

The Effect of Customer Satisfaction on Word-of-Mouth Communication: The Mediating Role of Face Perception

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Abstract: Traditional theoretical research suggests that negative word-of-mouth (WOM) communication is stronger, but due to cultural differences between East and West, Chinese face psychology in interpersonal interactions affects consumers' WOM behaviors. Based on the theory of face psychology, this paper utilizes the experimental method to explore the relationship between face perception in customer satisfaction and willingness to spread WOM after consuming a high-end brand. The results show that in the case of satisfaction, positive WOM communication willingness is higher for premium brands than for ordinary brands in order to gain face, but in the case of failure, negative WOM communication willingness is lower for premium brands than for ordinary brands in order to avoid losing face; consumers' face perception has a mediating role between satisfaction and WOM communication willingness.

Keywords: Customer satisfaction; Word-of-mouth communication intention; Face perception.

1. Introduction

Word of mouth is a two-way communication with certain attitude tendency of consumers under strong relationship, which has the characteristics of high credibility, low cost and group [1]. Word of mouth affects potential consumers' perception of products, and with the help of word-of-mouth communication enterprises can shape the brand image. However, research has found that consumers are more inclined to spread negative word of mouth, and the amount of negative word of mouth spread when dissatisfied is 2.6 times more than that of positive word of mouth when satisfied [2], so how to promote positive word of mouth and inhibit the spread of negative word of mouth has become the focus of word-of-mouth marketing. Academics have discussed the factors affecting consumers' word-of-mouth (IWOM) communication, and studies have concluded that customer satisfaction (Anderson, 1998), customer commitment (Brown, 2005), substantive incentives (Wirtz, 2002), and opinion leaders (Rosen, 2000) are the main factors affecting IWOM communication [3]. At the same time, research has found that cultural differences in social groups can have an impact on people's willingness to share [4,5], and most of the current research on word-of-mouth is based on the western cultural background, while the cultural differences between east and west can easily lead to individual behavioral differences. China is a collectivist-oriented society, and under the influence of collectivist culture, Chinese people attach particular importance to face [6], and in order to "compete for face" and "save face", consumers attach more importance to the external attributes of products or services (brand, influence, price, etc.) [7], and prefer to buy high-priced and well-known products [8]. In addition, consumers prefer to buy high-priced and famous brand products [8]. Since the face psychology unique to Chinese culture affects consumer purchasing behavior, does face have an impact on word-of-mouth communication behavior?

It has been suggested that face has a greater impact when consumers talk about premium brands [9], but there is a lack of in-depth discussion on the impact of satisfaction and word-of-mouth communication after purchasing a premium brand,

as well as the mechanism of face's role. Consumers' face perception has "face gain" and "face loss", what kind of consumption situations will promote consumers' face gain and loss perception? How does consumer face perception affect consumer word-of-mouth communication? The above issues have not been addressed in the existing literature, this paper will be based on the theory of face, to explore the factors affecting consumer face perception and the influence of face on the willingness of word-of-mouth WOM communication, the study not only enriches the theory of WOM marketing, but also based on the local culture of face to open up the traditional research field of WOM communication based on the Western context.

2. Overview of Face Theory

"Mian" literally refers to the face and the front of the head. It originally only referred to a physiological indicator, but later gradually evolved into a value symbol with psychological and social significance [10]. The definition of face can be roughly divided into two categories: the first category regards face as a social construction, emphasizing the prestige and status given to individuals by society; the second category regards face as a psychological construct, emphasizing the image projection of an individual in society., their relationship may be well understood from the perspective of structural duality [11]. Based on social construction, Goffman (1956) believed that face is the need to avoid "discomfort" in social interactions. In order to keep social interactions running smoothly and effectively, people involved in the interaction are required to convey a minimum acceptable public image, similarly helping others maintain their social identities [12]. Based on the perspective of psychological construction, Brown & Levinson (1987) pointed out that face is the public self-image that a person hopes to be recognized by others. It is an emotional investment that can be lost, maintained, and increased, and one must always pay attention to it in the process of getting along with others. [13]. This article agrees that face has both a social construct and a psychological construct. Face is the evaluation that consumers give to others and the display of their self-image. This article defines face perception as: in the

situation after purchasing a certain product, consumers believe that the purchase behavior can make others have a subjective feeling of public recognition of their social image.

