; (3) from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions; (4) from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of consumer-based brand equity affect purchase intention; (5) from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does brand country-of-origin affect consumer-based brand

equity dimensions? Therefore, this section aims to provide the conclusions of the research questions.

This research provides a threefold theoretical contribution to the existing literature as (1) an extension of theory, (2) conceptualisation and measurement, (3) theory testing and generalisation.

8.2.1.1. Extension of theory

This study contributes to the literature of brand communication and consumer-based brand equity by examining the established hypotheses and offering new research findings. The first theoretical contribution is to extend knowledge by examining the relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. In previous studies, although researchers identify that marketing communication can positively influence consumer-based brand equity, those studies mainly focused on traditional marketing communication on mass media (e.g. Luxton et al., 2015; Simon and Sullivan, 1993; Yoganathan et al., 2015; Yoo et al., 2000), and only a few studies investigated brand communications on social media platforms (Balakrishnan and Foroudi, 2019; Khadim et al., 2018; Kooli et al., 2019; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Therefore, this research increases the knowledge of the relationship between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity.

Second, previous studies categorised social media brand communication as firm-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication. These studies consider firm-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication as two separate independent variables (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Khadim et al., 2018; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). However, firm-generated social media communication can be used to stimulate user-generated content, which creates a new form of social media brand communication mixing both firm-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication. To the best knowledge of the author, this research is the first to add the construct

'co-creation of social media brand communication' as a dimension of social media brand communication. This dimension was proven to be validated by the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

Third, the theoretical contribution of this study is to propose a validated framework that encompasses the main part of the model that defines relationships among the focal constructs social media brand communication dimensions (firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication) and consumer-based brand equity (brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty), the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the factors which influence user-generated social media brand communication (its antecedents), the relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions and purchase intention (its consequence), and the relationships among the country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity dimensions. This research is one of the first empirical studies integrating these elements into one conceptual model in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the aforementioned relationships. The development of the conceptual framework can be seen in Chapter 3. Therefore, this research contributes to the literature on social media brand communication, consumer-based brand equity, purchase intention, and country-of-origin by developing and testing the model.

Fourth, in the proposed research framework, the positive impacts of the social media brand communication dimensions on consumer-based brand equity are identified, i.e. firm-generated social media brand communication is found to have a positive impact on brand awareness and brand loyalty, user-generated social media brand communication is identified as having a positive influence on perceived quality, and co-creation of social media brand communication is found to have a positive effect on brand association. Besides, the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions are identified, i.e. brand awareness has a positive impact on brand association and brand loyalty, brand association has a positive influence on perceived quality, and perceived quality positively affects brand loyalty. Furthermore, the positive relationships among country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity

dimensions are identified, i.e. country-of-origin has positive impacts on brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Moreover, altruism is found to be an antecedent to positively influence user-generated social media brand communication. Finally, purchase intention is confirmed to be a consequence of the consumer-based brand equity dimensions (brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty).

However, some hypothesised relationships are not supported by the statistical test results. With regard to the relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the positive relationships among firm-generated social media brand communication and brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty are not supported by the data. The positive relationships among user-generated social media brand communication and brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty are not confirmed. The positive relationships among co-creation of social media brand communication and brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty are not identified by the statistical test. Besides, venting motivation, self-enhancement, and economic motivation are not identified as being the antecedents of user-generated social media brand communication. Finally, the positive relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention is not supported by the test result. These findings also contribute to the literature, as they confirm the findings of other researchers who achieved the same conclusions. These findings can be supported by participants from the in-depth interviews and focus groups (see Section 7.3-7.7). As a result, this research extends the knowledge of previous studies.

Fifth, the hypothesised relationships among social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity dimensions are based on schema theory, and the test results reveal that each dimension of social media brand communication has positive impact on some particular dimension rather than all dimensions of consumer-based brand equity. Therefore, it contributes to the literature that schema theory is partially supported in the context of China from young Chinese consumers' perspectives. Also, the hypothesised causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions are based on

standard learning hierarchy theory, and the findings show the majority of hypotheses are accepted by the data, although not all hypotheses are accepted, the supported relationships present clear hierarchical paths among consumer-based brand equity dimensions. Thus, it contributes to the literature in that it demonstrates that standard learning hierarchy theory can be applied in China for young Chinese consumers.

8.2.1.2. Conceptualisation and measurement level

This research aims to identify the relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions and the consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the possible positive impact of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity, and the potential antecedent and consequent factors, based on a combination of motivation opportunity ability theory, functional theory, schema theory, and standard learning hierarchy. This research, therefore, contributes to the existing knowledge at the conceptualisation level by providing a conceptual framework to explain the aforementioned relationships.

In addition, with regard to the development of the measurement scale of this study, which was conducted in China, additional items were discovered from the qualitative research. The other measurement items for measuring the investigated constructs of this study originated from previous relevant studies (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Pappu et al., 2006; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), which were developed in the setting of Western countries. In general, when the constructs and measurement items are applied in a different research setting, it is necessary to pay more attention to the equivalence and applicability (Kaynak and Kara, 2002). This study provides validated items to measure the aspects of the motivations for consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, social media brand communication dimensions, consumer-based brand equity dimensions, purchase intention, and country-of-origin in the setting of China for young Chinese consumers.

Furthermore, this study also offers further understanding of the dimensionality and operationalisation of the investigated concepts from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. Based on the qualitative research and quantitative research,

this research demonstrates that social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity are multidimensional concepts. The findings show that the dimensions of these constructs fit the data well, indicating that the measurement items were psychometrically appropriate for representing the studied concepts. To be more specific, according to the literature, social media brand communication contains two dimensions, i.e. firm-generated social media brand communication and user-generated social media brand communication (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Khadim et al., 2018; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). The new dimension of social media brand communication, i.e. co-creation of social media brand communication proposed by this study is demonstrated using mixed-methods research.

Moreover, the four dimensions of consumer-based brand equity (brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty) are supported by the tests of this study. As the existing and new items for measuring the studied constructs were examined by exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), this study provides reliable and validated scales and contributes to the literature.

8.2.1.3. Theory testing and generalisation

As stated above, this PhD study seeks to explain in a more holistic manner the relationships among social media brand communication, consumer-based brand equity, purchase intention, and country-of-origin in the eyes of young Chinese consumers. It does this by investigating the proposed model of the relationships among user-generated social media brand communication and its antecedents (altruism, venting motivation, vengeance, self-enhancement, and economic motivation); the relationships among social media brand communication dimensions (firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication) and consumer-based brand equity dimensions (brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty); the relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions and their consequence (purchase intention); and the relationships among country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity dimensions in the context of China.

This study is expected to offer additional insights into the existing literature and contributes to theory testing and generalisation. The theory of social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity need to be examined in non-Western countries to achieve generalisation (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991). As most of the studies in this field have investigated the phenomenon in the Western countries, which reflect the situation and particular culture of a Western country, whether the theory is applicable in a non-Western country is open to question. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the applicability of the existing theory to a new context (Tsui, 2006). This investigation of the relationships among the dimensions of social media brand communication and the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity in the setting of China can broaden the insights in the literature.

In this study, the measurement items from previous studies available to the current study were adapted, purified, and verified in the setting of China, a non-Western developing country, which, to some extent, is culturally different from Western developed countries in consumption habits. Based on the findings, all the items are valid in their original content. Whereas, some new items were found from the qualitative study (in-depth interviews and focus groups). Although the number of measurement items were not the same as the original number, the statistical results revealed a high degree of reliability and validity for each studied construct. Therefore, the findings of this research can be generalised to the population (Churchill, 1991). As a result, this research contributes to the literature by adapting and examining the measurement items in a research setting that is culturally different from where the items originated from.

Moreover, this research gains some insight into the generalisability and applicability of Western-developed theories in a non-Western setting. From the perspective of young Chinese consumers, social media brand communication dimensions (firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media brand communication) and country-of-origin were found to be positively related to the consumer-based brand equity dimensions (brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty). In addition, the consumer-based brand equity dimensions were identified to

have positive impacts on purchase intention. However, at the level of the dimensions, not every dimension of social media brand communication was found to have a positive impact on each dimension of consumer-based brand equity. For example, firm-generated social media brand communication has positive impacts on brand awareness and brand loyalty but not brand association or perceived quality. Therefore, the findings partially support the studies conducted in Western settings (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Khadim et al., 2018; Pappu et al., 2005; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Torres et al., 2015).

8.2.2. Managerial implications

This study is also expected to yield some managerial contributions to the managers of international high street fashion brands who wish to grasp the more comprehensive situation of the relationships among the social media brand communication dimensions and consumer-based brand equity from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. In other words, the deeper understanding of the effect of different kinds of brand communications through social media platforms can help to enhance the company's brand equity among young Chinese consumers.

As the number of social media users has increased rapidly in recent decades, for example, the number of monthly active users of Facebook has surpassed 2.4 billion (Statista, 2019) and that of WeChat has exceeded 1 billion (WeChat, 2019), social media are gradually reshaping the traditional marketing communications and playing an increasingly important role in brand communication. Since social media offers opportunities for consumers to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other consumers over the world, the traditional one-way communication is replaced by two-way, multi-dimensional, and peer-to-peer communication. Therefore, companies are no longer the sole source of communication (Berthon et al., 2008). In other words, companies are confronted by the challenges posed by social media users who are also consumers through user-generated social media brand communication. As previous studies demonstrate that social media brand communication can positively influence consumer-based brand equity dimensions (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Seo and Park, 2019), it is crucial for marketing managers to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships

between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity and how to take full advantage of social media brand communication.

Furthermore, since the major Western social media, i.e. Facebook and Twitter, are forbidden in mainland China due to the violation of Chinese laws, companies can only conduct social media communication through Chinese social media platforms. This is another key reason that this research contributes to a better understanding of the real impact of social media brand communication on consumer-based brand equity for the international high street fashion companies targeting young Chinese consumers.

Based on the findings from both qualitative and quantitative research, some constructive suggestions are concluded as follows:

First, altruism is confirmed to have a positive influence on user-generated social media brand communication; therefore, it is important for managers to post information that is more likely to stimulate users' sense of altruism to post or share the information with their social media friends. Based on the measurement items of altruism in this study, such as "I would like to share my own positive experiences", "I want to give others the opportunity to buy the right product', and 'Information other people posted helped me, so I would like to return the favour", the information users are more likely to share due to altruism is related to 'good experience', 'right product', or can help someone, like the good product quality, value for money, pleasing shopping experience, and excellent service and so on, the brand-related information is useful and helpful for others.

Second, the results indicate that although not every dimension of social media brand communication has a positive impact on all four dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, which is considered to be a hierarchy of consumers learning process (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975), they have impacts on certain dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, and their influence encompasses all the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity. Therefore, the findings can enlighten and encourage managers to give full play to the impact of social media brand communication dimensions on the corresponding consumer-based brand equity dimensions.

The findings of this study confirmed that a positive perception of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on young Chinese consumers' brand awareness, while user-generated social media brand communication and co-creation of social media brand communication cannot be confirmed. Therefore, it is crucial for managers to pay more attention and fully take advantage of the firm-generated social media brand communication in making consumers aware of a brand that is new for them. According to the measurement items of firm-generated social media brand communication, such as "The content generated by this company about [brand] is very attractive", "The content generated by companies about [brand] is useful" and "I can get enough information about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication", the managers should guarantee that the firm-generated content meets these requirements in order to increase consumers' brand awareness effectively and efficiently.

Third, with regards to another dimension of consumer-based brand equity, i.e. brand association, only the co-creation of social media brand communication is found to have a positive influence on young Chinese consumers' brand association. Therefore, it is important for managers to pay more attention to the positive impact of the co-creation of social media brand communication on young Chinese consumers' brand association. Based on the measurement items of co-creation of social media brand communication, such as "The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] is very attractive", "I can get enough information about [brand] through co-creation of user-generated and firm-generated social media brand communication", "the content generated by the co-creation of companies and users about [brand] is useful", managers should put extra effort into stimulating users to engage in the co-creation of social media brand communication and create content useful or attractive to other users in order to increase young Chinese consumers' brand association. Furthermore, one interviewee explained as follows:

"Generally speaking, firm-generated content is always more professional and comprehensive than user-generated content, while user-generated content can be more trustworthy than firm-generated content, therefore integrating these two forms

of communication into one, i.e. co-creation brand communication, can achieve a better communicating effect." (Interview 1)

Therefore, the firm-generated content should offer professional and detailed information about the brand and product, combined with consumers' first-hand experience of the product to achieve the goal of successfully reinforcing young Chinese consumers' brand association.

Fourth, regarding the dimension perceived quality, only user-generated social media brand communication is statistically demonstrated to have a positive impact on young Chinese consumers' perception of the brand quality. Thus, it is necessary for marketing managers to focus more on the positive impact of user-generated social media brand communication on young Chinese consumers' perception of brand quality. As companies cannot directly control user-generated social media brand communication, marketing managers should put more effort into the firm-generated content concerning the brand quality, making it useful and attractive to facilitate user-generated social media brand communication about the perceived quality.

Fifth, with regard to another dimension of social media brand communication, i.e. brand loyalty, only firm-generated social media brand communication has been statistically proven to have a positive influence on young Chinese consumers' brand loyalty. Hence, it is vital for marketing managers to take it seriously. In addition, one interviewee stated as follows:

"The firm-generated content can be the most detailed and comprehensive one and companies can implement some strategies, such as offering a special service or discount to their loyal customers to strengthen customer loyalty to the brand." (Interview 7)

Accordingly, firm-generated content should keep a high standard level of content with detailed and useful information to cultivate consumers' brand loyalty.

Sixth, in terms of the causal relationships among the consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the findings of this research demonstrate that brand awareness can positively affect young Chinese consumers' brand association as well as brand loyalty. Therefore, brand awareness as the first step of the standard learning hierarchy (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975) is of great importance. Since firm-generated social media brand communication is also confirmed by this study, as positively influencing brand awareness and brand loyalty, notwithstanding that firm-generated brand communication is no longer the only kind of marketing communication that is in the full charge of companies in traditional mass media, it still plays a vital role in enhancing consumer-based brand equity among young Chinese consumers. Marketing managers should put more effort into efficiently converting brand awareness into brand loyalty with the help of firm-generated social media brand communication.

Seventh, based on the findings of this research, brand association has statistically demonstrated that it has a positive effect on young Chinese consumers' perceived quality. Thus, it is significant for marketing managers to pay more attention to the positive impact of brand association on perceived quality. As stated earlier, the co-creation of social media brand communication is proven to have a positive effect on young Chinese consumers' perceived quality, and, therefore, it is important for marketing managers to stimulate and attract users to engage in the co-creation of social media brand communication in order to reinforce young Chinese consumers' perception of brand quality.

Eighth, according to the findings of this study, perceived quality is found to be positively related to young Chinese consumers' brand loyalty. Therefore, the significance of perceived quality cannot be underestimated. As mentioned above, the findings of this study reveal that user-generated social media brand communication can positively influence young Chinese consumers' perception of brand quality. Hence, it is crucial for marketing managers to frequently deliver useful and attractive information about brand quality to consumers in order to facilitate user-generated social media brand communication, and, finally, achieve the enhancement of young Chinese consumers' perceptions of brand quality.

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Ninth, in terms of the relationships among the consumer-based brand equity dimensions and purchase intention, except for brand awareness, the other three dimensions (brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty) are confirmed to have positive influences on purchase intention. Regarding the impact of brand association on purchase intention, as discussed above, a positive perception of the co-creation of social media brand communication can positively affect young Chinese consumers' brand associations. Therefore, marketing managers should deliver more useful and attractive information about the brand to stimulate and facilitate consumers to engage in the co-creation of social media brand communication, and, the more brand associations young Chinese consumers have, the more likely they will buy the product.

