



Empirical Research on the Impact of Entrepreneurial Front-Stage Behaviors on Entrepreneur Image and Brand Image in the New Media Environment: Taking Weibo as an Example

Yulei Jiao^{1,a}, Fujie Zhu^{2,b}, Yaming Wang^{3,c}

¹Business School, University of Jinan, Jinan, 250355, China

²Financial Department, University of Jinan, Jinan, 250355, China

³School of Health Management, Shandong University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Jinan 250355, China

^a349336953@qq.com, ^b369293250@qq.com,

^c*60070073@sdutcm.edu.cn

Abstract. In the context of the booming development of new media, this study takes Weibo, a new media platform with extensive influence, as an example to deeply explore the impact of entrepreneurs' front-stage behaviors on entrepreneur image and brand image through empirical research. The results show that compared with individual-related behaviors and enterprise-related behaviors, social-related behaviors have a greater positive impact on entrepreneur image and brand image. And entrepreneur image has a positive impact on brand image. The research results will help us better understand the role of entrepreneurial behaviors in brand building and provide theoretical basis and practical guidance for enterprises to use entrepreneurs' front-stage behaviors to enhance brand image in the new media era.

Keywords: New media environment; Entrepreneur; Front-stage behavior; Brand image; Empirical Research; Weibo.

1 Introduction

The rise of new media has profoundly changed the communication pattern and brand building path of enterprises. As the core leader and image representative of an enterprise, the behavior of an entrepreneur is magnified and spread rapidly in the new media environment ^[1], playing a crucial role in shaping the enterprise brand image.

Among them, the front-stage behavior of entrepreneurs has become a remarkable phenomenon ^[2]. Entrepreneurial front-stage behavior refers to the behavior of entrepreneurs actively showing themselves and enterprise-related information in front of the public. By showing personal qualities, leadership abilities, identity backgrounds, entrepreneurial stories and other contents to influence the audience, to generate resonance

or emotional connection^[3]. Brand image is an important asset of an enterprise. It reflects consumers' cognition and evaluation of enterprise products, services and values. A good brand image can enhance consumers' trust and loyalty and improve the competitiveness of an enterprise.

In the new media environment, the formation and dissemination of brand image are more rapid and complex, and the impact of entrepreneurs' front-stage behaviors on brand image becomes more significant. However, there is still a lack of in-depth empirical research on the relationship between entrepreneurs' front-stage behaviors and brand image in the new media environment. This study aims to fill this research gap and explore the influence mechanism of entrepreneurs' front-stage behaviors on brand image in the new media environment through empirical analysis, to provide theoretical basis and practical guidance for brand building of enterprises in the new media era.

2 Literature Review and Hypothesis Proposing

2.1 Entrepreneurial Front-Stage Behaviors

Front-stage behavior is a selective display behavior while back-stage behavior is behavior that does not want the public to know and limits the public and outsiders to know. Huang et al. (2013) proposed that the front-stage behavior of entrepreneurs refers to a selective display behavior of entrepreneurs and an interaction behavior between entrepreneurs and the public, hoping that the public can see and obtain specific meaning from it^[4]. This study mainly discusses the influence of entrepreneurs' front-stage behavior on entrepreneur image and brand image.

According to the prior research, the front-stage behaviors of enterprises can be classified into individual-related behaviors, enterprise-related behavior and social-related behaviors. Individual-related behaviors refer to activities mainly related to individuals, including personal activities not directly related to enterprises and society such as daily life, interpersonal interaction, fan interaction, family life, interaction with celebrities, and current affairs comments. Enterprise-related behaviors refer to the content mainly related to the industry and work that entrepreneurs are engaged in and mentioned on Weibo. Social-related behaviors refer to some non-market, non-enterprise, and non-personal behaviors that entrepreneurs participate in, including public welfare activities, charity activities, participating in politics and policymaking, and civilization construction.

2.2 Entrepreneur Image and Brand Image

Entrepreneur image refers to the overall perception of entrepreneurs by individuals or the public^[5]. As the spokesperson and symbolic symbol of an enterprise, consumers always try to find some symbolic information from the words and deeds of entrepreneurs and transfer this information to brands and products^[6]. Due to this inherent connection between entrepreneurs and enterprises, the improvement of entrepreneurs' image has a positive impact on consumer satisfaction and purchase motivation^[7]. Huang

et al. (2014) pointed out that every word and deed of entrepreneurs will affect consumers' evaluation of their individuals and the brand of their enterprises^[8]. Consumers form cognition of enterprise brands or products through the cognition of entrepreneurs' public image^[9].