It can be seen that face is a very complex social psychological phenomenon, which not only involves the individual's subjective judgment and objective evaluation from others and society, but also is closely related to the individual's dignity and the role played in society. For the discussion of face perception, Brown and Levinson delineated two types of "positive face" and "negative face" [13], where people experience the feeling of gaining or losing face due to positive or negative social evaluations. When a person's social performance exceeds social expectations, he may gain face, but when it falls below these expectations, this does not necessarily mean a loss of face, only when a person's behavior or performance falls below the minimum level considered acceptable, or when certain requirements that are important or necessary as a social status are not satisfactorily met, he may lose face [3]. In this study, face perception is categorized into two dimensions, namely, gaining face and losing face, and the impact of premium brand and ordinary brand products on face perception is discussed in terms of consumer object qualities.

3. Theoretical Assumptions

3.1. The impact of the interaction between brand and customer satisfaction on word-of-mouth communication intention

Customer satisfaction is an important prerequisite for the willingness to promote WOM communication. Consumers are satisfied when they "meet" or "exceed" their expectations of a product's effectiveness, and the opposite leads to dissatisfaction [14]. Ranaweera and Prabhu found that satisfaction is a driver of WOM communication [15], and that highly satisfied and highly dissatisfied consumers have the highest willingness to participate in WOM. Highly satisfied and highly dissatisfied consumers have the highest willingness to participate in WOM communication, while consumers with average satisfaction have lower willingness to engage in WOM, and there is a U-shaped relationship between satisfaction and willingness to engage in WOM [16]. Some studies have shown that the relationship between satisfaction and word-of-mouth is affected by product characteristics, for example, for high-end brands, people are more willing to talk about consumption success than consumption failure [9]. In the study of luxury consumers' willingness to spread word-of-mouth, the relationship between satisfaction and word-of-mouth varies due to consumers' different consumption psychology, and consumers basically buy high-end brand products out of two consumption motives, namely, to follow the crowd and to show off [17]; the role of high-end brands is stronger for consumers to generate the motivation to show off, and it can better promote consumers' sharing [18]. Therefore, when consumers buy ordinary products, satisfaction is the main driver of word-of-mouth, and when consumers are influenced by consumption motives after purchasing high-end brand products, there is stronger word-of-mouth transmission when consumers feel satisfied, but less word-of-mouth transmission when they feel dissatisfied. Accordingly, the hypothesis is formulated:

H1: For high-end brands, the intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth communication is higher when satisfaction is

high compared to the intention to engage in negative word-of-mouth communication when satisfaction is low.

H2: For ordinary brands, the intention to engage in negative word-of-mouth communication is higher when satisfaction is low compared to the intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth communication when satisfaction is high.

3.2. The mediating effect of face perception

Face represents personal image to some extent, symbolising the social status and prestige of an individual, so face has also become a symbolic capital that people compete for, and this is also true in consumption activities. After entering the consumer society, people's material life has been greatly improved, and more and more consumption and survival needs are far away, on the contrary, consumers increasingly pay attention to the symbolic value and meaning of consumption [11]. Consumers will be influenced by face when purchasing branded products, Liao and Wang (2009) studied that people consume branded products not for material possessions, but for social needs, and desire to be respected in their dealings with others, and that brand awareness is significantly related to the perception of face [19]. In addition, it was found that Chinese consumers' "wanting to lose face" and "fear of losing face" are antecedent variables of consumption behaviour [20], and "fear of losing face" is more important than "wanting to lose face". "Fear of losing face" affects consumers' brand purchase more than "wanting to lose face", and the consumption of high-end brands makes consumers feel that they have gained face. Consumers are motivated to purchase premium brands for face-saving reasons, and this motivation also affects subsequent word-of-mouth communication. As consumers want to gain face and not lose face, they are more likely to discuss and share their experiences with premium brands in subsequent word-of-mouth communication [9]. Sharing the experience of high-end brands makes consumers feel face and highlights their social status, while sharing ordinary brands is slightly boring. Therefore the hypothesis is proposed:

H3: When consuming high-end brands, face perception plays a mediating role in the impact of satisfaction on word-of-mouth communication intention.

