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**Investigating the Influence of Brand Communication and  
Brand Trust on Customer Commitment:  
An Examination from the Perspective of Customer  
Perception**

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The study aims to investigate the role of different brand communication types on customer commitment and the impact of perceived fit on the bond between brand communication and brand trust in the context of China's international schools. This work offers profound insights into brand trust and communication strategies for brand decision-makers which directly shape customer commitment, a key aspect of the decision-making process.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Employing quantitative analysis, this study surveyed 318 parents of students from 6 international schools in China, constructing an SEM-PLS model to validate the influences of brand communication, perception of fit, and brand trust on customer commitment.

**Findings:** The research uncovered that controllable brand communication positively affects customer commitment via the mechanism of brand trust, while uncontrollable brand communication does not directly influence affective commitment. The mediation role of brand trust and affective commitment between brand communication and sustained commitment is observed. Perceived fit serves as a moderator in the relationship between brand communication and brand trust.

**Practical Implications:** Our findings empirically unravel the core determinants for the future development of international schools in China.

**Originality/value:** What sets this study apart is its empirical focus on China's international schools sector, an area not thoroughly explored in the existing literature. It bolsters the extant knowledge of brand relationship marketing, providing comprehensive insights into the interplay of brand communication, brand trust, and customer commitment. This paper emphasizes the vitality of effective brand management for gaining a competitive edge and achieving customer fit in the modern market, thereby offering invaluable implications for decision-makers in making scientifically informed brand management decisions.

**Keywords:** brand communication; brand trust; customer commitment; perceived fit; customer perception

**JEL classification:** M31

## 1. Introduction

As the embodiment of the common value of enterprises and consumers, the brand has long become the primary factor that consumers consider when purchasing goods and services from a company (Kumar et al., 2010; Liao & Wong, 2008). With the advent of the new media era, the paradigm of service marketing and relationship marketing has been continuously strengthened, consumers, as the "recipients" and "buyers" of brands, have gradually become the disseminators and creators of brands (Wang & Sun, 2023).

For brand decision-makers, the formulation of brand strategy is a process of scientific decision-making. In this process, clarifying the complex relationships among brand communication, brand trust, and customer commitment contributes to the scientific nature and feasibility of decision-making (Chen & Sriphon, 2022). Brand communication (BC) transmits the core value of the brand to consumers. Enterprises enhance the bond between the brand and customers by utilizing advertising, public communication, and word-of-mouth communication, thereby enhancing brand recognition and trust among the target audience. Customers' word-of-mouth, online reviews, and public opinions greatly influence consumer behavior (Anastasei & Dospinescu, 2019; Ali et al., 2022). The interaction between consumers and brands can increase satisfaction, commitment, trust, and loyalty. As a crucial measurement dimension in relationship quality, brand trust plays an important role in mediating the impact of brand communication, customer orientation, relationship benefit, and price orientation on customers' continuous repurchase commitment. Recent studies suggest that effective brand communication strategies are significantly effective in improving consumers' brand trust (BT), purchase intention, and positive word-of-mouth for trusted products (Baturina & Simakov, 2023; Dai & Reich, 2023). Therefore, the interplay between consumers and brands can elevate satisfaction, commitment, trust, and loyalty, impacting critical elements of the decision-making process.

What makes this study original is that it addresses an unexplored aspect of brand relationship marketing: customer commitment. Existing literature primarily concentrates on brand equity (e.g., brand loyalty), whereas brand extensions (such as customer commitment) warrant further investigation (Marmat, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2022; Wang & Sun, 2023). This study delves into China's international schools sector, constructing a research model to examine the underlying mechanism of brand communication's impact on customer commitment and the moderating effect of perceived fit. Concurrently, the empirical analysis aims to unveil the key drivers for the future development of international schools in China, propelling the healthy and sustainable growth of this sector. Furthermore, this research offers valuable insights for decision-makers, providing them with an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of

brand trust and communication strategies. These insights will directly shape the crucial stage of the decision-making process—customer commitment. Thus, by effectively addressing and incorporating these elements into their strategies, enterprises can bolster their competitiveness and consumer alignment in the market (Liao et al., 2012; Demirer et al., 2020).

## **2. Literature review and hypothesis development**

### ***2.1 The relationship between brand communication and brand trust***

Brand communication is the process of delivering the core values of a brand to consumers; effective communication improves the recognition and trust of the brand in the eyes of the audience, in the era when Internet technology and social media platforms are widely used. Brand communication encompasses various forms of brand-related messaging transmitted through social media platforms, enabling internet users to access, share, participate in, add to, and co-create content related to the brand (Erulgen et al., 2022; Voorveld, 2019). The methods of brand communication include advertising, public relations, promotion, interpersonal, products and services, etc. In this study, brand communication is divided into controllable brand communication (CBC) and uncontrollable brand communication (UBC) based on their level of control and management within the brand communication process. Controllable brand communication refers to the communication activities that the brand side can initiate independently. The main forms include advertising, public welfare activities, services, and public relations (Jothi et al., 2011). Uncontrollable brand communication reflects the spontaneous or organized brand information transmission activities or objective information transmission activities initiated by other brand stakeholders, The main forms of uncontrollable brand communication include customer word-of-mouth communication, non-profit communication of professional organizations, third-party recommendation, etc. (Liao & Wong, 2008; Wang & Sun, 2023).