With regard to the impact of perceived quality on purchase intention, as stated earlier, a positive perception of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality. Thus, marketing managers should deliver and emphasise more useful and attractive information regarding the product quality to stimulate users to create or share relevant information with others, and the better the quality that young Chinese consumers perceive, the more likely they will purchase the product.

Regarding the effect of brand loyalty on purchase intention, as discussed before, a positive perception of firm-generated social media brand communication can positively affect purchase intention. Therefore, marketing managers should deliver more useful and attractive brand-related information and employ marketing strategies to maintain consumers' loyalty, and the more loyal young Chinese consumers are, the more likely they will be to conduct the purchase behaviour.

Tenth, last but not least, based on the findings of this study, country-of-origin is proven to have a positive impact on brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Accordingly, marketing managers should pay more attention to the significance of country-of-origin in enhancing consumer-based brand equity among young Chinese consumers. Regarding the impact of country-of-origin on brand association, based on the findings from the qualitative research, it shows that

country-of-origin is likely to have more influence on brand association for consumers from developing countries, e.g. China, therefore, marketing managers should emphasise and deliver more attractive information about brand country-of-origin to young Chinese consumers. Besides, regarding the effect of country-of-origin on perceived quality, marketing managers should emphasise the brand country-of-origin concerning the brand quality and deliver this kind of information frequently to young Chinese consumers to make them fully aware of the brand quality. Finally, with regard to the impact of country-of-origin on brand loyalty, marketing managers should maintain its high quality and superiority of products and highlight its brand country-of-origin in order to retain young Chinese consumers as their loyal customers.

8.3. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As with other studies, this research also has limitations. In the following section, the limitations in terms of research context, research design, and measurement issues are elaborated.

8.3.1. Research limitations

The researcher attempted to obtain a deeper insight into the relationships among the motivations for engaging in user-generated social media brand communication, the metrics of social media brand communication, the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity, country-of-origin, and purchase intention. Although the researcher made every effort in this study, it is not possible to avoid limitations.

The following limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. First, this study provides an extensive examination of social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity as the focal constructs, the underlying dimensions, antecedents, and the outcome. However, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive investigation for all elements affecting the studied phenomenon in a single study, therefore, other constructs could probably be employed and may even turn out to be more effective. For example, this research only investigated the motivation for users to engage in user-generated social media brand communication but did not investigate the motivation for users to engage in the co-creation of social media

brand communication and the motivation for marketing managers to engage in firm-generated social media brand communication. In addition, due to the limitation of the sample sources, only young Chinese consumers rather than marketing managers were investigated.

Second, the limitations of the method of sampling should also be taken into account. As this research was implemented in a single setting, which was limited to the context of China, the findings might not be the same in a different country. Therefore, in future research, it would be better to replicate this study in other countries in order to examine the generalisability of the findings (external validity) (see 8.2.1.3, theory testing and generalisability).

Third, in the qualitative and quantitative studies, a lack of access to a complete sampling framework caused this study to adopt a non-probability sampling technique (i.e. judgement sampling), and, hence, is another limitation. Probability sampling techniques are generally employed to enable researchers to estimate the sampling errors (Churchill, 1996) and are also employed to eliminate potential bias regarding the generalisability and validity of the measurement scales (Churchill, 1979).

Fourth, the sample was limited to young Chinese consumers, a one-sided view, therefore, further research should also investigate the managerial perspective to broaden the scope of the research. Also, future research should look at a wider age group and examine the significance of the age group regarding the relationships among social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity.

Fifth, in terms of the conceptual framework, as this study investigated consumer-based brand equity rather than brand equity, only four of Aaker's five core brand equity dimensions were selected, and the other dimension (other proprietary brand assets) was omitted as it relates to firm-based brand equity. Thus, future research should also try to relate social media brand communication to company financial performance indicators, such as shareholder value, to gain a deeper insight into the benefits of social media communications to corporate financial success. Future

research in this field should be conducted in different countries to produce stronger validation and generalisation of the findings.

Sixth, in terms of the measurement scales, due to the time restriction and the limitation of sample size, this study was only conducted in the fashion industry. A broader spectrum of industries should be investigated in the future, which will yield a clearer indication of the various mechanisms operating with brands of different industries. Besides, as the study was only conducted in China, the generalisability of the research findings is limited. Therefore, the study should be repeated in different countries and its extended measurement scales applied to other sample groups to enhance its construct validity.

8.3.2. Future research avenues

In focusing on the impact of social media brand communication dimensions and country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity, the antecedent of user-generated social media brand communication and the consequence of the consumer-based brand equity dimensions in the context of China from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, this research opens numerous potential routes for future research. This section offers some suggestions to expand the existing body of knowledge in the literature on brand communication, consumer-based brand equity, country-of-origin, and purchase intention.

First, in terms of measurement and study validation, this study adopted a mixed-methods approach to develop and purify the measurement scales for motivations for users to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, each dimension of social media brand communication, each dimension of consumer-based brand equity, country-of-origin, and purchase intention. Accordingly, future research could consider applying these measurement scales to the study.

Second, as this study first comprises the co-creation of social media brand communication into the social media brand communication dimensions, future research could further examine the relationships among social media brand communication dimensions (firm-generated social media brand communication, user-generated social media brand communication, and co-creation of social media

brand communication). For example, investigating the impact of firm-generated social media brand communication on user-generated social media brand communication and the impact of firm-generated social media brand communication on the co-creation of social media brand communication. Besides, as this study demonstrates the validation of co-creation of social media brand communication as a dimension of social media brand communication, future research could consider exploring the motivations for users to engage in the co-creation of social media brand communication.

Third, based on the conceptual model of this study, e.g. the motivations for users to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, which is from the perspectives of consumers, future studies could further explore and investigate the motivation for marketing managers to engage in firm-generated social media brand communication, which is from the perspectives of companies. Besides, future research could investigate other possible consequences of consumer-based brand equity.

Fourth, as this study was conducted in China in order to mainly investigate the relationship between the focal constructs – social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity – from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, future research could replicate the conceptual model of this research to other industries, countries, age groups, and managerial perspective to examine the validity and generalisability of the results.

Fifth, as this study was only conducted in one country and one industry, future studies could consider conducting comparative analysis among different countries or different industries to produce stronger validation and generalisation of the findings.

Sixth, some hypotheses of this research are rejected by the statistical data, such as the positive impact of firm-generated social media brand communication on brand association and perceived quality; the positive impact of user-generated social media brand communication on brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty; the positive influence of co-creation of social media brand communication on brand

awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty; and the positive effect of brand awareness on purchase intention. These results may be another issue that needs future investigation.

8.4. SUMMARY

In this chapter, the researcher elaborates the potential theoretical and managerial contributions. In addition, the findings can be generalised to other countries that have certain common characteristics, such as economic development level, social culture, and consumption habits. Some limitations, however, should also be noted. For example, this study did not investigate the motivations for users to engage in the co-creation of social media brand communication and the motivations for marketing managers to engage in firm-generated social media brand communication, due to the limitation of the source of the samples. Therefore, the researcher suggests that future research should investigate from different perspectives and in different countries.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of social media brand communication dimensions on consumer-based brand equity dimensions, the causal relationships among consumer-based brand equity, the factors which influence user-generated social media brand communication (its antecedents), the relationships among consumer-based brand equity dimensions and purchase intention (its consequence), and the relationships among the country-of-origin and consumer-based brand equity dimensions in China, a non-Western setting, from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers.

In terms of theoretical implications, this research contributes to the extension of knowledge in the literature of brand communication and consumer-based brand equity, as previous studies mainly focused on traditional marketing communication on mass media, this research investigates the impact of social media brand communication on consumer-based brand equity. In addition, this research is the first to add the construct 'co-creation of social media brand communication' as a dimension of social media brand communication and investigate its influences on consumer-based brand equity dimensions. Furthermore, it is one of the first empirical

studies integrating motivations for users to engage in user-generated social media brand communication, social media brand communication dimensions, consumer-based brand equity dimensions, purchase intention and country-of-origin into one conceptual model in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the above relationships. In terms of managerial implications, this research provides some managerial contributions to the marketing managers of international high street fashion brands in order to enhance the company's brand equity among young Chinese consumers with the help of brand communication on Chinese social media platforms.

The study adopted the mixed-methods approach to better explore and identify a new and complex phenomenon and to achieve reliable conclusions. The qualitative research (13 in-depth interviews and 3 focus groups with 6 participants per group) helped explore the potential relationships between the constructs and refine the measurement items of each construct that originated from or was adapted from the existing literature, and then the theoretical framework was examined by quantitative research. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to analyse the collected data. The findings reveal that altruism has a positive impact on user-generated social media brand communication. Besides, firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive influence on brand awareness and brand loyalty; user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality; and co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive impact on brand association. In addition, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty can positively affect purchase intention. Country-of-origin can positively influence brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. These findings signify the important roles of social media brand communication dimensions and country-of-origin in enhancing consumer-based brand equity from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers.

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Appendix A: Topic Guide for the Interviews

Description of respondent:
Date:
Place:
Duration of interview:
Interviewer:

The interviewer will first provide explanations about the objectives of the research to respondents. The respondent will be asked:

An overall view of social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity

What is your understanding of social media brand communication?

How do you describe social media brand communication on WeChat?

What is your understanding of consumer-based brand equity?

What metrics do you think consumer-based brand equity contain?

What links between social media brand communication and consumer-based brand equity can you think of?

RQ1 – From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are consumers' motivations to engage in user-generated social media brand communication?

H1a: Altruism has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.	Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ho and Dempsey, 2010; Parra-López et al., 2011; Payal et al., 2013; Phelps et al., 2004; Presi et al., 2014; Price et al., 1995; Ulrich, 1998; Yoo and Gretzel, 2011	Do you consider that altruism is one of the motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication? Why?
H1b: Venting motivation has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.	Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sparks and Browning, 2010	Do you consider that venting is one of the motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication? Why?
H1c: Vengeance has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.	Bechwati and Morrin, 2003; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Payal et al., 2013; Zourrig et al., 2009	Do you consider that vengeance is one of the motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand

		communication? Why?
H1d: Self-enhancement has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.	Alicke et al., 1995; Berthon et al., 2008; Chung and Darke, 2006; Courtois et al., 2009; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Hepper et al., 2013; Ho and Dempsey, 2010; Payal et al., 2013; Sundaram, Mitra and Webster, 1998; Shao, 2009; Shrauger and Schoeneman, 1979	Do you consider that self-enhancement is one of the motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication? Why?
H1e: Economic motivation has a positive effect on user-generated social media brand communication.	Baldus et al, 2015; Gummerus et al, 2012; Enginkaya and Yilmaz, 2014; Martins and Patrício, 2013; Muntinga et al, 2011; Tsai and Men, 2013; Rohm et al., 2013; Yoo and Gretzel, 2011	Do you consider that economic motivation is one of the motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication? Why?
Extra questions		Can you think of any other motivations for customers to engage in social media brand communication?

RQ2 – From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of social media brand communication affect each dimension of consumer-based brand equity?

H2a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness.	Bruhn et al., 2012; Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Jansen et al., 2009; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015	What is your understanding of firm-generated social media brand communication? How do you describe firm-generated social media brand communication on WeChat? What is your understanding of brand awareness? How are you aware of a brand? Do you consider a positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication can positively

		influence brand awareness? Why?
H2b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness.	Bruhn et al., 2012; Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Hutter et al., 2013; Jansen et al., 2009; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015	What is your understanding of user-generated social media brand communication? How do you describe user-generated social media brand communication on WeChat? Do you consider a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication can positively influence brand awareness? Why?
H2c: A positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand awareness.		What is your understanding of co-creation of social media brand communication? How do you describe co-creation of social media brand communication on WeChat? Do you consider a positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication can positively influence brand awareness? Why?
H3a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand association.	Bruhn et al., 2012; Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Jansen et al., 2009; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015	What is your understanding of brand association? How do you associate a brand? Do you consider a positive evaluation of firm-generated

		social media brand communication can positively influence brand association? Why?
H3b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand association.	Bruhn et al., 2012; Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Hutter et al., 2013; Jansen et al., 2009; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015	Do you consider a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication can positively influence brand association? Why?
H3c: A positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand association.		Do you consider a positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication can positively influence brand association? Why?
H4a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality.	Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco, 2005	What is your understanding of perceived quality? How do you evaluate brand quality? Do you consider a positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication can positively influence perceived quality? Why?
H4b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality.	Murtiasih et al., 2014; Li and Bernoff, 2011; Riegner, 2007; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015	Do you consider a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication can positively influence perceived quality? Why?

H4c: A positive evaluation of co-creation social media brand communication has a positive effect on perceived quality.		Do you consider a positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication can positively influence perceived quality? Why?
H5a: A positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand loyalty.	Bruhn et al., 2013; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015	What is your understanding of brand loyalty? How are you loyal to a brand? Do you consider a positive evaluation of firm-generated social media brand communication can positively influence brand loyalty? Why?
H5b: A positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand loyalty.	Bruhn et al., 2013; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015	Do you consider a positive evaluation of user-generated social media brand communication can positively influence brand loyalty? Why?
H5c: A positive evaluation of co-creation social media brand communication has a positive effect on brand loyalty.		Do you consider a positive evaluation of co-creation of social media brand communication can positively influence brand loyalty? Why?
RQ3 – From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, what are the causal relationships among the consumer-based brand equity dimensions?		
H6: Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand association.	Aaker, 1991; Kumar et al., 2013; Tong and Hawley, 2009; Singh and Pattanayak, 2016	Do you consider brand awareness can positively influence brand association? Why?
H7: Brand awareness has a positive effect on perceived quality.	Aaker, 1991; Khan et al., 2015; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo and Donthu, 2001	Do you consider brand awareness can positively influence perceived quality?

		Why?
H8: Brand association has a positive effect on perceived quality.	Aaker, 1991; Khan et al., 2015; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Yoo and Donthu, 2001	Do you consider brand association can positively influence perceived quality? Why?
H9: Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand loyalty.	Aaker, 1991; Khan et al., 2015; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Torres et al., 2015; Yoo and Donthu, 2001	Do you consider brand awareness can positively influence brand loyalty? Why?
H10: Brand association has a positive effect on brand loyalty.	Aaker, 1991; Khan et al., 2015; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Torres et al., 2015; Yoo and Donthu, 2001	Do you consider brand association can positively influence brand loyalty? Why?
H11 ： Perceived quality has a positive effect on brand loyalty.	Khan et al., 2015; Torres et al., 2015; Yee and Sidek, 2008	Do you consider perceived quality can positively influence brand loyalty? Why?
RQ4 – From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does each dimension of consumer-based brand equity affect purchase intention?		
H12: Brand awareness has a positive effect on purchase intention.	Aaker, 1996; Khan et al., 2015; Macdonald and Sharp, 2000; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013; Shij and Piron, 2002; Wang and Li, 2012	What is your understanding of purchase intention? How do you describe your purchase intention? Do you consider brand awareness can positively influence purchase intention?
H13: Brand association has a positive effect on purchase intention.	Aaker, 1996; Khan et al., 2015; Macdonald and Sharp, 2000; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013; Shij and Piron, 2002; Wang and Li, 2012	Do you consider brand association can positively influence purchase intention?
H14: Perceived quality has a positive effect on purchase intention.	Aaker, 1996; Jones et al., 2002; Khan et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2009; Kumar et al., 2009; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013; Shij and Piron, 2002; Wang and Li, 2012	Do you consider perceived quality can positively influence purchase intention?
H15: Brand loyalty has a positive effect on purchase	Aaker, 1996; Jahn, B and Kunz, W., 2012; Khan et al., 2015; Schivinski and	Do you consider brand loyalty can positively influence

intention.	Dąbrowski, 2013; Shij and Piron, 2002; Wang and Li, 2012	purchase intention?
RQ5 – From the perspectives of young Chinese consumers, how does brand country-of-origin affect the consumer-based brand equity dimensions?		
H16a: Country-of-origin has a positive effect on brand association.	Batra et al., 2000; Hu et al., 2012; Lin and Kao, 2004; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Paswan and Sharma, 2004; Zeugner-Roth et al., 2008	What is your understanding of country-of-origin? How do you evaluate brand country-of-origin? Do you consider country-of-origin can positively influence brand association?
H16b: Country-of-origin has a positive effect on perceived quality.	Batra et al., 2000; Hu et al., 2012; Lin and Kao, 2004; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Paswan and Sharma, 2004; Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012; Godey et al., 2012; Zeugner-Roth et al., 2008	Do you consider country-of-origin can positively influence perceived quality?
H16c: Country-of-origin has a positive effect on brand loyalty.	Batra et al., 2000; Hu et al., 2012; Lin and Kao, 2004; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Pappu et al., 2006; Paswan and Sharma, 2004; Zeugner-Roth et al., 2008	Do you consider country-of-origin can positively influence brand loyalty?