2.3 Impact of Entrepreneurial Front-Stage Behaviors on Entrepreneur Image and Brand Image

Compared with individual-related and enterprise-related behaviors, social-related behaviors can enhance entrepreneurs' image more. First, social-related behaviors often have an altruistic nature and aim to contribute to society^[10]. Thus, social-related behaviors can enhance the affinity of entrepreneurs which helps shorten the distance between entrepreneurs and consumers and enhance consumers' favor for entrepreneurs, which helps improve consumers' trust and recognition of entrepreneurs. Moreover, social-related behaviors can convey entrepreneurs' sense of social responsibility to society, which can enhance the image and reputation of entrepreneurs^[11]. However, individual-related behaviors mainly refer to the display of entrepreneurs in personal life, hobbies and other aspects. Although this behavior can let consumers understand the personality and lifestyle of entrepreneurs^[4], it often lacks influence on society. While enterprise-related behavior can improve competitiveness^[8], it has a relatively small role in improving the personal image of entrepreneurs. Huang et al. (2014) pointed out that every word and deed of entrepreneurs will affect consumers' evaluation of their individuals and the brand of their enterprises^[8]. Consumers form cognition of enterprise brands or products through the cognition of entrepreneurs' public image^[9]. Based on this, we propose H1 and H2. Theoretical Model was shown in Figure 1.

H1: Compared with individual-related and enterprise-related behaviors, social-related behaviors have a greater positive impact on entrepreneur image.

H2: Entrepreneur Image plays the mediating role between types of front-stage behaviors and brand image.

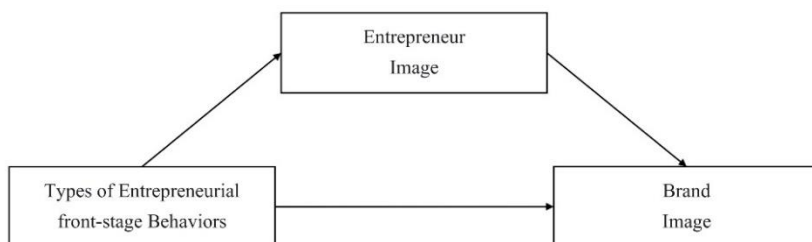


Fig. 1. Theoretical Model.

3 Pilot Experiment

We collected a total of 360 Weibo messages of 20 entrepreneurs from Sina Weibo from January 2016 to May 2019. Through discussions among 2 marketing professors and 3

marketing doctoral students, 31 Weibo messages posted by 5 entrepreneurs were retained. We modified the 31 Weibo messages and deleted the entrepreneur's name, enterprise name, position in the enterprise, release time of Weibo, number of forwards and likes.

They were given to 30 randomly selected ordinary consumers. First, we asked the subjects whether they had used Weibo. If the subjects had not used Weibo, they would no longer participate in the next survey. Then they were asked to classify the 31 Weibo messages according to whether they focused on showing "individual-related content", "enterprise-related content" and "social-related content". It was found that the consistency rate reached 96%. Finally, 9 pieces of individual-related content, 14 pieces of enterprise-related content and 8 pieces of social-related content were displayed. On this basis, through many discussions among 2 marketing professors, 3 marketing doctoral students and 6 marketing postgraduates, 6 pieces of individual-related content, 6 pieces of enterprise-related content and 6 pieces of social-related content were retained as experimental scripts.

4 Formal Experiment

4.1 Experimental Design

The study adopted a single-factor between-subjects design (front-stage behavior types: individual-related behaviors vs. enterprise-related behaviors vs. social-related behaviors). Two hundred and sixty subjects recruited from wjx.cn participated in this experiment.

The subjects were told that this was a test of Weibo usage skills. At the beginning of the experiment, they were asked "Do you have a Weibo account?" and "How often do you use Weibo?". Subjects without Weibo accounts and those who did not use Weibo frequently were excluded.

The subjects were randomly assigned to three groups. First, the subjects were asked to read the profile materials of a virtual entrepreneur (Mr. A). The materials showed that Mr. A is the founder and CEO of an e-commerce company. Then, the subjects browsed the Weibo messages recently posted by Mr. A. One-third of the subjects saw the script of individual-related content, one-third saw the script of enterprise-related content, and one-third saw the script of social-related content.

After that, the subjects' evaluations of entrepreneur image and brand image were measured. Entrepreneur image was measured by a mature scale from the research of Park and Berger (2004)^[12] with 5 items (i.e., The entrepreneur is characterized with sincerity/ trustworthiness/ caution and carefulness/ hard work/ steadiness). Brand image was measured by a scale adapted from the research of Davies et al. (2003)^[13] with 5 items (i.e., The brand is characterized with pleasure/ frankness/ integrity/ trustworthiness/ responsibility). The variables were measured by a 5-point Likert scale.

4.2 Result Analysis

Sixteen subjects who were without Weibo accounts or did not use Weibo frequently were excluded. We analyzed the remaining 244 subjects (55.7% female; for additional details, refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Sample demographics

		Quantity	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	108	44.3
	Female	136	55.7
Age	Under 18 years old	55	22.5
	18-24 years old	5	2.0
	25-30 years old	82	33.6
	Over 30 years old	102	41.8
Profession	Medical	11	4.5
	Education	11	4.5
	Private Enterprises	111	45.5
	State-owned enterprises	42	17.2
	Individual enterprises	17	7.0
	Government departments	8	3.3
	Other	44	18.0

Main effect. We conducted a one-way ANOVA on brand image ($\alpha = 0.72$), with front-stage behavior types (individual-related behaviors vs. enterprise-related behaviors vs. social-related behaviors) as the independent variable. The results indicated that participants in the social-related behaviors group demonstrated a significantly better opinion of the brand image ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.38$) than those in the individual-related group ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.50$) and enterprise-related group ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.52$; $F(2, 241) = 22.56$, $p < 0.001$). Consequently, H1 was supported. Refer to Figure 2 for a visual representation of these findings.