Early studies have shown that controllable brand communication (i.e. advertising, promotion, non-paid publicity, etc.) affects emotional and cognitive brand trust (Grace & O’Cass, 2005; Paul et al., 2022). Marketing communication strategies such as advertising, promotion, and public relations can generate positive consumer sentiment at the attribute level. This positive sentiment contributes to building brand trust, which, in turn, fosters higher levels of brand loyalty. Brand loyalty plays a critical role in shaping consumers' post-purchase behavior (Geng & Li, 2018; Ferreira & Dickason-Koekemoer, 2019; Juliana et al., 2022). With the continuous development of research, some researchers have put forward different views. According to a recent study,

controllable brand communication, such as advertising and promotion, has a positive influence on both brand cognitive trust and emotional trust. However, word-of-mouth publicity and public publicity do not have a significant impact on brand trust (Kim & Ju, 2019,pp279). Cui et al. (2020) also verify this conclusion. The study shows that brand communication methods such as advertising/promotion and SNS have statistically significant negative effects on brand trust in the catering industry(Cui et al., 2020). With the rise of new media, researchers have started to focus on the impact of uncontrollable brand communication on brands. Researchers believe that consumers tend to build trust in brands through information obtained through social media, rather than information obtained through advertising in marketing activities or promotions (Tabrani et al., 2018). Social media has increased the dynamics of brand communication and promoted the development of user-generated content (UGC). Consumers' trust in brands is more dependent on the information obtained through social media, rather than the information obtained from advertisements in traditional marketing activities or promotions (Seo & Park, 2018,pp38). Integration of social media platforms into marketing strategies has opened up new avenues for brand communication, leveraging new technologies and communication tools. Brand communication activities such as brand word-of-mouth, online comments, and engaging with netizens on social media have a positive impact on brand trust. This, in turn, directly influences brand loyalty and enhances brand equity. Online social media network brand communication follows a three-stage process in building brand trust. During the first stage, interaction and adherence to brand communication play a crucial role in influencing customers to progress to the next level of brand trust. In the second stage, the customer carries out brand information processing through brand identification, internalizing brand information, and building connections. By reducing the emotional risk associated with decision-making, brand communication ultimately establishes the brand trust (Marmat, 2022,p588). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H1: Controllable brand communication has a positive impact on brand trust*

*H2: Uncontrollable brand communication has a positive impact on brand trust*

## ***2.2 Relationship between brand communication and customer commitment***

In the field of marketing, the two-dimensional division of customer commitment has reached a wide consensus. Affective commitment (AC) reflects the emotional attachment, identification, and participation of the organization. While Continuous commitment (CC) refers to a specific program of action (Shah & Khan, 2020,pp166). Researchers call on managers to invest in superior sensory brand experience in visual,

auditory, and olfactory aspects to improve customer emotional commitment (EC) and customer satisfaction, to increase brand equity (Iglesias et al., 2019; Naveed et al., 2023). Lacroix et al. (2020) conducted a study to examine the influence of perceptively experiential brand advertising on customer response. Their findings demonstrated that experiential brand advertising across cognitive, emotional, and sensory dimensions positively affects the development of customer emotional commitment. With the deepening of the research, the interaction and participation of consumers in brand communication, such as online evaluation, word-of-mouth communication, media reports, etc., have gradually attracted the attention of scholars. Some studies have shown that uncontrollable brand communication results from customer commitment, and customer feedback to the brand forms customer commitment, which in turn affects the effect of brand word-of-mouth communication and social media evaluation (Shah & Khan, 2020, pp168). Drawing from the social exchange theory, it is postulated that customer psychological empowerment, customer commitment (both emotional and continuous), and brand word-of-mouth communication are significantly and positively interrelated. However, some researchers put forward different views. Anastasiei and Dospinescu (2019) evaluated the impact of customer emotional commitment on e-word of the mouth of online retail brands by building a model, and the study showed that customer emotional commitment had a strong impact on the value of e-word of the mouth of brands, but did not affect the number of online comments of e-word of mouth. The moderating effects of emotional commitment and continuous commitment were also proposed, which moderated the impact of retail service quality on brand word-of-mouth communication. Meanwhile, continuous commitment played an intermediary role between emotional commitment and retail service brands. Therefore, service quality improves customers' commitment to retail brands, and customers promise to spread their in-store experience to other potential customers, forming a good word-of-mouth communication effect (Bakhshi & Dubey, 2020). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H3: Controllable brand communication positively influences emotional commitment.*

*H4: Controllable brand communication positively impacts continuous commitment.*

*H5: Uncontrollable brand communication positively influences emotional commitment.*

*H6: Uncontrollable brand communication positively impacts continuous commitment.*

### ***2.3 Relationship between brand trust and customer commitment***

Scholars have extensively researched the relationship between brand trust and customer-perceived fit, yielding significant research accomplishments over the past

five years. Early scholars proposed and verified the conceptual model of a high-tech B2B brand trust commitment mechanism based on brand theory and relationship theory, to explore how different dimensions of brand trust affect different types of customer commitment (Sadhvani et al., 2019). The findings indicate that various dimensions of brand trust, including competence trust, relationship trust, and economic trust, positively influence customers' continuous commitment. However, only relationship trust has a positive impact on emotional commitment, while economic trust exhibits a negative impact on emotional commitment. These results shed light on the causal relationship between the three components of brand trust and the two dimensions of customer commitment (Rather et al., 2019). With research development, some scholars have proposed the mediating effect of customer commitment. A study conducted in the hotel industry reveals that customer commitment acts as an intermediary variable, mediating the relationship between brand trust, satisfaction, and brand loyalty. In addition, some researchers believe that there is a significant influence between emotional commitment and continuous commitment (Sashi et al., 2019, pp13). Customer continuous commitment is identified as the primary factor influencing brand communication. Utilizing social media communication for customer retention amplifies the intensity of brand communication, and higher levels of continuous commitment further enhance this intensity. Brand trust exerts an influence on customer brand identification through the mediating role of emotional commitment. In the context of the social media brand community, some researchers have discovered that brand trust acts as a partial moderator in the relationship between customer engagement, customer commitment, and word-of-mouth communication (Valette-Florence, R., & Valette-Florence, P., 2020). Customer commitment plays a vital role in establishing long-term relationships with coffee shops. Brand loyalty or customer commitment, which stems from brand trust, can be defined as the inclination to uphold or enhance high-quality relationships (Bernarto et al., 2020). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H7: Brand trust positively influences emotional commitment.*