Appendix B: The Coding of the Interviews

Table B-1: Social media brand communication on WeChat (three constructs)

Social media brand communication on WeChat (Domain)

"Consumers communicate and share some brand-related information on social media. For example, WeChat is the most popular social media platform in China, which has been expanding its function from social media platform to electronic business platform that sellers and buyers both communicate brand or product information and it achieves final purchase through this kind of communication." (Interview 1)

"It is a way of communication between consumers and companies through social media platforms which is based on the currently most advanced mobile network technology to promote and popularise brands and products. In terms of companies, there are three types of brand communication on WeChat now. Firstly, advertisement can be launched on the Moments of WeChat which is similar to Newsfeed and timeline of FB. The targeted users are selected by user's age, gender, interest, living area and so on. This kind of advertisement is more effective to match the company's positioning, especially compared to traditional mass media advertising. Secondly, the official accounts of WeChat has the menu function including options such as the collection of previous articles, the link to official online store and messaging and so on. Thirdly, the advent of WeChat little app can largely strengthen the bond between users and companies, as it is a gathering of a wide variety of apps with different functions on WeChat. In terms of users, I always see my WeChat friends share some brand-related information on the Moments like articles, photos and videos, or sometimes they send messages or share information directly to my private chat. Besides, I also share product information sometimes especially when I am into this product, I would like to share the information I think is useful to my friends. " (Informant 3)

"It is a kind of brand marketing through social media. In terms of China, social media brand communication mainly depends on the friend relationship, for example, consumers get to know one brand from friend's recommendation through social media. Daigou, which refers to the people who worked part time as a freelance retail consultant who posts product information and builds client networks by means of WeChat." (Interview 4)

"It is a way of brand promotion on social media platform, such as advertisement and advertorial." (Interview 5)

"Advertising on social media to promote a brand, make the public aware of this brand and enhance the awareness of it. In terms of famous brands, as they are well-known, I can buy the products through their WeChat official accounts. While in terms of some emerging brands, I could only trust my friends' recommendations and some fashion celebrities who I like." (Interview 8)

"It is a way of brand promotion through the social media platform which is characterised by its interactivity, therefore it enables interactions between brand and consumers. I have seen information regarding sales promotion and new arrival of products, especially in some festival, it is quite common." (Interview 9)

"One of a major feature of WeChat is that it is an enclosed circle of friends and acquaintances, as only your WeChat friends can send information to you as well as see the information you post on the Moments of WeChat. Therefore a notable advantage of WeChat is the influence of friends on brand communication, which is based on the sense of trust." (Interview 10)

"In terms of the feature of WeChat, it is an enclosed social media platform, which means you cannot see other users' contents unless you are WeChat friends. In other words, WeChat is a social media platform used to communicate with acquaintances, friends and relatives. Therefore, it is more trustworthy than other type of social media platforms." (Interview 11)

"Releasing brand advertisement on social media. I have seen the advertisement of Starbucks on my Moments, which I clicked and saw the discount information inside. Besides, I followed some famous Chinese fashion bloggers' WeChat public accounts to obtain information about fashion brands. For example, they always release articles regarding the trendy clothes and how to match them properly. And it also provides links to the online shops than users can buy what they like there, which is directional and convenient." (Interview 13)

Constructs(Tree node)	Items(Free node)	Sample quotes from the interviews
Firm-generated social media brand communication	I am satisfied with the content generated by companies about [brand] on WeChat.	*"I am pretty into the innovative form of presentation of the advertisement on WeChat, since I can interact with it such as giving like or comment. For example, a renowned Chinese cosmetic brand with nearly one hundred years history published an advertisement to display its representative and classic*
	The level of the content generated by companies about [brand] on WeChat meets my expectations.	
	The content generated by	

	companies about [brand] on WeChat performs well, when compared with other companies. The content generated by companies about [brand] is very attractive. I can get enough information about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication. I got recommendations from firm-generated social media brand communication to buy [brand]. I only hear positive things about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication. **Item generated from the interviews:** The content generated by companies about [brand] is useful.	*products launched in different time nodes. The innovation of the advertisement is even beyond my expectation, since it enables users to be the actors in the advertisement who can explore these products launched in different age, which obviously makes the advertisement interactive, interesting and entertaining. I think it is even better than some advertisement of internationally renowned cosmetics brands I have seen before. In general, I am satisfied with the firm-generated social media brand communication on WeChat." (Interview 2)* *"I have seen pop-up advertisement of Zara on my Moments of WeChat. As users can comment on the advertisement and, I saw the comments from my WeChat friends and we also replied to each other's comment on this advertisement to exchange our opinions. In addition, I prefer this kind of pop-up advertisement on WeChat, since it has various kind of forms, such as video clip, cartoon and dynamic graph, which looks interesting and creative and always makes me feel relaxed. Besides, if you are interested in it, you can click it to see the whole advertisement, while you are not interested in it,*

		you can simply click the option of hiding it. Technically, I think it is superior to traditional mass media advertisement, so I prefer it." (Interview 7)
		"I think the advertisement appeared automatically on my Moments of WeChat is quite useful, you know, due to the big data technique to screen users , the advertisement I receive is generally the brand that I am interested in or loyal to."(Interview 4)
		"I followed some brands' official accounts on WeChat, because I think they can offer me useful information, such as the introduction of latest products, the bestselling product ranking and discount information and so on."(Interview 6)
User-generated social media brand communication	I am satisfied with the content generated by users about [brand] on WeChat. The level of the content generated by users about [brand] on WeChat meets my expectations. The content generated by users about [brand] on WeChat performs well, when compared with other brands. The content generated by users	*"Some of my friends always post words and images about some products such as cosmetics and clothes on the Moments to sell. I always find their posts attractive to me and want to buy. As they are my friends who have similar taste with me and I know them for quite a long time, I trust the quality of products they sell. So I prefer to buy their products rather than strangers who sell the same products and I also prefer the products that my friend sell to other brands of*

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	about [brand] is very attractive.	*same category." (Interview 5)*
	I can get enough information about [brand] through user-generated social media brand communication.	*"As WeChat enables users to set up a group chat and add their WeChat friends to the group. We always chat about some fashion brands as well as exchange some brand-related information in the group chat. I think it is really convenient for me to get some useful information, so I am quite satisfied with this kind of communication. In general, the content shared by others can meet my expectation or even exceed my expectation, therefore, I really prefer to get brand-related information by making use of social media."*
	I got recommendations from user-generated social media brand communication to buy [brand].	
	I only hear positive things about [brand] through user-generated social media brand communication.	
	Item generated from the interviews:	
	The content generated by users about [brand] is useful.	*(Interview 7)*
		"My friends often send me brand-related messages to my WeChat, when they are shopping and noticing some discount information of brands I like, and of course this kind of information is quite useful to me. I really appreciate them." *(Interview 2)*
		"As WeChat enables users to set up a group chat and add their WeChat friends to the group. We always chat about some fashion brands as well as exchange some brand-related information in the group chat. I

		think it is really convenient for me to get some useful information, so I am quite satisfied with this kind of communication." (Interview 7)
Co-creation of social media brand communication	I am satisfied with the content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] on WeChat. The level of content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] on WeChat meets my expectations. The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] on WeChat performs well, when compared with other brands. The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] is attractive. I can get enough information about [brand] through co-creation of social media brand communication. I got recommendations from co-creation of social media brand communication to buy [brand]. I only hear positive thing about [brand] through co-creation of social media brand communication.	*"I have seen some public accounts started some brand activities with awards, for example, customers whose comment receives the maximum likes, the customer will gain a prize. So I think this kind of information is really attractive. In other words, economic motivation is effective for me." (Interview 7)* *"I have seen my WeChat friends commenting on some advertisements on the Moments of WeChat, which I think is a kind of co-creation of social media brand communication." (Interview 9)* *"Users comment on the brand articles that are released on brands' official accounts. I find the comments receiving most likes are always useful for me and meet my expectations (Interview 10)* *"I think the co-creation between international fashion brands and famous Chinese fashion bloggers is a noticeable kind of co-creation of social media brand communication. For*

| | **Item generated from the interviews:**

The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] is useful. | *example, the fashion bloggers share some firm-generated articles about latest products and then add captions to recommend the products, fulfilling their celebrity effect. In my opinion, I trust the recommendation from famous celebrities and I think this kind of information is useful for me."* (Interview 11)

"If I like a brand, I will follow its WeChat official account, and when it releases useful information, such as the discount information, I would like to share this article and add my experiences and thoughts of using this product, as it can show my taste and lifestyle. Besides, when I see an article about some new product introduction, if the consumers' comments such as their usage experiences are positive, I will have a good first impression on it, which is superior to the homogeneous brand lacking of consumers' positive comments." (Interview 13) |

Source: developed by the researcher for the present study

Table B-2: Consumer-based brand equity (four constructs)

Consumer-based brand equity (domain)
"The quality of products, the style of the brands, consumer purchasing experience, after-sales service, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty." (Interview 3) *"Brand awareness, quality and price and performance ratio." (Interview 5)* *"Brand notion, brand pursuit and the price of products." (Interview 7)* *"Brand awareness, brand loyalty and brand attachment." (Interview 10)* *"First, consumers acquire brand information from media. Second, consumers get to know the brand from celebrities' endorsement. Third, a long-term accumulation of understanding and knowledge of the brand." (Interview 11)* *"I think it is an intangible value consisted of brand awareness, brand reputation and approval degree." (Interview 12)*

Constructs(Tree node)	Items(Free node)	Sample quotes from the interviews
Brand awareness	I easily recognise [brand]. I can recognise [brand] among other competing brands. I easily recall the symbol/logo of [brand]. I know what [brand] looks like. I can give own opinion of [brand]. I am aware of [brand] presence.	*"I am aware of what I can buy from this brand." (Interview 1)* *"If I hear about or see a new brand, I will form a first impression positive or negative towards it." (Interview 2)* *"If you mention this brand's name, the brand image will come into my mind at once." (Interview 5)* *"I have seen this brand in a shopping mall for several times so that I can remember its name and logo and I can easily recognise it from other brands in the same category." (Interview 7)* *"I have seen this brand's advertisement on the Moments before so that I can recognise it." (Interview 9)*

		"I have heard of this brand before from my friend and I remember its name." (Interview 11)
Brand association	Several characteristics of [brand] instantly come to my mind. I associate [brand] with functions. I associate [brand] with uniqueness. I associate [brand] with prestige. I associate [brand] with creativity. I have a clear image of the type of person who would use [brand]. I like the brand image of [brand].	"When I see an advertisement about a new product of a luxury brand, I will always associate the product with some unique feature, high price and good quality and may long for it." (Interview 3) "If a brand that I am loyal to launches a new product, normally I will be willing to buy, as I am familiar with the brand's quality that I can trust." (Interview 5) "I am a fan of Nike, as I like its products, especially the sneakers. I consider it as the best sports brand worldwide with dynamic properties." (Interview 6) "I am interested in cars and Benz is my favorite brand, as it is famous for driving performance and quality, I associate it with high reputation and credibility." (Interview 7) "When I see a woman wearing Chanel suits, I will associate her with elegance and wealth, based on the positioning and targeted customers of Chanel." (Interview 8)
Perceived quality	Products of [brand] are of great quality. Products of [brand] are very durable. Products of [brand] are very reliable. Products of [brand] are worth their price. Products function as well as I expected.	"I can only evaluate the quality of a product based on my own usage of the product, because I only believe the real using experience rather than advertising. For example, If I use a liquid foundation and it makes my skin look smoother, I will trust its function and quality." (Interview 3) "Generally my evaluation of the quality of a new product depends on the first impression made by the advertisement, if it fully shows the advantageous features of the product, I tend to think it has high quality." (Interview 6) "I always buy Uniqlo's clothes, because the clothes is

	The materials used by the [brand] are comfortable. I trust the quality of products from [brand].	*durable, which means it can be used for a relatively long time compared to other high-street clothing brands." (Interview 7)* *"Normally I evaluate the quality of a product based on its material or design, if the material seems durable or the design seems exquisite, I am likely to consider it has good quality." (Interview 9)* *"If the packaging of the product looks reliable, I am more likely to think it has a good quality." (Interview 11)*
Brand loyalty	I am willing to pay higher price for [brand] although other brands have similar characteristics. I intend to remain the [brand]'s customer. I would love to recommend [brand] to my friends. I consider myself to be loyal to [brand]. The product of [brand] would be my first choice. I will not buy other brands if [brand] is available at store. I would like to choose [brand] when purchasing clothes.	*"Dior is my favourite cosmetic brand, when it launches new product, such as lipsticks and eyeshadows, I will buy it, no matter the price is always more expensive than many other cosmetic brands." (Interview 1)* *"As a loyal customer of H&M, I keep buying clothes of this brand. And if I find some clothes suitable for my friend, I would love to recommend it to my friend." (Interview 4)* *"I think I am extremely loyal to Nike, as I have purchased its products for more than 10 years and I think I have already been accustomed to buying and using its products and will not switch to other sports brand either in the future." (Interview 5)* *"I am a super fan of iPhone, which means it is the absolute first choice and the only choice in my mind when I want to buy a mobile phone. Even if sometimes some colour of phone I like is out of stock, I would like to wait for it. Till now I have bought more than four iPhones." (Interview 9)*

Source: developed by the researcher for the present study

Table B-3: The motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication (five constructs)

The motivations for consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication (domain)		
Constructs(Tree node)		**Items(Free node)**	**Sample quotes from the interviews**
The motivations for consumers to engage in social media brand communication	**Altruism**	I would like to help other people. I would like to share what I have. I would like to contribute to a pool of information. Information other people posted helped me, so I would like to return the favour. I want to give others the opportunity to buy the right product.	*"I always share deposit information of products with my friends on WeChat." (Interview 1)* *"For example, when I was shopping in a department store, I saw some products of Dior is on sale, I would like to take a picture and sent it to my friend through WeChat." (Interview 3)*
	Venting motivation	I want to express my anger about my negative experience. I want to vent my negative feelings. My contributions help me to shake off frustrations about bad buys. I want to seek consolation.	*"Because Wechat is a virtual friend circle, users can post information to release their negative feelings about some product and obtain consolation from their Wechat friends." (Interview 1)* *"I think vengeance and venting motivation can be combined into one as they are related, which are both negative comments from consumers." (Interview 4)* *"I think ordinary consumers only release negative emotions on*

| | | | | *social media rather than revenge on the brands.*" (Interview 5)

"Because customers need an outlet to release negative emotions, which are caused, in this case, by awful product quality or customer experience. For instance, I saw my friend post the pictures of a shirt from H&M, which is stretched out of the shape after the first wash." (Interview 7)

"For example, the clothes I bought from Zara severely shank after I washed it for the first time." (interview 9)

"All the interviewees consider venting as one motivation for consumers to engage in social media brand communication." (Interview 10)

"For instance, I saw my friend's post about the bad quality of some high street fashion clothes she purchased on WeChat." (Interview 12) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | **Vengeance** | I want to take revenge upon the company, as I suffered a great loss.