In summary, integrating face theory in the context of social media, a mediation model was constructed to investigate the relationship between customer satisfaction, face perception, and customers' willingness to communicate by word-of-mouth. Specifically, the relationship between satisfaction and willingness to communicate by word-of-mouth in different consumption contexts of high-end brands and ordinary brands is explored phenomenologically; and then the mediating mechanism of face perception in word-of-mouth communication is explored.

4. Research Design and Analysis

4.1. Research methods

(1) Research Design. In order to investigate the relationship between customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth communication willingness under high-end brands and ordinary brands as well as to study the inner mechanism of this phenomenon, the experimental design is 2 (high customer satisfaction vs. low customer satisfaction) × 2 (high-end brands vs. ordinary brands), and in order to improve the reliability of the study, the experimental brands are: firstly, the virtual brand is selected, whose purpose is to eliminate the

established attitude of consumers towards the real brand possible impact, and secondly, service brands rather than product brands were used for the study. The experimental simulation scenarios in the restaurant dining success consumption and failure to consume two situations to share their consumption experience to others, the experimental subjects for the university students. The experimental group was an A-brand hotel located in a selected prime location in each city, selected in the Black Pearl Restaurant Guide published by Meituan (a high-end virtual brand), and the control group was a B-brand restaurant (a common virtual brand) with low brand awareness and no surprise in the catering industry. The consumer experience was manipulated into two states, success and failure, the success state is that the restaurant environment is very comfortable, the dishes are diverse and novel, the service staff has a good attitude and pays attention to the needs of the dining staff; the failure state is that during the dining process, the restaurant serves the food slowly, and the restaurant service staff has a haughty attitude and does not have a good sense of service.

(2) Research process and scale measurement. The formal experiment invited 127 college students from a university to participate. They were randomly divided into 2 experimental groups and 2 control groups according to their birth month. The experiment required the subjects to project into the experimental situation and fill in the choices based on the content of the materials and their own feelings. related questions in the questionnaire. All questionnaires were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree), and were about satisfaction [14], brand reputation [21], face perception [22], and word-of-mouth communication habits [23] The reliability was tested, and Cronbach's Alpha values were 0.97, 0.95, 0.94 and 0.77 respectively, which were higher than the reliability threshold of 0.7. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the factor loadings of each scale item were all above 0.5, meeting the requirements of construct validity.

4.2. Statistical analysis of results

First, the manipulation of the success or failure of the consumption experience was tested. The results showed that there was a significant difference in perception between the successful consumption experience group ($M=4.40$, $SD=0.29$) and the failed consumption experience group ($M=1.76$, $SD=0.67$) ($t=29.42$, $p=0.000$), indicating that the experiment successfully manipulated consumption experience. The second is the measurement of consumers' perception of the brand. There is a significant difference ($t=28.64$, $p=0.000$), indicating that the experiment successfully manipulated the level of product brand. Finally, a single-factor analysis of variance test was conducted on the word-of-mouth communication habits in the experimental group and the control group. $P>0.05$ showed that there was no significant difference in the word-of-mouth communication habits between the groups, indicating that the measured word-of-mouth communication willingness was meaningful.

The willingness to spread word-of-mouth communication of each group in the experiment is shown in Figure 1 below. A two-factor analysis of variance was used to find that the interaction effect between shopping experience satisfaction and product brand reputation had a significant impact on willingness to spread word-of-mouth communication ($F(1,127)=35.948$, $P<0.05$), indicating that the interaction between shopping experience satisfaction and brand has a

significant impact on word-of-mouth communication intention. Use the one-factor analysis of variance method to test and compare the differences in word-of-mouth communication intentions under different brands. In the experimental group, the willingness to spread word-of-mouth communication for successful consumption of high-end brands ($WOM=4.53$) is higher than the willingness to spread word-of-mouth communication for failed consumption of high-end brands ($WOM=3.50$) ($F(1,64)=27.58$, $P=0.000$), that is, among customers When sharing their own consumption experience after consuming high-end brand products, they are more inclined to spread successful consumption experiences. Hypothesis H1 is supported. In the control group, the willingness to spread word-of-mouth communication for successful consumption of ordinary brands ($WOM=3.88$) is lower ($F(1,63)=15.61$, $P=0.000$) than the willingness to spread word-of-mouth communication for failed consumption of ordinary brands ($WOM=4.43$), that is, when customers fail After consuming ordinary brand products, the willingness to spread word-of-mouth is higher than the willingness to spread word-of-mouth after successful consumption. Hypothesis H2 is supported.