*H8: Brand trust positively impacts continuous commitment.*

*H9: Emotional commitment positively influences continuous commitment.*

#### ***2.4 The mediating effect of brand trust and emotional commitment on brand communication and continuous commitment***

Through an extensive literature review, various scholars have collectively demonstrated the interconnectedness between brand communication, brand trust, and customer



commitment across diverse research contexts. Most studies have revealed that brand trust is a mediating factor between brand communication and customer commitment. Based on a comprehensive review of research literature over the past five years, a study on Internet brand marketing indicates that advocacy and collaboration in online brand marketing are directly linked to customer emotional commitment. Additionally, brand trust acts as an intermediary between participation, individuation, and emotional commitment. The study highlights the significance of leveraging brand trust in online channels to foster customer relationships (Boateng & Narteh, 2016, *pp131*). In studies exploring the relationship between brands and customers, certain scholars argue that brand trust, as a critical dimension of relationship quality, plays a significant role in influencing customers' continuous repurchase commitment. This influence is observed in the context of brand communication, customer orientation, relationship benefits, and price orientation (Prayag et al., 2019, *pp180*). In research examining the relationship between social presence and customer relationship quality, several scholars conducted studies that revealed trust as a full mediator between social communication (online brand community, online communication), customer commitment, and customer loyalty within online brand communities. Despite the absence of personal interaction in the online environment, customer commitment and loyalty within online social business communities can still be influenced by personal interaction cues. The brand business trust serves as a mediator between brand commitment and loyalty, ultimately influencing customers in the realm of social business (Nadeem et al., 2020). As research progresses, the latest study has introduced the concept of emotional commitment as a mediating factor. According to present the research, emotional trust in brand cognition acts as a positive mediating factor in the relationship between marketing activities and customer emotional commitment within the context of brand communication. To some extent, consumers need to be more inclined to produce a strong emotional commitment to the brand through the intermediary role of brand emotional trust, to improve the attitudinal loyalty to the brand. In the era of new media, the impact of online brand communication on customer commitment has garnered significant attention. Scholars have suggested that online brand communication, including online advertising and electronic word of mouth, facilitates interactive communication with consumers and achieves cost-effective communication outcomes. The effect of E-WOM and online advertising on customer commitment can only be achieved through the intermediary role of brand trust (Ahn & Yang, 2021, *p12*). Hence, this study posits that brand communication, encompassing controllable methods like advertising, promotion, public relations, and brand experiences, as well as uncontrolled methods like word-of-mouth behavior and online comments, exerts a positive influence on customer commitment, particularly emotional commitment. Furthermore, brand trust is believed to mediate this impact. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H10: Brand trust and emotional commitment play a dual mediating role between Controllable brand communication and continuous commitment.*

*H11: Brand trust and emotional commitment play a dual mediating role between uncontrollable brand communication and continuous commitment.*

### ***2.5 Moderating Effect of customer perceived fit***

Customers are the foundation of an enterprise's survival. The primary objective of management is to create value for customers. It is those who can create value for customers that possess a strong competitive edge in the market. The concept of "customer value chain" introduced by Drucker (2012) marks one of the earliest research endeavors in understanding customer perception. According to Drucker (2012), customers do not merely purchase and consume products; they seek value. Drucker (2012) emphasized the pivotal role of customer value in determining enterprise performance. This concept laid a robust theoretical foundation for the subsequent development and evolution of the customer value framework (Drucker, 2012).

In the early stage, scholars believed that customer perception is that after customers pay, they realize how much they can get from the product they expect, namely, the quality they pay for (Zeithaml et al., 1990). As brand theory has advanced over time, brand equity theory has emerged as a prominent topic in the field of brand management research. It has captured significant attention in the academic community, leading to a focus on the expansion of the customer-brand relationship. One study used associative network theory to construct a model to explain the effect of brand implantation in movies. The research findings indicate that when there is a strong association between a brand and the plot of a movie, it leads to an increased perceived fit between the brand and the movie. This, in turn, positively influences customers' brand attitudes. When brand familiarity is high, the influence of plot connection on brand attitude is not significant. However, when brand familiarity is low, cleverly associating the brand with the movie plot will have a positive impact on brand attitude (Verhellen et al., 2016). However, there are also studies showing that consumers in different countries respond differently to the fit of brand perception. Managers need to understand the cultural differences among consumers and influence consumers through different brand strategies. And high perceived fit can effectively promote consumers' brand identification (Breves et al., 2019; Sommer, 2019). As the social economy continues to evolve, social media has emerged as a powerful communication channel. Consequently, an increasing number of brands are utilizing social media platforms for informal communication purposes. Christodoulides et al. (2015) introduced a theoretical framework based on the theory of social information processing, outlining three stages

involved in the establishment of brand trust through online social media network brand communication. During the initial stage, the level of customer interaction and compliance with brand communication plays a pivotal role in progressing toward the subsequent stage of brand trust. In the second stage, the customer establishes brand perception through brand identification. In the final stage, customers can mitigate emotional risks associated with decision-making, leading to the establishment of brand trust, facilitated by the perception of brand fit. At the same time, some researchers believe that social media communication style has an impact on consumers' cognition and booking intention. According to a study conducted on hotel brands, the alignment between communication style and hotel positioning acts as a mediator in the relationship between brand attitudes and booking intention. Customers' attitudes towards a brand and their booking intention are more favorable when there is a higher perceived sense of brand fit (Hegner et al., 2021, pp121). Recent research has further supported the notion that as customers perceive a higher fit between themselves and the brand, the brand tends to gain more popularity among consumers. Therefore, perceived fit affects consumers' overall attitude and behavioral intention (Deng & Messinger, 2022; Zhou & Li, 2023). Therefore, the following assumptions are made in this study.