I want to take actions to sabotage the company.

I want the company to lose customers. | *"If the product does harm on consumer's mental or physical wellbeing, it will trigger consumer's vengeance on the company. But compared to venting motivation, this motivation happens far less.*" (Interview 2) |

			"Because if the product has bad quality, consumers may warn others not to buy this product to avoid potential loss." (Interview 4)
			"I have never seen this kind of information on WeChat." (Interview 5)
			"WeChat as an enclosed network of friends and acquaintances is not suitable for posting negative information, since it may adversely affect other's opinion towards you, Besides, if a problem does exist, you should seek a proper channel to resolve it." (Interview 8)
	Self-enhancement	I want to show my personality to others. I feel good when I can tell others my buying success. I want to show others that I am a clever customer. I want to gain attention from others. Showing that I use this product makes a good impression. I want to show my fashion taste.	*"Because consumers can show off their wealth by posting brand-related information." (Interview 4)* *"Because it is a way to indicate consumer's fashion taste. For example, the ones who wear high street fashion brands look youthful and trendy, while the ones who wear high-end fashion brands look elegant and classy." (Interview 8)*
	Economic motivation	I interact with brands on WeChat in order to get	*"Because sometimes brands launch some online promotional*

		vouchers or coupons. I interact with brands on WeChat in order to get free products or other special offers. I would like to get some money reward from [brand]. I am looking for some benefit. I want to have a financial compensation. **Item generated from the interviews:** I would like to bring some financial benefit to my friends.	*campaign, for example, users need to share some information to get the discount coupon."* *(Interview 1)* *"Because by sharing brand's promotional information with their WeChat friends, it is beneficial for their friends so that it can strengthen their friendship. For example, my friend shared the discount information of H&M on WeChat." (Interview 3)* *"Some of my WeChat friends post information regarding helping us to buy the discount clothes such as Zara, H&M and Uniqlo. Because in China, the brand promotion is not always nation-wide, it can be specified in certain area in China, the price of same brand may differ sometimes. Therefore some people take advantage of it to sell products with lower price to others." (Interview 7)* *"I only share information of the brand that I really like to get some discount, if I do not like it, the discount still cannot attract me." (Interview 10)*

Source: developed by the researcher for the present study

Table B-4: Purchase intention (one construct)

Purchase intention		
Constructs(Tree node)	**Items(Free node)**	**Sample quotes from the interviews**
purchase intention	It is possible that I will buy [brand] in the near future.	*"I made my mind to buy some brand's product the next time I go shopping." (Interview 4)*
	I will seriously consider buying [brand] in the future.	*"I intend to buy some brand's product in the future." (Interview 7)*
	I have intention to buy [brand] in the future.	*"I prefer some brands so that I plan to buy their products frequently." (Interview 8)*
	I plan to buy products of [brand] more often.	*"My inclination to buying some brands' products more often, as I found they are really suitable and useful for me." (Interview 10)*
	I plan to buy products of [brand] right away.	*"When I find the product I planned to buy, I will buy it without hesitance." (Interview 12)*
		"When I am satisfied with some new product I used, I may plan to buy it again the next time." (Interview 13)

Source: developed by the researcher for the present study

Table B-5: Country-of-origin (one construct)

Country-of-origin		
Constructs(Tree node)	**Items(Free node)**	**Sample quotes from the interviews**
Country-of-origin	The [country] is a rich developed country. The [country] is a country that has high quality in its workmanship. The [country] is a country that is prestigious. The [country] is a country that is innovative.	*"When someone mentions the brand country-of-origin of Apple, I will associate it with USA that is a country equipped with most advanced technology so that it deserves extensive prestige worldwide." (Interview 3)* *"I have associations with China that is dominant in manufacture as Chinese labours are generally adept at crafts so that it is called world factory." (Interview 8)*

Source: developed by the researcher for the present study

Appendix C: The pilot study questionnaire

An investigation of the impact of social media brand communication on brand equity for young Chinese consumers: a study of international high street fashion brands in China

Middlesex University, London, UK

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research aims to examine the influence of social media brand communication on consumer-based brand equity from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. To be more specific, it aims to explore the influence of each dimension of social media brand communication on each dimension of consumer-based brand equity. Second, it aims to explore the motivations of user-generated social media brand communication. Third, it aims to investigate the causal relationships among the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity. Forth, it aims to examine the effect of each dimension of consumer-based brand equity on purchase intention. Last but not the least, it aims to explore the influence of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity dimensions.

This questionnaire aims to collect data from young Chinese consumers through WeChat about the motivations of consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication (altruism; venting; vengeance; self-enhancement; economic motivation), social media brand communication (firm-generated social media brand communication; user-generated social media brand communication; co-creation of social media brand communication), consumer-based brand equity (brand awareness; brand association; perceived quality; brand loyalty), country-of-origin, and purchase intention.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential:

- It will not be possible to identify the respondents engaged in this study.

- The data will be used for statistical purposes only and will be published in aggregated form. No single name will be revealed.

YOUR SUPPORT IS IMPORTANT

The achievement of this research depends greatly on the data contributed by young Chinese consumers like you, one of the students of Sichuan University.

ADVANTAGE FOR YOU AS A RESPONDENT

The data collected from you can be applied to make suggestions for the management of international high street fashion brands targeting at young Chinese consumers about possible areas of brand communications through Chinese social media and improvement of consumer-based brand equity. These will enhance their level of branding in China and therefore boost them become more satisfactory for you as a consumer's demand.

Thank you for your co-operation,

Yuna Kan

Department of Marketing, Branding and Tourism, Business School, Middlesex University, London, UK
If you require more information about the questionnaire, please contact: Yuna Kan, Email: yk240@mdx.live.ac.uk

An investigation of the impact of social media brand communication on brand equity for young Chinese consumers: a study of international high street fashion brands in China

HOW TO FILL IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Please tick ☑ the option that best expresses your opinion. If any question is not applicable to you, please simply tick ☑ the "Not Applicable" option. There is no right or wrong answer in this questionnaire, as the purpose of it is to obtain your opinion on the impact of social media brand communication on consumer-based brand equity.

2. This questionnaire is structured so that it is easy and convenient to complete. It will take approximately 10-15 minutes to finish all of the questions.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements, as is shown by a score from "1" to "7"? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Neither Disagree Nor Agree, and 7 = Strongly Agree).

SECTION A - OPINIONS ABOUT FIRM-GENERATED SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION ON WECHAT

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I am satisfied with the content generated by companies about [brand] on WeChat.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. The level of the content generated by companies about [brand] on WeChat meets my expectations.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. The content generated by this company about [brand] on WeChat perform well, when compared with other companies.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. The content generated by companies about [brand] is very attractive.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I can get enough information about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I got recommendations from firm-generated social media brand communication to buy [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. I only hear positive thing about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
8. The content generated by companies about [brand] is useful.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

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SECTION B - OPINIONS ABOUT USER-GENERATED SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION ON WECHAT

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I am satisfied with the content generated by users about [brand] on WeChat.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. The level of the content generated by users about [brand] on WeChat meets my expectations.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. The content generated by users about this [brand] on WeChat performs well, when compared with other brands.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. The content generated by users about [brand] is very attractive.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I can get enough information about [brand] through user-generated social media brand communication.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I got recommendations from user-generated social media brand communication to buy [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. I only hear positive thing about [brand] through user-generated social media brand communication.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
8. The content generated by users about [brand] is useful.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION C - OPINIONS ABOUT CO-CREATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION ON WECHAT

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I am satisfied with the content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brands] on WeChat.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. The level of the content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brands] on WeChat meets my expectations.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about this [brand] on WeChat performs well, when compared with other brands.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brands] is very attractive.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I can get enough information about [brand] through co-creation of social media brand communication.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I got recommendations from co-creation of social media brand communication to buy [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. I only hear positive thing about [brand] through co-creation of social media brand communication.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
8. The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] is useful.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION D - OPINIONS ABOUT BRAND AWARENESS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I easily recognize [brand]	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I can recognize [brand] among other competing brands.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I easily recall the symbol/logo of [brand].	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I know what the [brand] looks like.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I can give my own opinion of [brand].	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I am aware of [brand] presence.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION E - OPINIONS ABOUT BRAND ASSOCIATION

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. Several characteristics of [brand] instantly come to my mind.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. I associate [brand] with functions.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. I associate [brand] with uniqueness.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. I associate [brand] with prestige.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I associate [brand] with creativity.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I have a clear image of the type of person who would use [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. I like the brand image of [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION F - OPINIONS ABOUT PERCEIVED QUALITY

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. Products of [brand] are of great quality.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. Products of [brand] are very durable.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. Products of [brand] are very reliable.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. The quality of products of [brand] worth their price.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. Products function are as well as I expected.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. The materials used by the [brand] are comfortable.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. I trust the quality of products from [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION G - OPINIONS ABOUT BRAND LOYALTY

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I am willing to pay higher price for [brand] although other brands have similar characteristics.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. I intend to remain the [brand]'s customer.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. I would love to recommend [brand] to my friends.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. I consider myself to be loyal to [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. The product of [brand] would be my first choice.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I will not buy other brands if [brand] is available at store.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. I would like to choose [brand] when purchasing clothes.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION H - OPINIONS ABOUT MOTIVATIONS TO ENGAGE IN USER-GENERATED SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I would like to help other people.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. I would like to share my own positive experiences	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. I would like to share what I have	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. Information other people posted help me, so I would like to return the favour.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I would like to contribute to a pool of information.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I want to give others the opportunity to buy the right product.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. I want to express my anger about my negative experience.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
8. I want to vent my negative feelings.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
9. My contributions help me to shake off frustrations about bad buys.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
10. I want to seek consolation.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
11. I want to pour my heart out.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
12. I want to take revenge upon the company, as I suffered a great loss.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
13. The company harmed me, and I will harm the company.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
14. I want to take actions to attempt to sabotage the company.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
15. I want the [brand] to lose customers.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

16. I want to give this brand a bad reputation.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
17. I want to show my personality to others.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
18. I feel good when I can tell others my buying success.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
19. I want to gain attention from others.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
20. I want to show my fashion taste to others	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
21. I want to show others that I am a clever customer.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
22. Showing that I use this product makes a good impression.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
23. I interact with brands on WeChat in order to get vouchers or coupons.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
24. I interact with brands on WeChat in order to get free products or other special offers.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
25. I would like to get some money reward from [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
26. I am looking for some benefit.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
27. I want to have a financial compensation.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
28. I would like to bring some financial benefit to my friends.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION I - OPINIONS ABOUT PURCHASE INTENTION

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. It is possible that I will buy [brand] in the near future.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. It is highly likely that I will buy [brand] in the future.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. I will seriously consider buying [brand] in the future.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. I plan to buy products of [brand] more often.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I plan to buy products of [brand] right away.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I have intention to buy [brand] in the future.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION J - OPINIONS ABOUT CONTRY-OF-ORIGIN

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. The [country] is a rich developed country.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. The [country] is a country that has high quality in its workmanship.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. The [country] is a country that is prestigious.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. The [country] is a country that is innovative.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. The [country] is a country that is competent in design.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I like [country].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. The [country] is technologically advanced.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION K - PROFILE

Please answer the following questions concerning your profile information. Confidentiality is assured and no individual data will be reported.

1. Your sex: □ Female □ Male

2. Age ……………

3. Level of your education □ Undergraduate level □ Master's degree □ PhD

Thank you very much for your co-operation

Appendix D: The main study questionnaire

An investigation of the impact of social media brand communication on brand equity for young Chinese consumers: a study of international high street fashion brands in China

Middlesex University, London, UK

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research aims to examine the influence of social media brand communication on consumer-based brand equity from the perspectives of young Chinese consumers. To be more specific, it aims to explore the influence of each dimension of social media brand communication on each dimension of consumer-based brand equity. Second, it aims to explore the motivations of user-generated social media brand communication. Third, it aims to investigate the causal relationships among the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity. Forth, it aims to examine the effect of each dimension of consumer-based brand equity on purchase intention. Last but not the least, it aims to explore the influence of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity dimensions.

This questionnaire aims to collect data from young Chinese consumers through WeChat about the motivations of consumers to engage in user-generated social media brand communication (altruism; venting; vengeance; self-enhancement; economic motivation), social media brand communication (firm-generated social media brand communication; user-generated social media brand communication; co-creation of social media brand communication), consumer-based brand equity (brand awareness; brand association; perceived quality; brand loyalty), country-of-origin, and purchase intention.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential:

- It will not be possible to identify the respondents engaged in this study.

- The data will be used for statistical purposes only and will be published in aggregated form. No single name will be revealed.

YOUR SUPPORT IS IMPORTANT

The achievement of this research depends greatly on the data contributed by young Chinese consumers like you, one of the students of Sichuan University.

ADVANTAGE FOR YOU AS A RESPONDENT

The data collected from you can be applied to make suggestions for the management of international high street fashion brands targeting at young Chinese consumers about possible areas of brand communications through Chinese social media and improvement of consumer-based brand equity. These will enhance their level of branding in China and therefore boost them become more satisfactory for you as a consumer's demand.