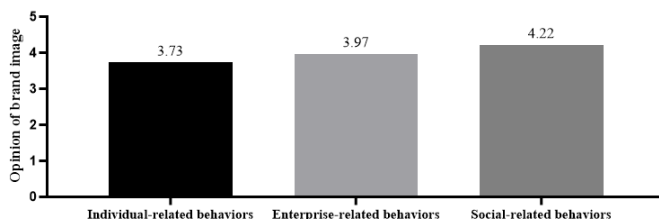


Fig. 2. Opinion of Brand image

Mediation analysis. ANOVA of entrepreneur image ($\alpha = 0.68$) showed that participants in the social-related behaviors group demonstrated a significantly better opinion of the entrepreneur image ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.36$) than those in the individual-related group ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.45$) and enterprise-related group ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.48$; $F(2, 241) = 18.18$, $p < 0.001$).

A mediating analysis was conducted (Model 4; Hayes, 2011) to explore the mediating role of entrepreneur image between front-stage behavior types and brand image (i.e., H2). The independent value was encoded (individual-related behaviors = 1; enterprise-related behaviors = 2; social-related behaviors = 3), and entrepreneur image was used as mediating variable to conduct regression analysis on the brand image. As expected, the mediating effect of entrepreneur image was significant ($\beta = 0.17$, $SE = 0.03$; 95% CI: 0.12 to 0.23) between behavior types and brand image. At the same time, the direct effect of behavior type on brand image was significant ($\beta = 0.08$, $SE = 0.02$; 95% CI: 0.03 to 0.12), demonstrating that entrepreneur image partially mediated the effect of behavior type on brand image. Thus, H2 was proved. The results are shown in Figure 3.

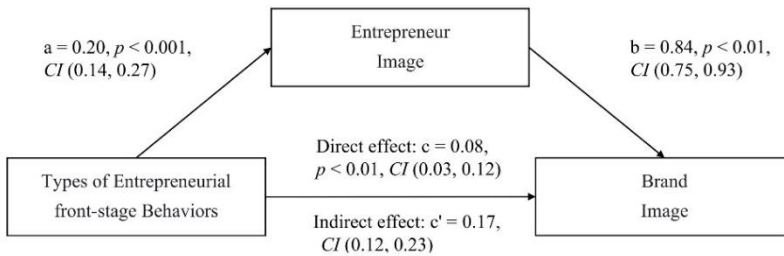


Fig. 3. The mediating effect of entrepreneur image

5 Conclusion

Through empirical analysis, H1, H2 and H3 proposed in this study are all established. The model of the role of entrepreneurs' Weibo on entrepreneur image and brand image is verified, and it is explained how the types of front-stage behaviors displayed by enterprises on Weibo affect consumers' evaluations of entrepreneurs and enterprise brand images. Specifically, the social-related behaviors of entrepreneurs are more conducive to the establishment of a positive entrepreneur image than enterprise and individual-related behaviors.

According to the conclusions of this study, we put forward the following suggestions and opinions on how entrepreneurs manage Weibo. First, this study confirms that the content posted by entrepreneurs on Weibo will affect Weibo browsers' perception of the entrepreneur's image. And the perception of the entrepreneur's image will further affect the evaluation of brand image. Therefore, when entrepreneurs post Weibo messages, they should consider the impact of Weibo content on personal image and entrepreneur image. Don't act willfully and recklessly, which will then affect the brand image and damage the brand value. Second, the empirical results of this study also show that entrepreneurs' posting of social-related Weibo content is better than posting individual-related and social-related content, which has a better impact on entrepreneur image and brand image. This shows that the public has requirements for entrepreneurs' sense of social responsibility. And sharing social-related activities can make Weibo browsers have a more positive cognition of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are important

spokespersons in enterprises. The fulfillment of entrepreneurs' social responsibility behaviors will not only make Weibo browsers have a more positive perception of entrepreneurs' image, but also affect browsers' perception of brand image.

6 Limitations and Future Research Directions

First, in the experimental process, we divided the subjects into three groups (individual-related behavior/ enterprise-related behavior/ social-related behavior) and subjects in the three groups saw different microblog content. However, in real life, when individuals browse entrepreneurs' Weibo, they might see different types of entrepreneurs' Weibo content, different from the experimental situation. Secondly, in the current study we explore the impact of entrepreneurial front-stage Behaviors on entrepreneur image and brand image in the new media environment by taking Weibo as an example. However, in today's era, new media types (e.g., live broadcasts and short videos) emerge endlessly. This may make the research conclusions need to be adjusted according to the characteristics of new media to be more applicable. Therefore, in future study, we should design experiments that simulate real-life scenarios more closely. And we should conduct research on the impact of entrepreneurial front-stage behaviors on entrepreneur image and brand image across different emerging new media platforms.

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