*H12: Perceived fit acts as a moderating factor in the relationship between controllable brand communication and brand trust.*

*H13: Perceived fit moderates between uncontrollable brand communication and brand trust.*

### **3. Research methodology**

#### ***3.1 Data Collection***

For this study, 318 parents of students from 6 international colleges in China were selected as participants, and questionnaires were administered in four different regions: central China, South China, and North China. To ensure data authenticity, three classes were chosen from each international school to provide questionnaire-filling training for the head teacher. The head teacher was then responsible for guiding the questionnaire filling process and collecting the completed questionnaires. The questionnaire was primarily distributed through two methods: online distribution and on-site distribution. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 318 valid questionnaires were collected, resulting in an effective recovery rate of 79.5%.

Among them, 53.2% are males, 46.8% are females, 73% are Chinese, and 37% are foreigners. The grade distribution of the surveyed children was: kindergarten accounted

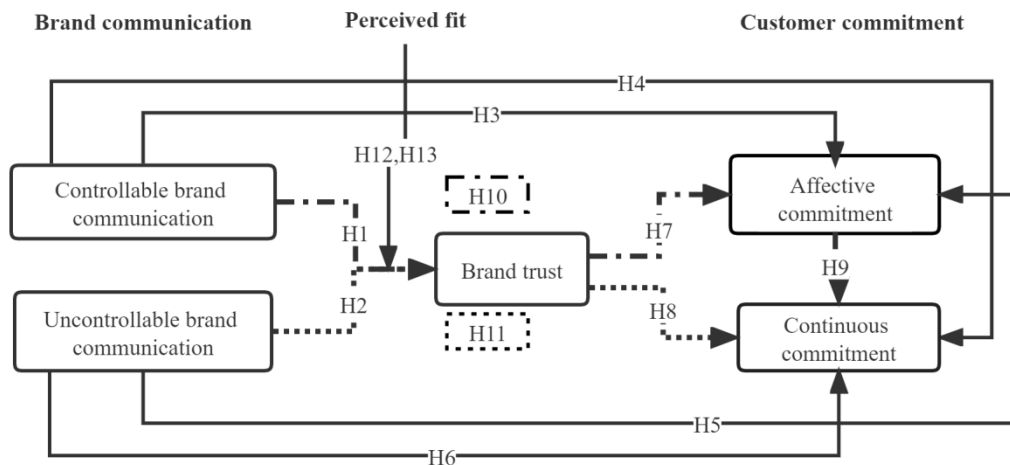
for 15%, primary school accounted for 30%, middle school accounted for 28%, and high school accounted for 37%.

### ***3.2 Measurement***

By referring to the brand equity scale of Keller and Brexendorf (2019) and Christodoulides et al. (2015), this study revised some questions and formed the China International School Brand Scale. There are 26 items on the scale, including 2 main parts. The first part is the basic information, a total of 6 questions. The second part is the customer perception scale, which contains 20 questions. The measurement of brand communication includes 8 items (A1-A4, B1-B4), such as "I believe that the school advertisement significantly impacts my decision to choose this school.", and "I believe that the reputation of the school greatly influences my choice of this school.". The perceived fit includes four items (C1-C4), such as "I think the educational philosophy of this school fits well with the personality of my child". The brand trust consists of four items (D1-D4), such as "I do not think the brand school will harm the interests of parents and students". Customer commitment contains four items (E11-EI4, F1-F4), such as "I and my child depend on this school", and "I will keep my children in this school until they graduate". Cronbach's alpha was calculated to be 0.846, indicating a high level of scale reliability with a reliability coefficient greater than 0.8. Therefore, all items could be retained in the analysis.

### ***3.3 Methodology***

In this paper, the literature review section categorizes brand communication into two dimensions: controllable brand communication and uncontrollable brand communication. Additionally, customer commitment is divided into two dimensions: emotional commitment and continuous commitment. Brand trust was the mediating variable, and perceived fit was the moderating variable. The research model is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical model

Note: There are totally 13 hypothetical paths in the research model (H1-H13).

The structural equation model was used as the research model. In this study, both covariance structure analysis (CSA) and partial least squares (PLS) methods were employed. In the research model, brand communication is divided into two dimensions, and customer commitment into two dimensions. On the theoretical level, due to differences in the division of different dimensions, the higher-order model can better reflect the main path relationship between the study variables (Liu et al., 2012; Vander et al., 2010). However, when modeling the higher-order model using covariance structure analysis (CSA), the significance of variance may be systematically and significantly diminished (Henseler et al., 2016; Ijasan et al., 2021). Therefore, a first-order model was constructed in this study, and the discriminant validity of PLS estimation was also satisfied. This method is more efficient than the initial method proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Furthermore, considering that Ahn and Yang (2021) have emphasized the mediating role of trust, it is pertinent to investigate whether trust can act as a complete mediator between brand communication and customer commitment through the utilization of PLS. In the field of brand research, studies related to emotions appear to be relatively fragmented or concentrated on specific aspects, such as brand preference or brand passion (Charton-Vachet & Lombart, 2018; Lombart & Louis, 2014). Based on this, this study uses a Process to conduct regression analysis to explore the influence of customer-perceived fit on the key variables of brand relationships. This study also includes an exploratory examination of the moderating effect of perceived contracts on the relationship between brand communication and brand trust.

#### 4. Empirical analysis

In this study, descriptive statistical analysis, factor analysis, and regression analysis were conducted by running Smart PLS software, and PLS-SEM was constructed for path analysis.

##### 4.1 Descriptive statistical analysis

In Table 1, the minimum value is 1, the maximum value is 5, and the mean values are distributed between 3.211 and 3.824. These findings indicate that the scores of each question item are reasonably distributed. Skewness and kurtosis values falling within the range of -1.96 to 1.96 suggest that the scores of each item follow a normal distribution.