Thank you for your co-operation,

Yuna Kan

Department of Marketing, Branding and Tourism, Business School, Middlesex University, London, UK
If you require more information about the questionnaire, please contact: Yuna Kan, Email: yk240@mdx.live.ac.uk

SECTION A - OPINIONS ABOUT FIRM-GENERATED SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION ON WECHAT

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I am satisfied with the content generated by companies about [brand] on WeChat.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. The level of the content generated by companies about [brand] on WeChat meets my expectations.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. The content generated by this company about [brand] on WeChat perform well, when compared with other companies.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. The content generated by companies about [brand] is very attractive.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I can get enough information about [brand] through firm-generated social media brand communication.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. The content generated by companies about [brand] is useful.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION B - OPINIONS ABOUT USER-GENERATED SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION ON WECHAT

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I am satisfied with the content generated by users about [brand] on WeChat.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. The level of the content generated by users about [brand] on WeChat meets my expectations.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. The content generated by users about this [brand] on WeChat performs well, when compared with other brands.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. The content generated by users about [brand] is very attractive.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I can get enough information about [brand] through user-generated social media brand communication.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. The content generated by users about [brand] is useful.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION C - OPINIONS ABOUT CO-CREATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION ON WECHAT

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I am satisfied with the content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brands] on WeChat.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. The level of the content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brands] on WeChat meets my expectations.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about this [brand] on WeChat performs well, when compared with other brands.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brands] is very attractive.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I can get enough information about [brand] through co-creation of social media brand communication.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. The content generated by co-creation of users and companies about [brand] is useful.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION D - OPINIONS ABOUT BRAND AWARENESS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I easily recognize [brand]	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I can recognize [brand] among other competing brands.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I easily recall the symbol/logo of [brand].	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I know what the [brand] looks like.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I can give my own opinion of [brand].	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I am aware of [brand] presence.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION E - OPINIONS ABOUT BRAND ASSOCIATION

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. Several characteristics of [brand] instantly come to my mind.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. I associate [brand] with functions.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. I associate [brand] with uniqueness.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. I associate [brand] with prestige.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I associate [brand] with creativity.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I have a clear image of the type of person who would use [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. I like the brand image of [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION F - OPINIONS ABOUT PERCEIVED QUALITY

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. Products of [brand] are of great quality.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. Products of [brand] are very durable.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. Products of [brand] are very reliable.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. The quality of products of [brand] worth their price.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. Products function are as well as I expected.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. The materials used by the [brand] are comfortable.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. I trust the quality of products from [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION G - OPINIONS ABOUT BRAND LOYALTY

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I am willing to pay higher price for [brand] although other brands have similar characteristics.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. I intend to remain the [brand]'s customer.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. I consider myself to be loyal to [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. The product of [brand] would be my first choice.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I will not buy other brands if [brand] is available at store.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I would like to choose [brand] when purchasing clothes.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION H - OPINIONS ABOUT MOTIVATIONS TO ENGAGE IN USER-GENERATED SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. I would like to help other people.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. I would like to share my own positive experiences	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. I would like to share what I have	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. Information other people posted help me, so I would like to return the favour.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I would like to contribute to a pool of information.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I want to give others the opportunity to buy the right product.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. I want to express my anger about my negative experience.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
8. I want to vent my negative feelings.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
9. My contributions help me to shake off frustrations about bad buys.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
10. I want to pour my heart out.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
11. I want to take revenge upon the company, as I suffered a great loss.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
12. The company harmed me, and I will harm the company.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
13. I want to take actions to attempt to sabotage the company.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
14. I want the [brand] to lose customers.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
15. I want to give this brand a bad	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

reputation.								
16. I want to gain attention from others.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
17. I want to show my fashion taste to others	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
18. I want to show others that I am a clever customer.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
19. Showing that I use this product makes a good impression.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
20. I interact with brands on WeChat in order to get vouchers or coupons.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
21. I interact with brands on WeChat in order to get free products or other special offers.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
22. I would like to get some money reward from [brand].	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
23. I am looking for some benefit.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
24. I want to have a financial compensation.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
25. I would like to bring some financial benefit to my friends.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

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SECTION I - OPINIONS ABOUT PURCHASE INTENTION

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. It is possible that I will buy [brand] in the near future.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. It is highly likely that I will buy [brand] in the future.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. I will seriously consider buying [brand] in the future.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. I plan to buy products of [brand] more often.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. I plan to buy products of [brand] right away.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. I have intention to buy [brand] in the future.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION J - OPINIONS ABOUT CONTRY-OF-ORIGIN

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	'Not Applicable'
1. The [country] is a rich developed country.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. The [country] is a country that has high quality in its workmanship.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. The [country] is a country that is prestigious.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. The [country] is a country that is innovative.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. The [country] is a country that is competent in design.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. The [country] is technologically advanced.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION K - PROFILE

Please answer the following questions concerning your profile information. Confidentiality is assured and no individual data will be reported.

1. Your sex: □ Female   □ Male

2. Age   ……………

3. Level of your education   □ Undergraduate level □ Master's degree   □ PhD

Thank you very much for your co-operation

Appendix E: Outliers
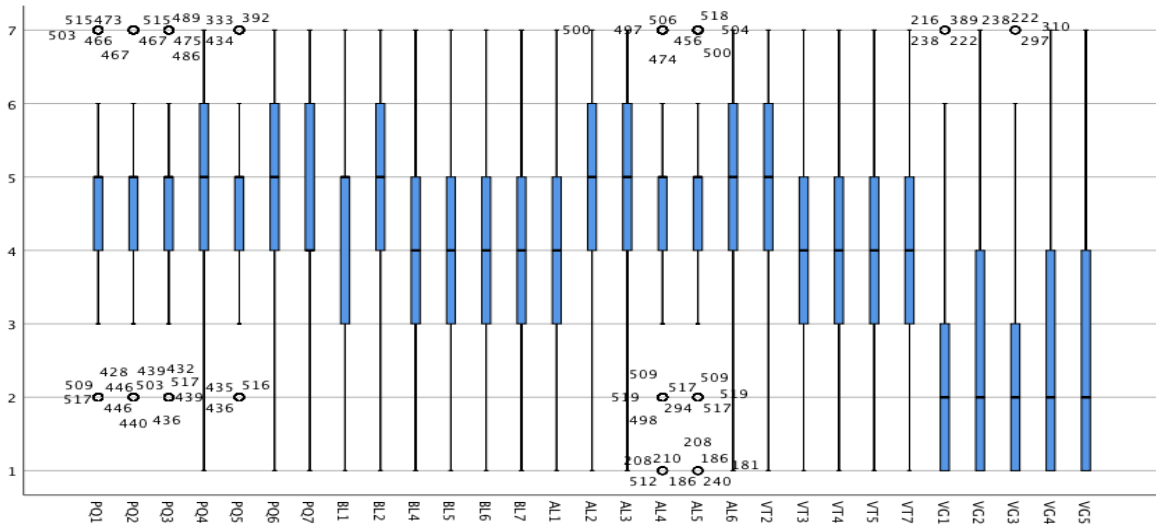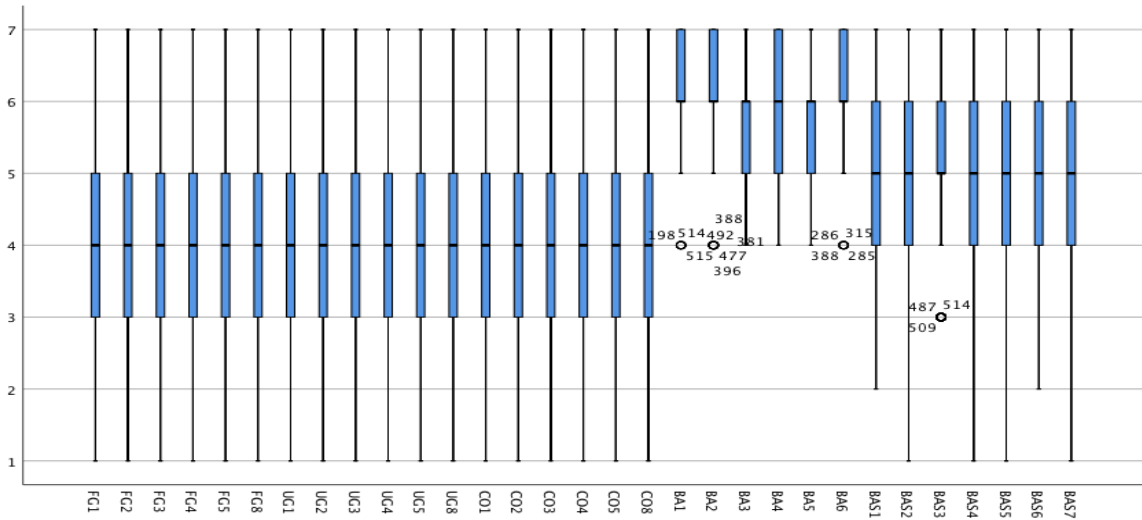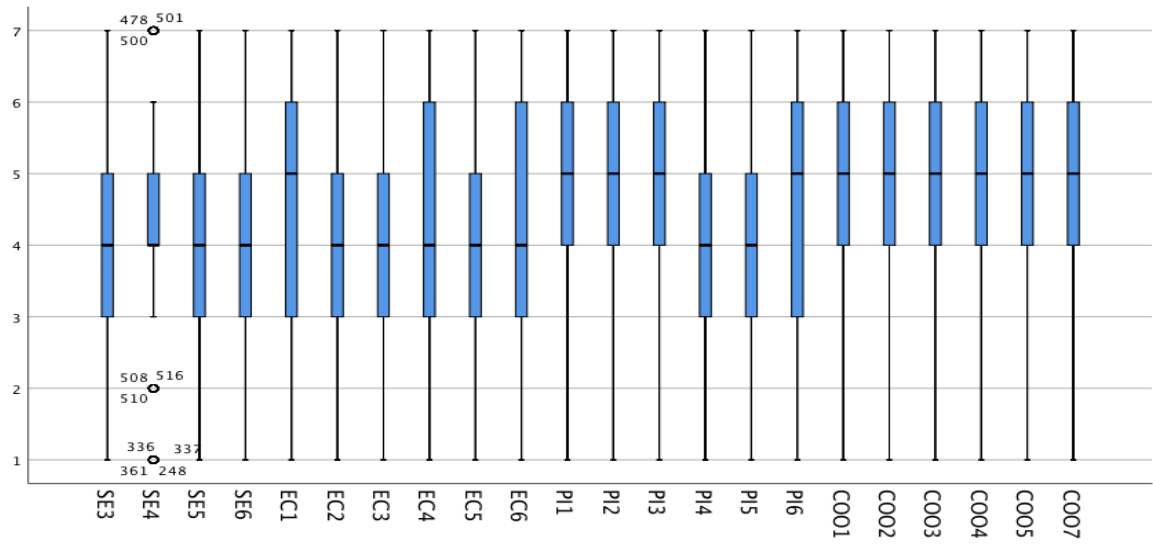
Appendix F: Histograms of the items of vengeance