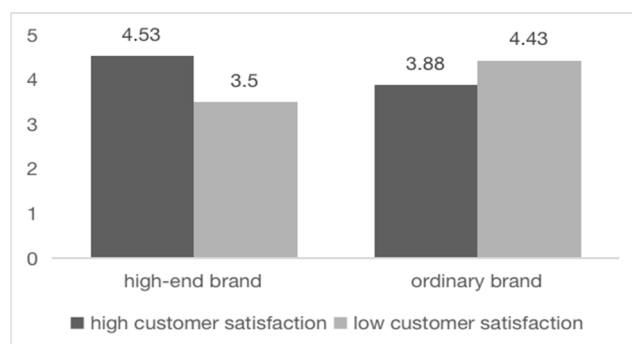


Figure 1. Word-of-Mouth

A two-factor ANOVA was used to analyze the impact of the interaction effect between shopping experience satisfaction and product brand reputation on face perception. The impact of ordinary brand shopping experience satisfaction on face perception is not significant ($F(1,63)=0.28$, $P>0.05$), while the high-end brand shopping experience satisfaction has a significant impact on face perception $F(1,64)=2.31$, $P<0.05$), indicating that the interaction between shopping experience satisfaction and high-end brands has a significant impact on face perception. Further study on the specific paths of satisfaction and word-of-mouth communication intention among face perceptions under high-end brands. We examine whether face perception plays a mediating role in consumption experience satisfaction and word-of-mouth communication intention of high-end products. First, consumer satisfaction is used as the independent variable and word-of-mouth communication intention is used as the dependent variable for regression analysis ($\beta=0.381$, $SE=0.072$; $P<0.001$). Then, face perception is used as the dependent variable for regression analysis ($\beta=0.434$, $SE=0.065$; $P<0.001$). Finally, consumption experience satisfaction and face perception were used as independent variables, and word-of-mouth communication intention was used as the dependent variable for regression analysis. Satisfaction had a positive effect on word-of-mouth communication intention ($\beta=0.246$, $SE=0.092$; $P<0.01$), face perception affects word-of-mouth communication intention ($\beta=0.312$, $SE=0.136$; $P<0.05$), as shown in Figure 2.

Bootstrap was used to test the mediating effect of face perception. The results showed that the mediating effect of face perception was significant (95% CI=0.002--0.272). As shown in Table 1, the 95% confidence interval does not

include 0. It shows that under high-end brand consumption, face perception plays a mediating role in the impact of satisfaction on word-of-mouth communication intention, and H3 is established.

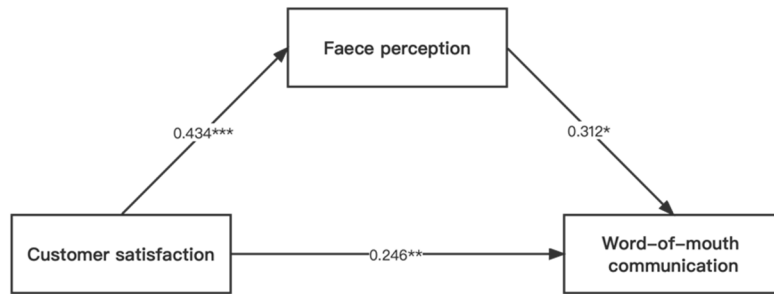


Figure 2. Mediating effect of face perception

Table 1. Decomposition table of total effect, direct effect, and mediating effect

	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Total effect	0.381	0.072	5.260	0.000	0.236	0.526
Direct effects	0.246	0.092	2.677	0.010	0.062	0.429
Indirect effects	0.135	0.068	/	/	0.002	0.272

4.3. Discussion

The study verified H1 and H2 that consumers' willingness to spread word-of-mouth after successfully purchasing a high-end brand product is higher than their willingness to spread word-of-mouth after failing to purchase, while for ordinary brands, willingness to spread word-of-mouth after failing to purchase is higher than that of successfully purchasing. It is also proposed that face perception plays an intermediary role in which face perception mediates between customer experience satisfaction and post-purchase word-of-mouth communication intention after consuming high-end brand products. After successfully consuming high-end brand products, customers will perceive that they have gained face and share their consumption experience with others; after failing to consume high-end brands, customers will have the impression that sharing their consumption experience will damage their own image, and they will perceive that the loss of face reduces their willingness to spread word-of-mouth, which is the intermediary role played by face perception under the consumption of high-end brands.