Table 1. Descriptive statistical analysis

Variable	Mean	Observed min	Observed max	Standard deviation	kurtosis	Skewness
A1	3.588	1	5	1.186	-0.602	-0.524
A2	3.522	1	5	1.060	-0.460	-0.400
A3	3.469	1	5	1.103	-0.603	-0.414
A4	3.651	1	5	1.158	-0.663	-0.499
B1	3.305	1	5	1.135	-0.740	-0.205
B2	3.211	1	5	1.089	-0.866	0.102
B3	3.220	1	5	1.053	-0.561	-0.076
B4	3.255	1	5	1.076	-0.656	-0.050
C1	3.638	1	5	0.996	-0.626	-0.319
C2	3.560	1	5	0.946	-0.158	-0.341
C3	3.456	1	5	0.956	-0.338	-0.199
C4	3.509	1	5	0.893	0.363	-0.441
D1	3.660	1	5	1.123	-0.406	-0.572
D2	3.635	1	5	1.046	-0.523	-0.404
D3	3.638	1	5	0.954	-0.259	-0.313
D4	3.541	1	5	1.068	-0.611	-0.309
EI1	3.494	1	5	1.168	-0.943	-0.277

EI2	3.497	1	5	1.090	-0.537	-0.366
EI3	3.450	1	5	1.004	-0.531	-0.264
EI4	3.519	1	5	1.123	-0.982	-0.134
EI5	3.575	1	5	1.027	-0.901	-0.161
EI6	3.484	1	5	1.033	-0.629	-0.25
F1	3.660	1	5	0.930	-0.143	-0.428
F2	3.824	1	5	1.016	-0.255	-0.618
F3	3.726	1	5	0.934	-0.085	-0.477
F4	3.720	1	5	1.006	-0.324	-0.457

Note: There are 24 items on the scale (A-F).

#### ***4.2 Reliability and validity analysis***

In this study, the PLS-SEM algorithm was employed to assess the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the scale. At the same time, Bootstrapping was carried out, and the significance test was conducted by iterating 5000 times at a 95% confidence interval.

##### **4.2.1 Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis**

In this study, a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.7 indicates a high level of reliability, while a CR value above 0.7 and an AVE value above 0.5 indicate good convergent validity. Based on the data presented in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha values for UBC (Uncontrollable Brand Communication), CBC (Controllable Brand Communication), BT (Brand Trust), ECM (Emotional Commitment), and CCM (Continuous Commitment) all exceed 0.7. Therefore, there is no need to remove any items from the scale, indicating that each dimension demonstrates good internal consistency. Based on the data provided in Table 3, T-statistics values greater than 1.96 and P-values less than 0.001 suggest that all items are statistically significant, indicating good reliability of the questionnaire. At the same time,  $CR > 0.8$  and  $AVE > 0.5$  indicate that all items can be well aggregated in all dimensions, and the scale has good convergent validity.

**Table 2.** Reliability and convergent validity

Variable	Reliability	Convergent validity	
	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
UBC	0.795	0.801	0.620
CBC	0.851	0.873	0.691
BT	0.825	0.829	0.656
ECM	0.812	0.818	0.639
CCM	0.873	0.876	0.725

Note: Composite reliability (CR), Average variance extracted (AVE), Uncontrollable Brand Communication (UBC), Controllable Brand Communication (CBC), Brand Trust (BT), Emotional Commitment (ECM), and Continuous Commitment (CCM).

**Table 3.** Significance test

Path	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics	
			( O/STDEV )	P values
A1 <- CBC	0.874	0.015	56.779	***
A2 <- CBC	0.753	0.03	24.981	***
A3 <- CBC	0.81	0.022	36.08	***
A4 <- CBC	0.883	0.013	65.611	***
B1 <- UBC	0.835	0.021	40.334	***
B2 <- UBC	0.74	0.029	25.744	***
B3 <- UBC	0.771	0.028	27.94	***
B4 <- UBC	0.8	0.021	37.416	***
C2 <- BT	0.787	0.025	30.901	***
C3 <- BT	0.832	0.019	44.771	***
C4 <- BT	0.765	0.031	24.818	***
C5 <- BT	0.853	0.017	49.025	***
D1 <- ECM	0.823	0.021	39.293	***
D2 <- ECM	0.813	0.021	38.167	***
D3 <- ECM	0.752	0.029	26.287	***
D4 <- ECM	0.808	0.021	38.358	***
F1 <- CCM	0.857	0.014	59.306	***
F2 <- CCM	0.836	0.018	45.359	***
F3 <- CCM	0.827	0.021	39.768	***
F4 <- CCM	0.884	0.014	63.028	***

Note: Uncontrollable Brand Communication (UBC), Controllable Brand Communication (CBC), Brand Trust (BT),



Emotional Commitment (ECM), and Continuous Commitment (CCM).

#### 4.2.2 Discriminant validity analysis

Based on the data presented in Table 4, the factor loadings of items within each dimension are higher compared to those in other dimensions. This indicates that each item possesses discriminant validity. Meanwhile, based on the data provided in Table 5, the square roots of the calculated AVE are 0.787, 0.831, 0.810, 0.799, and 0.851 for the respective dimensions. As can be seen from Table 5, the values on the trigonometric line are all greater than the correlation coefficients below the trigonometric line. This indicates that the scale exhibits good discriminant validity.