Mean = 2.44
Std. Dev. = 1.585
N = 520

Mean = 2.47
Std. Dev. = 1.606
N = 520

Mean = 2.48
Std. Dev. = 1.623
N = 520
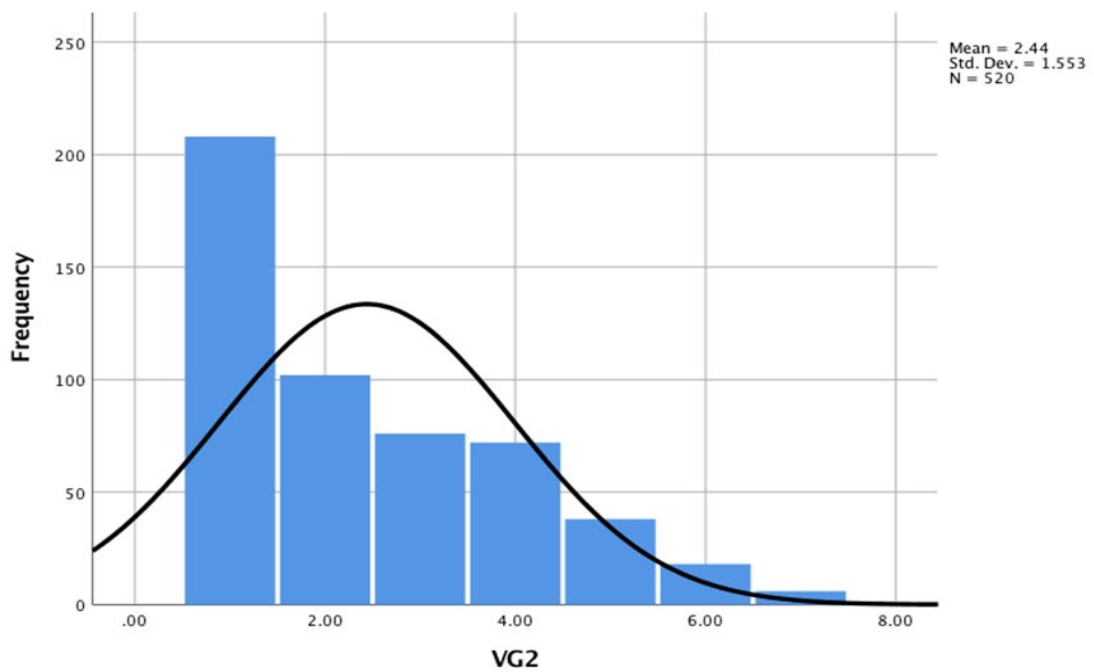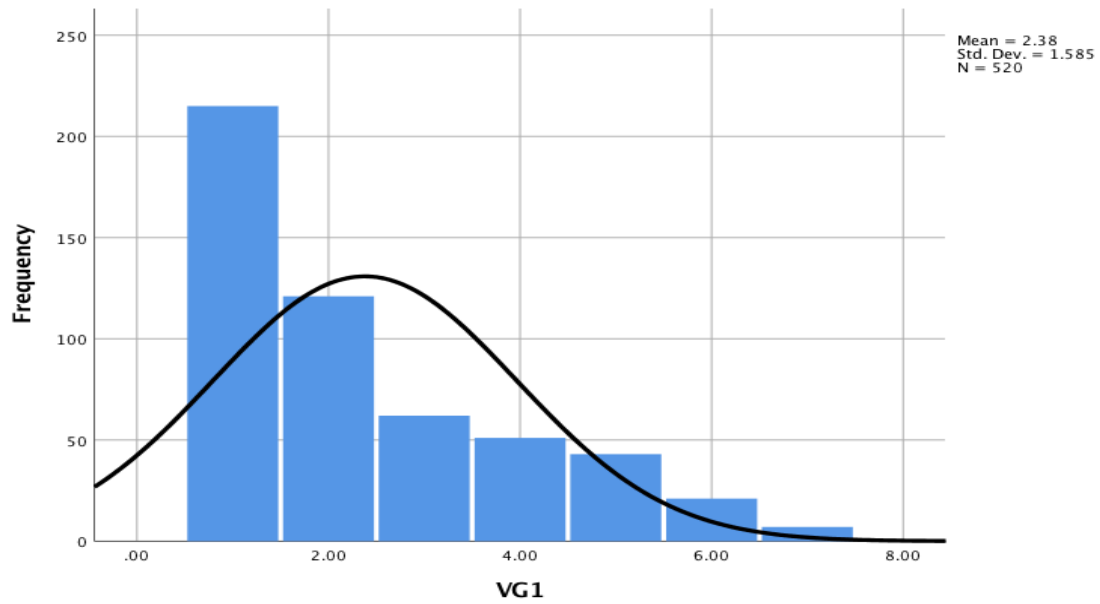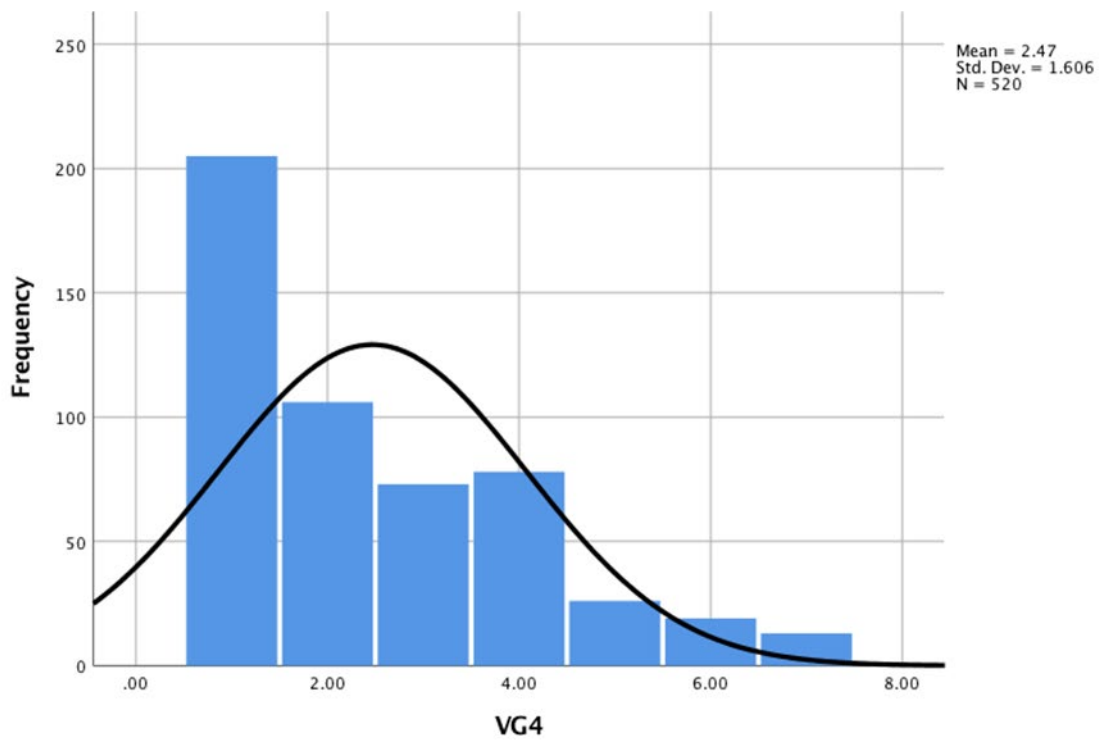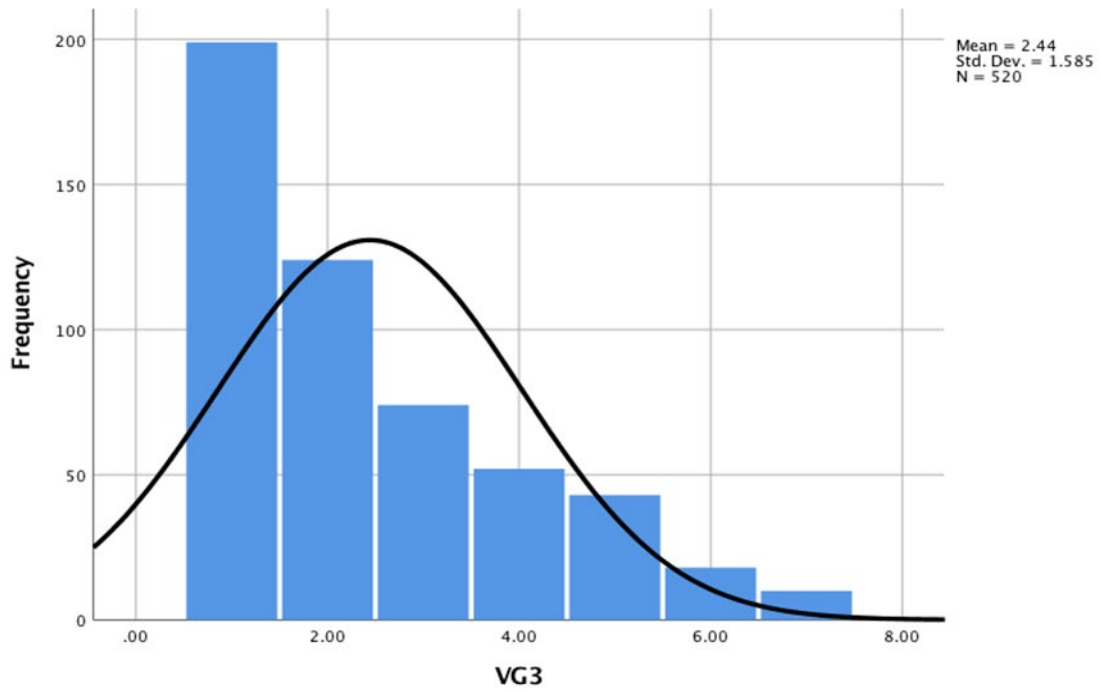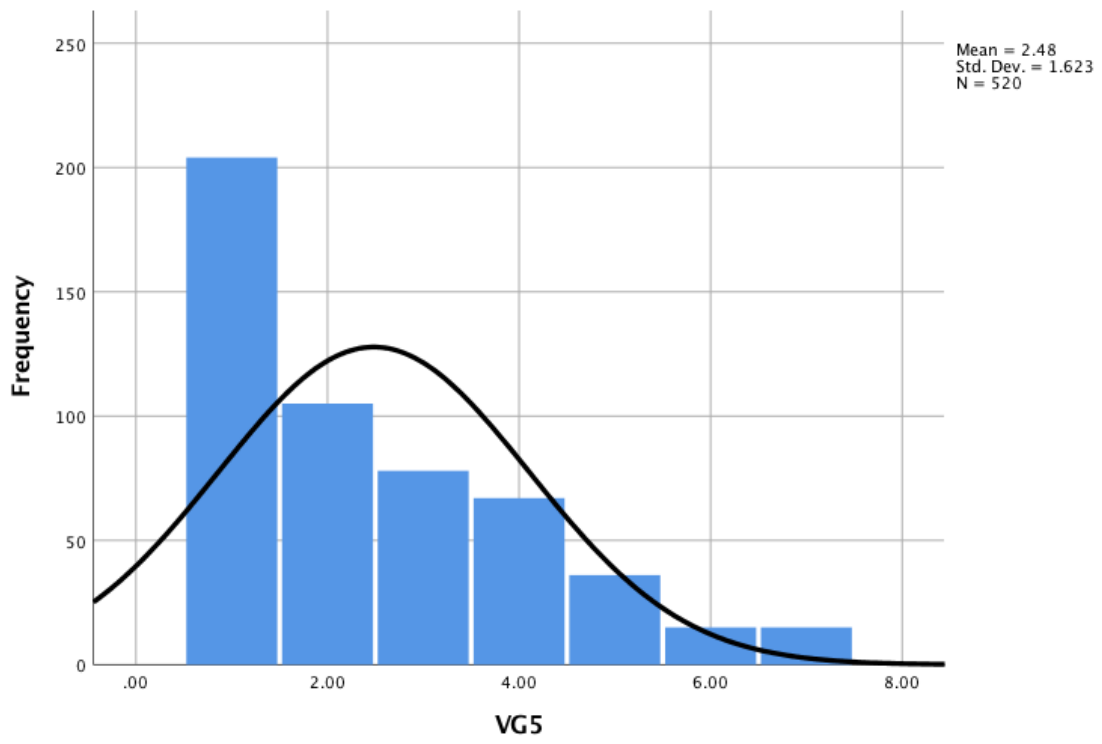
Appendix G: Test of Normality (Skewness and Kurtosis values)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
FG1	520	4.35	1.33596	-0.036	0.107	-0.225	0.214
FG2	520	4.1288	1.26489	0.037	0.107	-0.145	0.214
FG3	520	4.0904	1.28932	0.183	0.107	-0.431	0.214
FG4	520	4.2788	1.3419	0.034	0.107	-0.552	0.214
FG5	520	4.0885	1.27366	0.047	0.107	-0.336	0.214
FG8	520	4.2058	1.34364	-0.092	0.107	-0.52	0.214
UG1	520	4.0404	1.29334	0.22	0.107	-0.347	0.214
UG2	520	4.0308	1.27637	0.166	0.107	-0.424	0.214
UG3	520	4.1058	1.24401	0.046	0.107	-0.104	0.214
UG4	520	4.1462	1.29836	-0.013	0.107	-0.48	0.214
UG5	520	4.1096	1.28782	0.202	0.107	-0.467	0.214
UG8	520	4.1923	1.33196	0.066	0.107	-0.371	0.214
CO1	520	4.1615	1.32446	-0.099	0.107	-0.33	0.214
CO2	520	4.0846	1.33161	-0.047	0.107	-0.448	0.214
CO3	520	4.0365	1.31854	0.039	0.107	-0.409	0.214
CO4	520	4.1558	1.39803	-0.08	0.107	-0.665	0.214
CO5	520	4.1981	1.37596	-0.07	0.107	-0.437	0.214
CO8	520	4.0788	1.40859	-0.045	0.107	-0.655	0.214
BA1	520	6.0385	0.72557	-0.241	0.107	-0.55	0.214
BA2	520	5.9981	0.75647	-0.345	0.107	-0.325	0.214
BA3	520	5.9404	0.75921	-0.271	0.107	-0.389	0.214
BA4	520	5.9615	0.78917	-0.215	0.107	-0.722	0.214

BA5	520	5.8154	0.83317	-0.104	0.107	-0.766	0.214
BA6	520	6.1615	0.72185	-0.438	0.107	-0.373	0.214
BAS1	520	5.0846	1.21509	-0.253	0.107	-0.528	0.214
BAS2	520	5.0269	1.34266	-0.313	0.107	-0.411	0.214
BAS3	520	5.2423	1.12209	-0.151	0.107	-0.633	0.214
BAS4	520	5.0827	1.238	-0.268	0.107	-0.457	0.214
BAS5	520	4.7	1.37498	-0.257	0.107	-0.494	0.214
BAS6	520	5.1096	1.21547	-0.237	0.107	-0.511	0.214
BAS7	520	5.0019	1.23765	-0.169	0.107	-0.372	0.214
PQ1	520	4.6423	1.23802	-0.109	0.107	-0.364	0.214
PQ2	520	4.5558	1.26794	0.071	0.107	-0.564	0.214
PQ3	520	4.5846	1.29493	0.053	0.107	-0.564	0.214
PQ4	520	4.7673	1.32185	-0.083	0.107	-0.393	0.214
PQ5	520	4.5885	1.22587	-0.158	0.107	-0.362	0.214
PQ6	520	4.6423	1.34971	-0.127	0.107	-0.375	0.214
PQ7	520	4.5981	1.33934	0.043	0.107	-0.369	0.214
BL1	520	4.4788	1.36129	-0.098	0.107	-0.3	0.214
BL2	520	4.775	1.38717	-0.192	0.107	-0.325	0.214
BL4	520	4.3519	1.40231	0.102	0.107	-0.256	0.214
BL5	520	3.9923	1.41963	0.302	0.107	-0.373	0.214
BL6	520	4.0577	1.4293	0.165	0.107	-0.333	0.214
BL7	520	4.1981	1.48246	0.009	0.107	-0.323	0.214
AL1	520	4.2308	1.44141	-0.176	0.107	-0.35	0.214
AL2	520	4.6192	1.37736	-0.185	0.107	-0.371	0.214
AL3	520	4.7538	1.39673	-0.219	0.107	-0.357	0.214
AL4	520	4.4788	1.38931	-0.194	0.107	-0.241	0.214
AL5	520	4.5788	1.38306	-0.145	0.107	-0.337	0.214
AL6	520	4.7885	1.41471	-0.191	0.107	-0.34	0.214

VT1	520	4.2962	1.47581	-0.029	0.107	-0.43	0.214
VT2	520	4.2135	1.48552	0.019	0.107	-0.535	0.214
VT3	520	4.1731	1.43075	0.157	0.107	-0.421	0.214
VT5	520	4.2654	1.46598	0.071	0.107	-0.494	0.214
VG1	520	2.3788	1.58532	1.031	0.107	0.06	0.214
VG2	520	2.4385	1.55319	0.868	0.107	-0.184	0.214
VG3	520	2.4423	1.58526	1.009	0.107	0.136	0.214
VG4	520	2.4673	1.60649	0.982	0.107	0.175	0.214
VG5	520	2.4827	1.62343	0.984	0.107	0.165	0.214
SE3	520	4.1327	1.39214	-0.148	0.107	-0.328	0.214
SE4	520	4.3962	1.41856	-0.231	0.107	-0.112	0.214
SE5	520	4.1173	1.43708	-0.003	0.107	-0.48	0.214
SE6	520	4.1731	1.45347	-0.209	0.107	-0.437	0.214
EC1	520	4.5058	1.50528	-0.2	0.107	-0.551	0.214
EC2	520	4.2962	1.4732	-0.041	0.107	-0.601	0.214
EC3	520	4.3192	1.52374	-0.12	0.107	-0.53	0.214
EC4	520	4.4269	1.51627	-0.181	0.107	-0.523	0.214
EC5	520	4.1942	1.47907	-0.018	0.107	-0.477	0.214
EC6	520	4.4077	1.57508	-0.232	0.107	-0.529	0.214
PI1	520	4.9212	1.31961	-0.248	0.107	-0.31	0.214
PI2	520	4.6192	1.4119	-0.215	0.107	-0.535	0.214
PI3	520	4.6846	1.39105	-0.225	0.107	-0.365	0.214
PI4	520	4.2808	1.41217	-0.008	0.107	-0.414	0.214
PI5	520	4.0981	1.38113	0.079	0.107	-0.39	0.214
PI6	520	4.5654	1.46887	-0.239	0.107	-0.518	0.214
COO1	520	4.7865	1.49843	-0.391	0.107	-0.428	0.214
COO2	520	4.6231	1.54827	-0.227	0.107	-0.71	0.214
COO3	520	4.9308	1.44755	-0.403	0.107	-0.446	0.214

COO4	520	4.8981	1.48181	-0.263	0.107	-0.672	0.214
COO5	520	4.9596	1.39511	-0.295	0.107	-0.487	0.214
COO7	520	4.6923	1.51979	-0.181	0.107	-0.675	0.214
Valid N (listwise)	520						

Appendix H: Testing of Homogeneity of Variance (Levene's Test)

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
FG1	Based on Mean	7.286	1	518	0.007
	Based on Median	3.143	1	518	0.077
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	3.143	1	516.532	0.077
	Based on trimmed mean	7.489	1	518	0.006
FG2	Based on Mean	0.343	1	518	0.558
	Based on Median	0.09	1	518	0.764
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.09	1	506.278	0.764
	Based on trimmed mean	0.385	1	518	0.535
FG3	Based on Mean	1.478	1	518	0.225
	Based on Median	0.343	1	518	0.558
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.343	1	513.64	0.558
	Based on trimmed mean	1.525	1	518	0.217
FG4	Based on Mean	6.397	1	518	0.012
	Based on Median	6.253	1	518	0.013
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	6.253	1	511.551	0.013
	Based on trimmed mean	6.456	1	518	0.011

FG5	Based on Mean	3.228	1	518	0.073
	Based on Median	2.656	1	518	0.104
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.656	1	517.032	0.104
	Based on trimmed mean	3.245	1	518	0.072
FG8	Based on Mean	20.214	1	518	0
	Based on Median	17.701	1	518	0
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	17.701	1	517.431	0
	Based on trimmed mean	19.793	1	518	0
UG1	Based on Mean	0.421	1	518	0.517
	Based on Median	0.456	1	518	0.5
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.456	1	511.025	0.5
	Based on trimmed mean	0.254	1	518	0.614
UG2	Based on Mean	0.019	1	518	0.89
	Based on Median	0.02	1	518	0.886
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.02	1	507.208	0.886
	Based on trimmed mean	0.025	1	518	0.876
UG3	Based on Mean	0.222	1	518	0.638
	Based on Median	0.007	1	518	0.934
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.007	1	504.531	0.934

	Based on trimmed mean	0.301	1	518	0.584
UG4	Based on Mean	0.352	1	518	0.553
	Based on Median	0.049	1	518	0.825
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.049	1	502.863	0.825
	Based on trimmed mean	0.56	1	518	0.455
UG5	Based on Mean	0.377	1	518	0.539
	Based on Median	1.489	1	518	0.223
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.489	1	494.435	0.223
	Based on trimmed mean	0.428	1	518	0.513
UG8	Based on Mean	0.675	1	518	0.412
	Based on Median	0.38	1	518	0.538
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.38	1	516.292	0.538
	Based on trimmed mean	0.445	1	518	0.505
CO1	Based on Mean	4.41	1	518	0.036
	Based on Median	2.494	1	518	0.115
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.494	1	507.22	0.115
	Based on trimmed mean	4.007	1	518	0.046
CO2	Based on Mean	1.643	1	518	0.201
	Based on Median	0.651	1	518	0.42