5. Research Conclusions and Implications

5.1. Research conclusion

Based on the face theory, this paper investigates the mechanism of the influence of high and low brand consumer satisfaction on face perception and word-of-mouth communication willingness, and the results found that: (1) There is a difference in the relationship between customer satisfaction and willingness to spread word of mouth under different brands. When consuming high-end brand products, the willingness to spread word of mouth is higher than the willingness to spread word of mouth when successfully purchasing, and when consuming ordinary brand products, the willingness to spread word of mouth is higher than the willingness to spread word of mouth when successfully purchasing. (2) Successful consumption of high-end brands

perceives face gain and is more willing to positive word-of-mouth communication, while failed consumption of high-end brands perceives loss of face and is unwilling to carry out word-of-mouth communication, and face perception mediates the relationship between customer satisfaction and willingness to word-of-mouth communication.

5.2. Theoretical contribution

(1) This study expands the research on face theory. Previous research has paid more attention to the impact of face on consumers' shopping behavior, but rarely explored the impact of face on consumers' word-of-mouth communication behavior. This study found that face perception plays a mediating role in satisfaction after purchasing high-end brand products and word-of-mouth communication intention. From the perspective of behavioral motivations, consumers not only purchase products for image modification motives such as showing off and gaining status, but also publicize successful consumption experiences in order to better display their self-image and gain face. If purchase and use is a kind of "behavior", word-of-mouth communication is more of a "word". The influence of face on consumer behavior can be said to be consistent with "words" and "actions". This article expands the scope of face theory in consumer behavior research and is conducive to a better understanding of the impact of Chinese people's concept of face.

(2) This study enriches the literature on word-of-mouth communication. Previous studies based on Western culture have concluded that consumers are more inclined to negative word-of-mouth communication than positive word-of-mouth. However, this study studied the word-of-mouth of high-end brands and found that Chinese consumers' willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth is higher than their willingness to spread negative word-of-mouth after purchasing high-end brand products. Positive word-of-mouth spread is a matter of gaining face, while negative word-of-mouth spread feels It will lose face. Under the influence of face psychology, when word-of-mouth content may pose a threat to face, consumers will also adopt hiding strategies and

deliberately choose not to spread word-of-mouth. Research shows that consumers are not always inclined to spread negative word-of-mouth, and brand promotion has an inhibitory effect on negative word-of-mouth. The conclusion further enriches the theory of word-of-mouth communication and promotes the localization of word-of-mouth research.

5.3. Practical inspiration

In the Internet economy era, effective use of online word-of-mouth has become one of the winning strategies for corporate online marketing. This article (1) enhances the brand image and connects the product brand image with the consumer's personal image. Under the motivation of consumers' personal image modification, consumers will Purchase and promote brand products; (2) Use face perception to maximize word-of-mouth communication. Positive word-of-mouth communication for high-end brands is a matter of gaining face. Enterprises must not only improve product satisfaction, but also make users feel conspicuous achievements and the envy of others through publicity, thereby increasing the psychology of gaining face.

5.4. Research limitations and prospects

First of all, this article explores the relationship between satisfaction and word-of-mouth communication intention under high-end brands and ordinary brands. Here, the classification of brand attributes only discusses the level of brand status. In the later stage, other brand attributes and their common characteristics can be studied; secondly This article only discusses face perception from the perspective of gain and loss of face. Face also has other face dimensions such as moral face, talent face, interpersonal face, etc. Later we can explore face perception based on the undiscussed face dimensions. Finally, in the selection of antecedent variables, this article examines the relationship between customer satisfaction and face perception and word-of-mouth communication. In fact, there are other antecedent variables that affect it.

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