**Table 4.** Crossing loading

<b>Variable</b>	<b>UBC</b>	<b>CBC</b>	<b>BT</b>	<b>ECM</b>	<b>CCM</b>
<b>A1</b>	0.346	0.874	0.363	0.333	0.403
<b>A2</b>	0.264	0.753	0.231	0.251	0.242
<b>A3</b>	0.312	0.810	0.301	0.311	0.331
<b>A4</b>	0.401	0.883	0.332	0.354	0.432
<b>B1</b>	0.835	0.370	0.275	0.231	0.414
<b>B2</b>	0.740	0.301	0.206	0.245	0.305
<b>B3</b>	0.771	0.295	0.278	0.238	0.361
<b>B4</b>	0.800	0.303	0.251	0.216	0.420
<b>C2</b>	0.221	0.255	0.787	0.435	0.230
<b>C3</b>	0.306	0.321	0.832	0.516	0.260
<b>C4</b>	0.234	0.285	0.765	0.489	0.221
<b>C5</b>	0.277	0.348	0.853	0.490	0.213
<b>D1</b>	0.263	0.332	0.515	0.823	0.305
<b>D2</b>	0.229	0.256	0.477	0.813	0.283
<b>D3</b>	0.191	0.294	0.421	0.752	0.201
<b>D4</b>	0.250	0.330	0.489	0.808	0.311
<b>F1</b>	0.416	0.379	0.242	0.302	0.857
<b>F2</b>	0.413	0.374	0.258	0.309	0.836
<b>F3</b>	0.364	0.343	0.218	0.287	0.827
<b>F4</b>	0.438	0.380	0.253	0.289	0.884

Note: Uncontrollable Brand Communication (UBC), Controllable Brand Communication (CBC), Brand Trust (BT), Emotional Commitment (ECM), and Continuous Commitment (CCM).

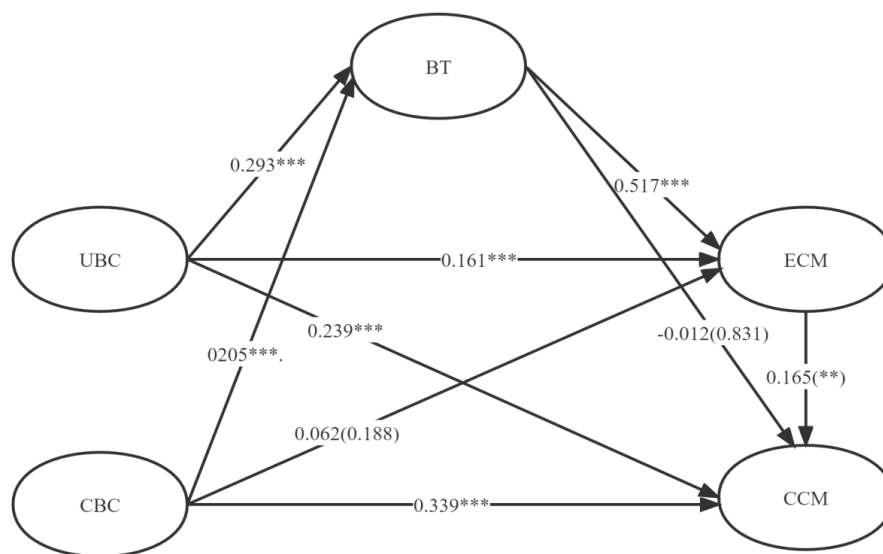
**Table 5.** Differential validity analysis

	<b>UBC</b>	<b>CBC</b>	<b>BT</b>	<b>ECM</b>	<b>CCM</b>
<b>UBC</b>	<b>0.787</b>				
<b>CBC</b>	0.483	<b>0.831</b>			
<b>BT</b>	0.394	0.438	<b>0.810</b>		
<b>ECM</b>	0.365	0.450	0.725	<b>0.799</b>	
<b>CCM</b>	0.570	0.490	0.336	0.409	<b>0.851</b>

Note: The value on the triangular line is the square root value of AVE, and the value above the triangular line is the correlation coefficient. Uncontrollable Brand Communication (UBC), Controllable Brand Communication (CBC), Brand Trust (BT), Emotional Commitment (ECM), and Continuous Commitment (CCM).

### 4.3 Structural model analysis

In this study, the path significance test was conducted by running the PLS-SEM algorithm and calculating Bootstrapping for 5000 iterations at a 95% confidence interval(Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** PLS-SEM path analysis

Note: In the figure, there are 11 paths. \*\*\* $P < 0.01$ , \*\* $P < 0.05$ . Among them, the path from UBC to ECM ( $P = 0.188 > 0.05$ ) is not significant, and the path from BT to CCM ( $P = 0.831 > 0.05$ ) is also not significant. All other paths are significant ( $P < 0.05$ ).

#### 4.3.1 Model fitting degree analysis

According to Chin, W. W. (1998), the PLS-SEM model, reveals that: 1)if the R-square of endogenous variables are respectively 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67, the prediction effect of the model is respectively weak, moderate, and strong; 2)if  $Q^2 > 0.1$ , indicates the model

has good predictive power.

The data presented in Table 6 demonstrates that the R-Square values range from 0.17 to 0.388, and the Q<sup>2</sup> values are between 0.240 and 0.224. Both values are greater than 0.1, indicating that the model exhibits good predictive ability.

The data analysis in Table 7 shows the value of SRMR=0.053(<0.08), NFI=0.866(>0.8), indicating that the model has a good degree of fitting.

**Table 6.** Model prediction ability

<b>Endogenous variables</b>	<b>R-square</b>	<b>Q<sup>2</sup> (=1-SSE/SSO)</b>
BT	0.176	0.111
ECM	0.388	0.240
CCM	0.320	0.224

Note: Brand Trust (BT), Emotional Commitment (ECM), and Continuous Commitment (CCM).

**Table 7.** Model fit

<b>Measure of fit</b>	<b>SRM R</b>	<b>d_ULS</b>	<b>d_G</b>	<b>Chi- square</b>	<b>NFI</b>
<b>Saturated model</b>	0.053	0.593	0.207	395.543	0.866

Note: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Unweighted Least Squares Discrepancy (d\_ULS), Geodesic Distance (d\_G).

### 4.3.2 Path analysis

#### 1) Direct path analysis

Based on the data analysis presented in Table 8, out of the nine research hypotheses, all hypotheses except UBC -> ECM and BT -> CCM (with T-values < 1.96 and P-values > 0.05) were found to be statistically significant (with T-values > 1.96 and P-values < 0.05). The results indicate that uncontrollable brand communication does not have a significant impact on emotional commitment. Additionally, brand trust does not have a significant effect on sustained commitment.