	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.651	1	515.328	0.42
	Based on trimmed mean	1.937	1	518	0.165
CO3	Based on Mean	0.089	1	518	0.766
	Based on Median	0.002	1	518	0.964
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.002	1	517.614	0.964
	Based on trimmed mean	0.107	1	518	0.743
CO4	Based on Mean	0.737	1	518	0.391
	Based on Median	0.487	1	518	0.486
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.487	1	505.936	0.486
	Based on trimmed mean	0.676	1	518	0.411
CO5	Based on Mean	6.023	1	518	0.014
	Based on Median	5.589	1	518	0.018
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	5.589	1	515.198	0.018
	Based on trimmed mean	6.166	1	518	0.013
CO8	Based on Mean	3.907	1	518	0.049
	Based on Median	2.803	1	518	0.095
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.803	1	513.83	0.095
	Based on trimmed mean	4.405	1	518	0.036
BA1	Based on Mean	0.034	1	518	0.854

	Based on Median	0.011	1	518	0.918
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.011	1	517.245	0.918
	Based on trimmed mean	0.008	1	518	0.928
BA2	Based on Mean	0.525	1	518	0.469
	Based on Median	0.499	1	518	0.48
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.499	1	515.534	0.48
	Based on trimmed mean	0.167	1	518	0.683
BA3	Based on Mean	0.338	1	518	0.561
	Based on Median	0.132	1	518	0.716
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.132	1	517.556	0.716
	Based on trimmed mean	0.247	1	518	0.62
BA4	Based on Mean	0.139	1	518	0.71
	Based on Median	0.879	1	518	0.349
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.879	1	517.781	0.349
	Based on trimmed mean	0.568	1	518	0.452
BA5	Based on Mean	1.216	1	518	0.271
	Based on Median	1.365	1	518	0.243
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.365	1	515.59	0.243
	Based on trimmed mean	1.607	1	518	0.205

BA6	Based on Mean	0.485	1	518	0.487
	Based on Median	0.495	1	518	0.482
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.495	1	517.351	0.482
	Based on trimmed mean	0.616	1	518	0.433
BAS1	Based on Mean	0.368	1	518	0.544
	Based on Median	0.024	1	518	0.876
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.024	1	514.341	0.876
	Based on trimmed mean	0.591	1	518	0.442
BAS2	Based on Mean	0.651	1	518	0.42
	Based on Median	0.478	1	518	0.49
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.478	1	517.425	0.49
	Based on trimmed mean	1.077	1	518	0.3
BAS3	Based on Mean	1.268	1	518	0.261
	Based on Median	1.804	1	518	0.18
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.804	1	517.955	0.18
	Based on trimmed mean	1.225	1	518	0.269
BAS4	Based on Mean	1.801	1	518	0.18
	Based on Median	2.749	1	518	0.098
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.749	1	517.986	0.098

	Based on trimmed mean	1.773	1	518	0.184
BAS5	Based on Mean	0.403	1	518	0.526
	Based on Median	0.071	1	518	0.79
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.071	1	517.456	0.79
	Based on trimmed mean	0.341	1	518	0.56
BAS6	Based on Mean	3.191	1	518	0.075
	Based on Median	1.971	1	518	0.161
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.971	1	517.306	0.161
	Based on trimmed mean	3.078	1	518	0.08
BAS7	Based on Mean	0.079	1	518	0.779
	Based on Median	0.072	1	518	0.788
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.072	1	511.865	0.788
	Based on trimmed mean	0.213	1	518	0.644
PQ1	Based on Mean	1.754	1	518	0.186
	Based on Median	1.789	1	518	0.182
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.789	1	515.036	0.182
	Based on trimmed mean	1.693	1	518	0.194
PQ2	Based on Mean	0.939	1	518	0.333
	Based on Median	0.239	1	518	0.625

	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.239	1	518	0.625
	Based on trimmed mean	0.924	1	518	0.337
PQ3	Based on Mean	0.153	1	518	0.696
	Based on Median	0.341	1	518	0.56
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.341	1	515.681	0.56
	Based on trimmed mean	0.166	1	518	0.684
PQ4	Based on Mean	0.283	1	518	0.595
	Based on Median	0.269	1	518	0.604
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.269	1	516.834	0.604
	Based on trimmed mean	0.223	1	518	0.637
PQ5	Based on Mean	0.98	1	518	0.323
	Based on Median	0.805	1	518	0.37
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.805	1	517.284	0.37
	Based on trimmed mean	0.985	1	518	0.321
PQ6	Based on Mean	1.355	1	518	0.245
	Based on Median	1.614	1	518	0.205
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.614	1	517.563	0.205
	Based on trimmed mean	1.395	1	518	0.238
PQ7	Based on Mean	0.021	1	518	0.885

	Based on Median	0	1	518	0.993
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0	1	517.695	0.993
	Based on trimmed mean	0.021	1	518	0.885
BL1	Based on Mean	0.061	1	518	0.805
	Based on Median	0.001	1	518	0.975
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.001	1	516.114	0.975
	Based on trimmed mean	0.055	1	518	0.815
BL2	Based on Mean	1.692	1	518	0.194
	Based on Median	1.491	1	518	0.223
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.491	1	517.842	0.223
	Based on trimmed mean	1.582	1	518	0.209
BL4	Based on Mean	0.254	1	518	0.614
	Based on Median	0.115	1	518	0.735
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.115	1	517.799	0.735
	Based on trimmed mean	0.27	1	518	0.604
BL5	Based on Mean	0.382	1	518	0.537
	Based on Median	0.128	1	518	0.72
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.128	1	517.369	0.72
	Based on trimmed mean	0.179	1	518	0.672

BL6	Based on Mean	7.206	1	518	0.007
	Based on Median	4.751	1	518	0.03
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	4.751	1	517.999	0.03
	Based on trimmed mean	6.726	1	518	0.01
BL7	Based on Mean	3.856	1	518	0.05
	Based on Median	3.014	1	518	0.083
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	3.014	1	517.222	0.083
	Based on trimmed mean	3.844	1	518	0.05
AL1	Based on Mean	0.491	1	518	0.484
	Based on Median	0.514	1	518	0.474
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.514	1	517.109	0.474
	Based on trimmed mean	0.509	1	518	0.476
AL2	Based on Mean	0.86	1	518	0.354
	Based on Median	2.135	1	518	0.145
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.135	1	517.958	0.145
	Based on trimmed mean	0.978	1	518	0.323
AL3	Based on Mean	0.02	1	518	0.887
	Based on Median	0.236	1	518	0.627
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.236	1	517.527	0.627

	Based on trimmed mean	0.025	1	518	0.875
AL4	Based on Mean	0.189	1	518	0.664
	Based on Median	0	1	518	0.999
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0	1	514.167	0.999
	Based on trimmed mean	0.174	1	518	0.677
AL5	Based on Mean	1.728	1	518	0.189
	Based on Median	0.696	1	518	0.404
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.696	1	517.998	0.404
	Based on trimmed mean	1.715	1	518	0.191
AL6	Based on Mean	0.038	1	518	0.845
	Based on Median	0.03	1	518	0.864
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.03	1	517.189	0.864
	Based on trimmed mean	0.048	1	518	0.826
VT1	Based on Mean	0.047	1	518	0.828
	Based on Median	0.001	1	518	0.977
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.001	1	517.146	0.977
	Based on trimmed mean	0.073	1	518	0.787
VT2	Based on Mean	0.405	1	518	0.525
	Based on Median	1.459	1	518	0.228
	Based on Median and	1.459	1	517.99	0.228

	with adjusted df				
	Based on trimmed mean	0.472	1	518	0.492
VT3	Based on Mean	0.003	1	518	0.955
	Based on Median	0.081	1	518	0.776
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.081	1	517.965	0.776
	Based on trimmed mean	0.006	1	518	0.94
VT5	Based on Mean	0.942	1	518	0.332
	Based on Median	0.821	1	518	0.365
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.821	1	516.975	0.365
	Based on trimmed mean	0.926	1	518	0.336
VG1	Based on Mean	0.053	1	518	0.818
	Based on Median	0.015	1	518	0.902
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.015	1	517.253	0.902
	Based on trimmed mean	0.045	1	518	0.832
VG2	Based on Mean	0.151	1	518	0.698
	Based on Median	0.032	1	518	0.859
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.032	1	513.875	0.859
	Based on trimmed mean	0.036	1	518	0.85
VG3	Based on Mean	0.803	1	518	0.371

	Based on Median	0.308	1	518	0.579
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.308	1	515.894	0.579
	Based on trimmed mean	0.737	1	518	0.391
VG4	Based on Mean	0.005	1	518	0.944
	Based on Median	0.028	1	518	0.868
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.028	1	511.338	0.868
	Based on trimmed mean	0.001	1	518	0.969
VG5	Based on Mean	0.285	1	518	0.594
	Based on Median	0.17	1	518	0.68
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.17	1	514.864	0.68
	Based on trimmed mean	0.314	1	518	0.575
SE3	Based on Mean	0.755	1	518	0.385
	Based on Median	1.543	1	518	0.215
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.543	1	517.916	0.215
	Based on trimmed mean	0.897	1	518	0.344
SE4	Based on Mean	1.431	1	518	0.232
	Based on Median	0.523	1	518	0.47
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.523	1	511.516	0.47
	Based on trimmed mean	1.596	1	518	0.207

SE5	Based on Mean	2.399	1	518	0.122
	Based on Median	1.153	1	518	0.283
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.153	1	516.83	0.283
	Based on trimmed mean	2.276	1	518	0.132
SE6	Based on Mean	0.39	1	518	0.533
	Based on Median	0.13	1	518	0.719
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.13	1	517.997	0.719
	Based on trimmed mean	0.316	1	518	0.574
EC1	Based on Mean	2.019	1	518	0.156
	Based on Median	1.251	1	518	0.264
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.251	1	517.995	0.264
	Based on trimmed mean	1.974	1	518	0.161
EC2	Based on Mean	0.311	1	518	0.577
	Based on Median	0.023	1	518	0.879
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.023	1	517.499	0.879
	Based on trimmed mean	0.303	1	518	0.582
EC3	Based on Mean	9.319	1	518	0.002
	Based on Median	7.892	1	518	0.005
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	7.892	1	516.648	0.005
	Based on trimmed	9.295	1	518	0.002

	mean				
EC4	Based on Mean	5.816	1	518	0.016
	Based on Median	4.749	1	518	0.03
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	4.749	1	517.843	0.03
	Based on trimmed mean	5.785	1	518	0.017
EC5	Based on Mean	2.901	1	518	0.089
	Based on Median	2.923	1	518	0.088
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.923	1	517.141	0.088
	Based on trimmed mean	2.913	1	518	0.088
EC6	Based on Mean	0.053	1	518	0.818
	Based on Median	0.115	1	518	0.734
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.115	1	514.804	0.734
	Based on trimmed mean	0.048	1	518	0.827
PI1	Based on Mean	0.599	1	518	0.439
	Based on Median	0.152	1	518	0.697
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.152	1	517.118	0.697
	Based on trimmed mean	0.311	1	518	0.577
PI2	Based on Mean	1.302	1	518	0.254
	Based on Median	0.254	1	518	0.615
	Based on Median and	0.254	1	517.302	0.615

	with adjusted df				
	Based on trimmed mean	1.015	1	518	0.314
PI3	Based on Mean	3.537	1	518	0.061
	Based on Median	2.584	1	518	0.109
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.584	1	517.767	0.109
	Based on trimmed mean	3.501	1	518	0.062
PI4	Based on Mean	2.278	1	518	0.132
	Based on Median	2.134	1	518	0.145
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.134	1	517.189	0.145
	Based on trimmed mean	2.309	1	518	0.129
PI5	Based on Mean	2.15	1	518	0.143
	Based on Median	1.097	1	518	0.295
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.097	1	517.994	0.295
	Based on trimmed mean	1.939	1	518	0.164
PI6	Based on Mean	2.043	1	518	0.153
	Based on Median	1.099	1	518	0.295
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.099	1	515.798	0.295
	Based on trimmed mean	1.882	1	518	0.171
COO1	Based on Mean	2.832	1	518	0.093

	Based on Median	2.907	1	518	0.089
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.907	1	516.943	0.089
	Based on trimmed mean	2.515	1	518	0.113
COO2	Based on Mean	1.098	1	518	0.295
	Based on Median	0.707	1	518	0.401
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.707	1	517.151	0.401
	Based on trimmed mean	1.038	1	518	0.309
COO3	Based on Mean	1.381	1	518	0.241
	Based on Median	1.255	1	518	0.263
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.255	1	518	0.263
	Based on trimmed mean	1.365	1	518	0.243
COO4	Based on Mean	5.544	1	518	0.019
	Based on Median	5.172	1	518	0.023
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	5.172	1	517.993	0.023
	Based on trimmed mean	5.481	1	518	0.02
COO5	Based on Mean	9.307	1	518	0.002
	Based on Median	8.752	1	518	0.003
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	8.752	1	517.821	0.003
	Based on trimmed mean	8.52	1	518	0.004

COO7	Based on Mean	0.752	1	518	0.386
	Based on Median	1.004	1	518	0.317
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.004	1	517.999	0.317
	Based on trimmed mean	0.822	1	518	0.365