**Table 8.** Direct path system

<b>Path</b>	<b>Original sample (O)</b>	<b>Standard deviation (STDEV)</b>	<b>T statistics ( O/STDEV )</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>CBC -&gt; BT</b>	0.293	0.057	5.144	***	Established

<b>UBC -&gt; BT</b>	0.205	0.06	3.438	0.001	Established
<b>CBC -&gt; ECM</b>	0.161	0.048	3.329	0.001	Established
<b>CBC -&gt; CCM</b>	0.239	0.056	4.271	***	Established
<b>UBC -&gt; ECM</b>	0.062	0.047	1.317	<b>0.188</b>	<b>Not true</b>
<b>UBC -&gt; CCM</b>	0.339	0.051	6.677	***	Established
<b>BT -&gt; ECM</b>	0.517	0.05	10.351	***	Established
<b>BT -&gt; CCM</b>	0.012	0.055	0.213	<b>0.831</b>	<b>Not true</b>
<b>ECM -&gt; CCM</b>	0.165	0.060	2.749	0.006	Established

Note: Uncontrollable Brand Communication (UBC), Controllable Brand Communication (CBC), Brand Trust (BT), Emotional Commitment (ECM), and Continuous Commitment (CCM).

## 2) Mediation effect analysis

Based on the data presented in Table 9, it can be observed that brand trust and emotional commitment play a significant mediating role between controllable brand communication and sustainable commitment. Brand trust and emotional commitment were found to play a mediating role between controllable brand communication and sustainable commitment, as indicated by the statistically significant T-values (>1.96) and P-values (<0.05).

**Table 9.** Analysis of the mediating effect

Path	Standard		T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values	Results
	Original sample (O)	deviation (STDEV)			
<b>CBC -&gt; BT -&gt; ECM -&gt; CCM</b>	0.025	0.011	2.371	0.018	Established
<b>UBC -&gt; BT -&gt; ECM -&gt; CCM</b>	0.017	0.009	1.964	0.050	Established

Note: Uncontrollable Brand Communication (UBC), Controllable Brand Communication (CBC), Brand Trust (BT), Emotional Commitment (ECM), and Continuous Commitment (CCM).

## 3) Moderating effect analysis

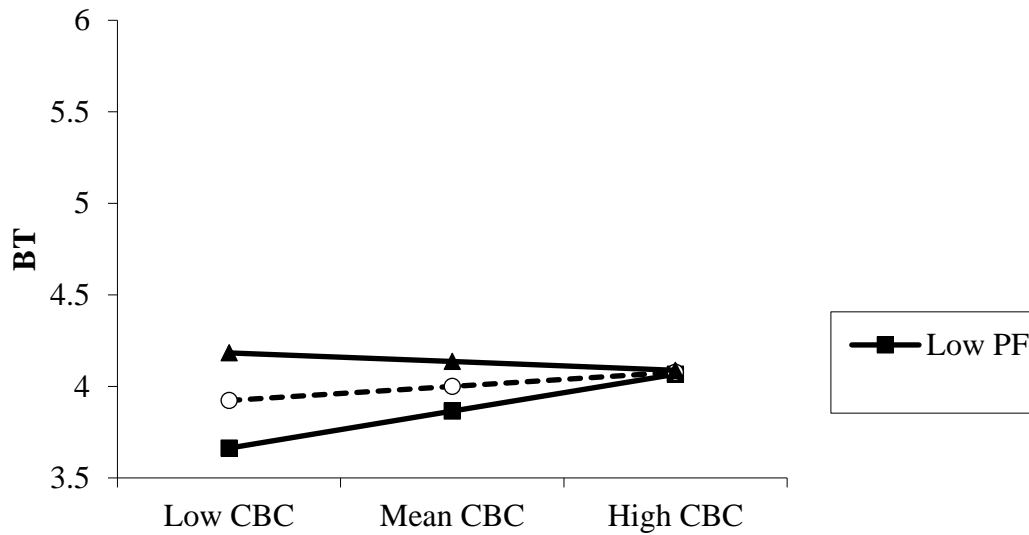
In this study, SPSS was utilized for regression analysis to examine the moderating effect of PF. The independent variables were CBC and UBC, the regulating variable was PF, and the interaction term was  $CBC*PF \setminus UBC*PF$ . According to Table 10's data, the coefficient of interaction item  $CBC*PF$  is -0.159,  $R^2=0.041$ , F value =15.587,  $P<0.05$ , indicating that PF plays a regulating role between CBC and BT; The interaction term  $UBC*PF$  coefficient is -0.233,  $R^2=0.062$ , F value =24.439,  $P<0.05$ , indicating that PF plays a regulating role between UBC and BT. As shown in Fig.3, the higher the degree of perceived fit, the greater the moderating effect of PF between CBC and BT. As shown in Figure 4, the higher the degree of perceived fit, the greater the moderating effect of PF between UBC and BT.



**Table 10.** Moderating effect

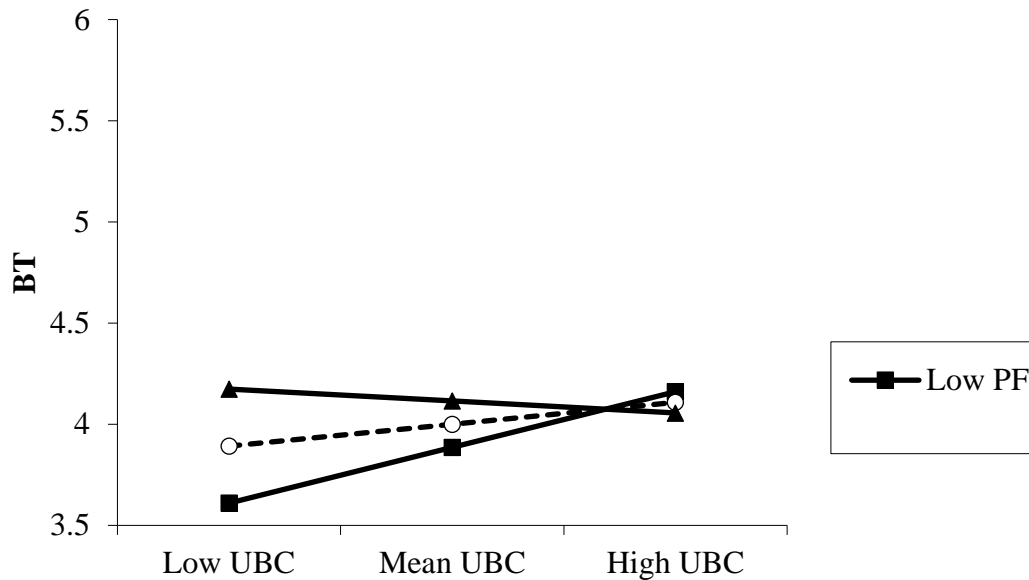
Independent variables							
Variable	Coeff.	SE	t	Variable	Coeff.	SE	t
<b>CBC</b>	0.082	0.0472	1.736	<b>UBC</b>	0.126	0.047	2.694
<b>PF</b>	0.162	0.0530	3.057	<b>PF</b>	0.137	0.050	2.772
Interactive items							
<b>CBC*PF</b>		0.159		<b>UBC*PF</b>		0.233	
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>		0.041		<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>		0.062	
<b>F</b>		15.587		<b>F</b>		24.439	
<b>P</b>		0.000		<b>P</b>		0.000	

Note: Uncontrollable Brand Communication (UBC), Controllable Brand Communication (CBC), Perceived Fit (PF).



**Figure 3.** The moderating effect of PF on CBC and BT

Note: The x-axis represents 'Controllable Brand Communication (CBC)', and the y-axis indicates 'Brand Trust (BT)'. The curve suggests that there is a greater moderating effect of PF between CBC and BT.



**Figure 4.** The moderating effect of PF on UBC and BT

Note: The x-axis represents 'Uncontrollable Brand Communication (UBC)', and the y-axis indicates 'Brand Trust (BT)'. The curve suggests that there is a greater moderating effect of PF between UBC and BT.

Through empirical analysis, this study has discovered a significant positive relationship between brand communication and brand commitment, mediated by brand trust. For example, controllable brand communication such as advertising and corporate social responsibility behavior, and uncontrollable brand communication such as word of mouth and media reports can significantly affect customers' attitude towards the brand and thus generate brand commitment. These conclusions partially confirm the conclusions of Prayag et al. (2019). Furthermore, this study examines the moderating effect of perceived fit and reveals that customers' perceived brand fit effectively moderates the influence of brand communication on brand trust. The findings indicate that the effectiveness of the influence of brand communication on brand trust is enhanced as the customer's perceived fit increases. However, the study also revealed that uncontrollable brand communication does not have a significant impact on continuous commitment, and brand trust does not have a significant effect on continuous commitment. This conclusion is inconsistent with the study of Hegner et al. (2021). The possible reason is that the advertising effect can affect customers' trust in brand value, but cannot make customers' continuous commitment, and brand trust does not directly affect customers' continuous commitment. It is necessary to promote customers' emotional commitment to the brand through customer relationship management, to influence customers' continuous commitment.

## 5. Conclusion

The study investigates the role of different brand communication types on customer commitment and the impact of perceived fit on the bond between brand communication and brand trust in the context of China's international schools. We illuminate how brand communication can effectively foster brand trust, thus, promoting sustained commitment via emotional commitment. Furthermore, we perceived fit emerges as a moderator within the relationship between brand communication and brand trust. To do so, we employ a quantitative analysis by surveying 318 parents of students from 6 international schools in China, and constructing an SEM-PLS model to validate the influences of brand communication, perception of fit, and brand trust on customer commitment.

The research uncovered that controllable brand communication positively affects customer commitment via the mechanism of brand trust, while uncontrollable brand communication does not directly influence affective commitment. The mediation role of brand trust and affective commitment between brand communication and sustained commitment is observed. Perceived fit serves as a moderator in the relationship between brand communication and brand trust.

As a result, the research underscores the significance of brand management in securing stable growth for international schools operating within China. This paper's unique examination from the perspective of international schools within China offers practical insights into the complex relationship between brand communication, brand trust, and customer commitment.

From our findings, this research offers four managerial implications for China International School decision-makers: 1) The establishment of an efficient brand communication mechanism is critical. Given that the brand image of a Chinese international school is directly tied to its survival and development, it is imperative to disseminate information about the school through varied channels to enhance consumer cognition and understanding of the brand. Emphasizing authenticity and accuracy in brand communication to circumvent false or exaggerated publicity is also paramount. 2) Enhancing brand trust, strengthening brand building, maintenance, and promotion can notably improve consumers' trust in the brand. With the emphasis on brand values and brand image, international schools should focus more on the cultivation and refinement of brand culture and brand image, designing mechanisms that elicit brand trust from students and parents. 3) Customer commitment needs to be strengthened. International schools need to enhance communication and interaction with consumers



to increase their cognition and understanding of brand commitment. 4) Continual enhancement of user experience is essential. Perceived fit is a key factor in customers' choice of brand. Therefore, international schools should incorporate user experience as a core element when building a brand image. Our findings empirically unravel the core determinants for the future development of international schools in China and support decision-makers in strategically managing their brands within the education sector.

The study could have a few limitations, including temporal and regional constraints, reliance on a singular research method, and a limited sample size. Future research endeavors could expand the discussion on brand equity, employ diversified research methods to further delve into the brand extension of Chinese international universities, such as multi-group difference analysis and hierarchical analysis, and broaden the sample size and research content (e.g., through big data mining) to enhance subsequent research.

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