Appendix I: Linearity between independent and dependent variables

Simple Scatter with Fit Line of UG1 by VG1
R^2 Linear = 0.001

Simple Scatter with Fit Line of UG1 by VG2
R^2 Linear = 4.369E-4

Simple Scatter with Fit Line of UG1 by VG3

R² Linear = 2.587E-6

Simple Scatter with Fit Line of UG1 by VG4

R² Linear = 5.455E-4

Simple Scatter with Fit Line of UG1 by VG5
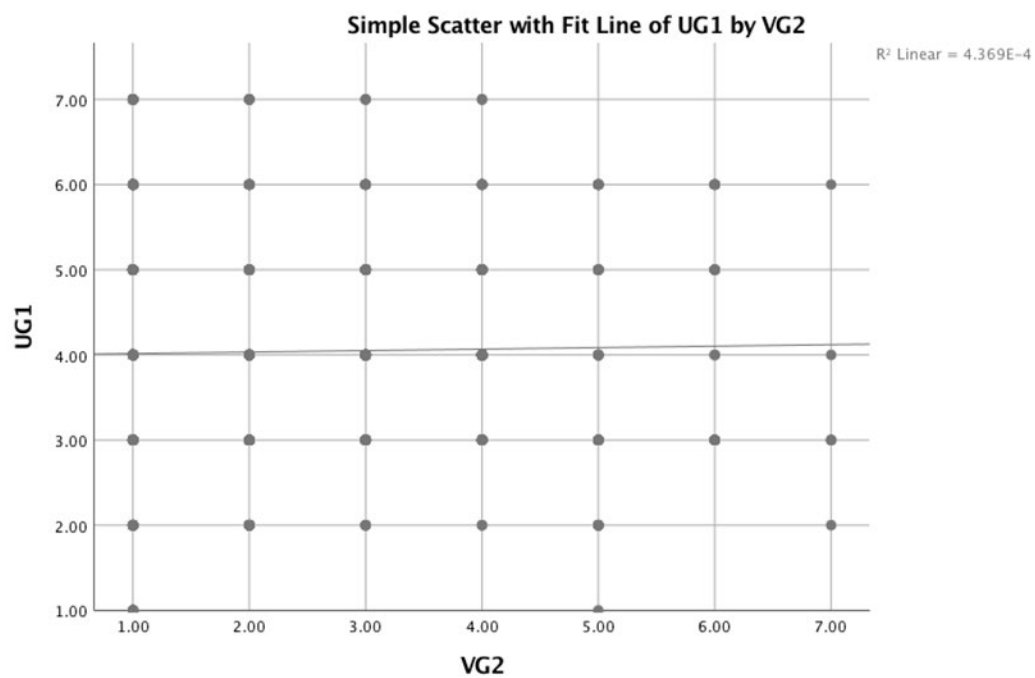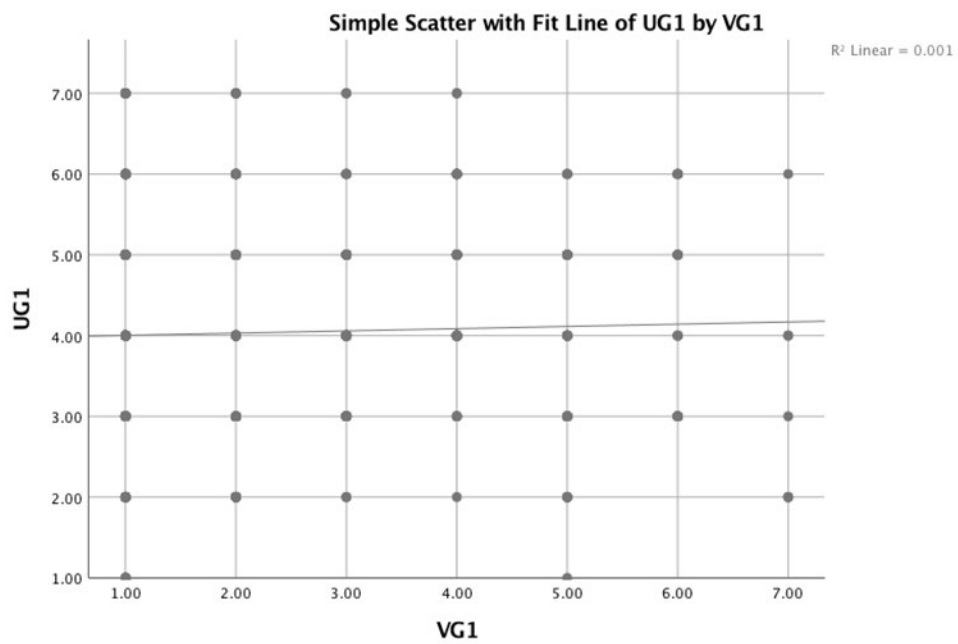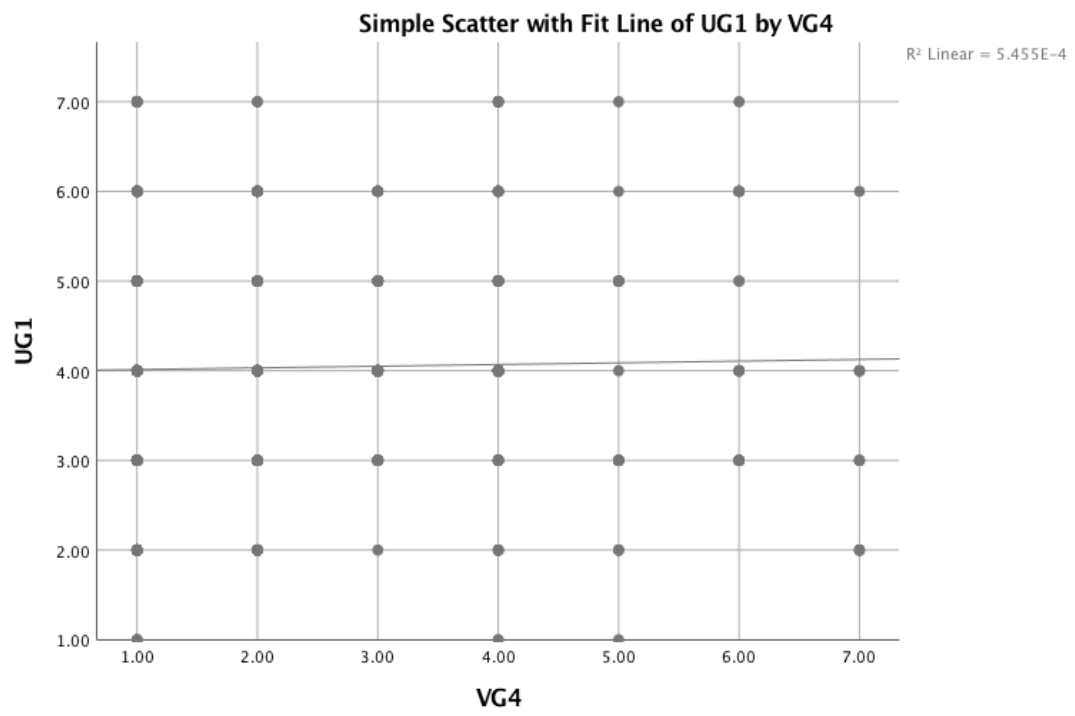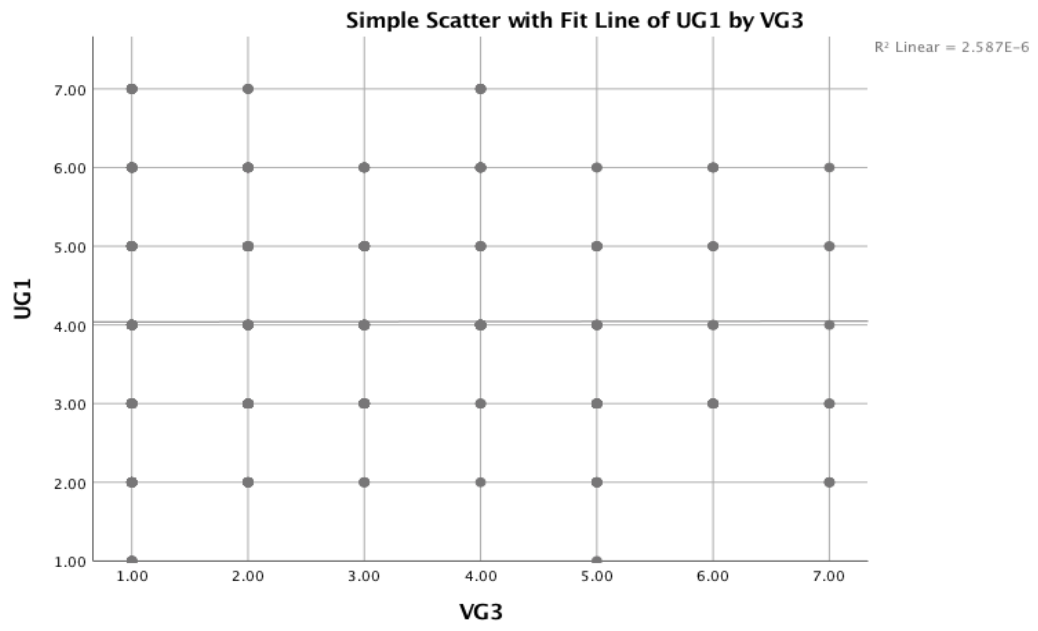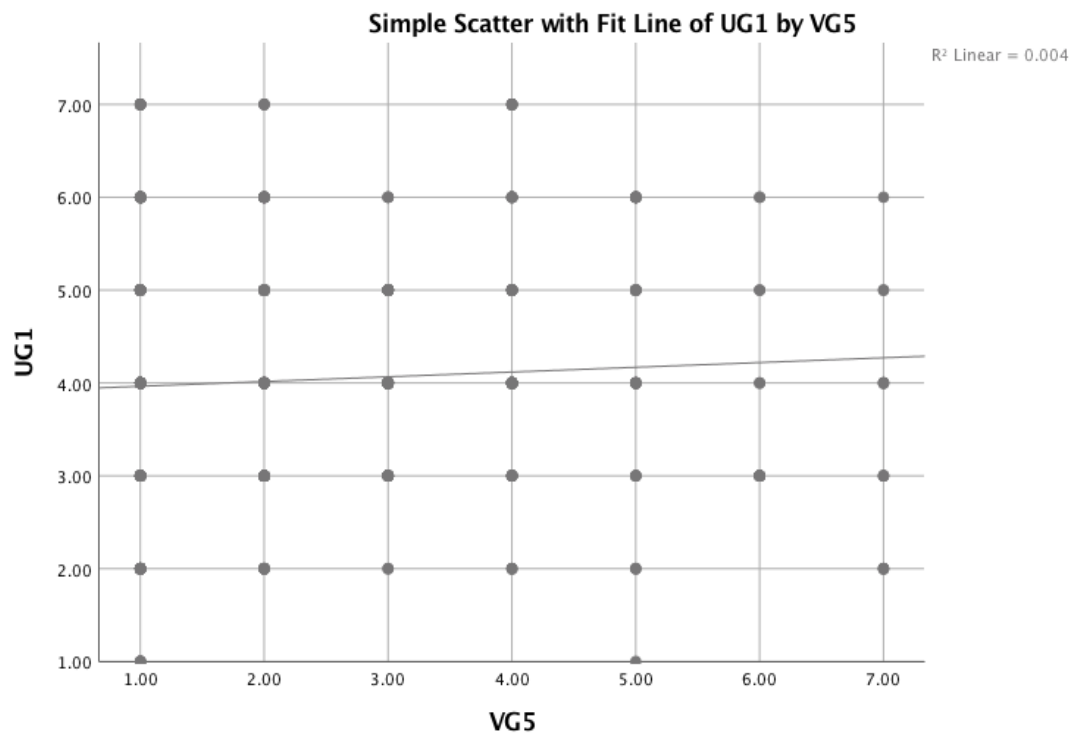
Appendix J: Test of Multicollinearity

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	-0.315	0.482		-0.653	0.514		
FG1	0.032	0.062	0.033	0.525	0.6	0.201	4.976
FG2	0.157	0.063	0.151	2.495	0.013	0.214	4.681
FG3	-0.005	0.051	-0.005	-0.101	0.92	0.308	3.249
FG4	-0.011	0.065	-0.011	-0.17	0.865	0.177	5.635
FG5	-0.008	0.048	-0.008	-0.165	0.869	0.356	2.806
FG8	-0.172	0.063	-0.175	-2.742	0.006	0.191	5.227
UG1	-0.116	0.07	-0.114	-1.672	0.095	0.167	5.984
UG2	0.228	0.081	0.221	2.803	0.005	0.126	7.951
UG3	0.123	0.07	0.116	1.749	0.081	0.179	5.597
UG4	-0.132	0.071	-0.129	-1.861	0.063	0.161	6.205
UG5	-0.214	0.055	-0.209	-3.88	0	0.269	3.716
UG8	0.077	0.058	0.077	1.327	0.185	0.23	4.353
CO1	0.188	0.072	0.189	2.621	0.009	0.15	6.686
CO2	-0.346	0.082	-0.349	-4.199	0	0.113	8.858
CO3	0.091	0.058	0.091	1.573	0.116	0.232	4.302
CO4	0.047	0.069	0.05	0.684	0.494	0.145	6.898
CO5	0.233	0.057	0.243	4.058	0	0.218	4.597
CO8	-0.1	0.058	-0.107	-1.731	0.084	0.205	4.878
BA1	-0.037	0.068	-0.02	-0.546	0.585	0.555	1.801
BA2	0.245	0.082	0.141	2.997	0.003	0.354	2.825

BA3	0.125	0.08	0.072	1.557	0.12	0.365	2.737
BA4	-0.081	0.079	-0.048	-1.026	0.305	0.353	2.834
BA5	0.167	0.08	0.106	2.099	0.036	0.308	3.247
BA6	-0.25	0.104	-0.137	-2.41	0.016	0.242	4.13
BAS1	0.186	0.057	0.171	3.27	0.001	0.285	3.515
BAS2	0.034	0.053	0.035	0.646	0.519	0.268	3.727
BAS3	-0.225	0.055	-0.191	-4.102	0	0.358	2.796
BAS4	0.039	0.051	0.037	0.771	0.441	0.347	2.883
BAS5	0.026	0.042	0.028	0.623	0.534	0.399	2.506
BAS6	-0.042	0.044	-0.039	-0.953	0.341	0.468	2.138
BAS7	0.023	0.047	0.022	0.492	0.623	0.399	2.507
PQ1	-0.148	0.065	-0.138	-2.285	0.023	0.212	4.71
PQ2	0.044	0.062	0.042	0.699	0.485	0.218	4.596
PQ3	0.008	0.065	0.008	0.12	0.904	0.189	5.282
PQ4	0.029	0.054	0.03	0.545	0.586	0.266	3.762
PQ5	0.076	0.059	0.07	1.284	0.2	0.26	3.851
PQ6	-0.035	0.055	-0.036	-0.642	0.522	0.251	3.989
PQ7	0.012	0.058	0.012	0.207	0.836	0.227	4.401
BL1	0.06	0.045	0.062	1.352	0.177	0.368	2.718
BL2	0.198	0.049	0.208	4.069	0	0.298	3.361
BL4	-0.054	0.054	-0.057	-0.985	0.325	0.233	4.283
BL5	0.014	0.053	0.015	0.264	0.792	0.238	4.21
BL6	0.077	0.048	0.083	1.606	0.109	0.289	3.459
BL7	0.135	0.043	0.152	3.133	0.002	0.333	3.006
AL1	-0.085	0.047	-0.093	-1.814	0.07	0.295	3.389
AL2	0.023	0.06	0.024	0.381	0.703	0.198	5.05
AL3	0.058	0.056	0.062	1.038	0.3	0.221	4.527
AL4	-0.17	0.048	-0.179	-3.525	0	0.301	3.321

AL5	0.115	0.054	0.121	2.132	0.034	0.243	4.117
AL6	0.07	0.052	0.075	1.34	0.181	0.251	3.981
VT1	0.081	0.058	0.091	1.404	0.161	0.187	5.349
VT2	-0.08	0.07	-0.09	-1.142	0.254	0.126	7.964
VT3	0.061	0.069	0.066	0.873	0.383	0.138	7.27
VT5	-0.024	0.042	-0.027	-0.575	0.565	0.355	2.819
VG1	-0.033	0.076	-0.04	-0.438	0.662	0.092	10.813
VG2	-0.072	0.08	-0.085	-0.903	0.367	0.088	11.413
VG3	0.147	0.081	0.177	1.809	0.071	0.082	12.268
VG4	-0.114	0.075	-0.138	-1.517	0.13	0.094	10.646
VG5	0.056	0.083	0.069	0.677	0.499	0.074	13.472
SE3	-0.041	0.054	-0.043	-0.753	0.452	0.24	4.163
SE4	-0.02	0.05	-0.021	-0.396	0.692	0.27	3.708
SE5	0.031	0.054	0.034	0.575	0.566	0.225	4.447
SE6	0.012	0.053	0.014	0.231	0.817	0.225	4.44
EC1	0.022	0.048	0.026	0.47	0.639	0.263	3.801
EC2	-0.051	0.051	-0.057	-0.998	0.319	0.24	4.17
EC3	0.053	0.053	0.061	0.989	0.323	0.204	4.893
EC4	-0.029	0.051	-0.034	-0.574	0.566	0.225	4.439
EC5	-0.123	0.048	-0.137	-2.571	0.01	0.273	3.665
EC6	0.153	0.042	0.183	3.658	0	0.313	3.196
COO1	0.172	0.054	0.196	3.216	0.001	0.21	4.758
COO2	0.063	0.056	0.074	1.128	0.26	0.183	5.479
COO3	0.027	0.062	0.03	0.442	0.659	0.171	5.847
COO4	-0.001	0.058	-0.002	-0.025	0.98	0.187	5.355
COO5	0.215	0.053	0.227	4.054	0	0.249	4.022
COO7	-0.127	0.044	-0.146	-2.876	0.004	0.304	3.294