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Consumers' Communication Channels Preferences: High-Stake Versus Low-Stake Brands

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Consumers' Communication Channels Preferences: High-Stake Versus Low-Stake Brands

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore which communication channels consumers are more likely to use when they want to provide feedback or acquire information about high-stake and low-stake brands. This research relies on the results of a survey and an analysis of the literature to gather findings. Results suggest that consumers prefer to talk more about high-stake brands than low-stake brands. They also show that consumers are more inclined to use face-to-face, Facebook, and websites to communicate experiences and acquire information about brands than other evaluated communication channels. Finally, consumers are more likely to express negative experiences than positive experiences or questions. Findings of this research provide insights to enhance the consumer-brand interactions in brand communications.

Keywords: brand communication, cross-media campaigns, consumer-brand engagement

Consumers' Communication Channels Preferences: High-Stake Versus Low-Stake Brands

The ways consumers gather information and communicate about brands has been changing dramatically over the last decade (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Content in the traditional media era was created and disseminated to mass audiences based on prearranged schedules via one-way communication channels. However, this model is gradually changing to allow consumers to select the content they want at the time of their choosing (Wildman, 2008). This switch challenges the understanding of brand managers about the types of connections that consumers tend to seek in the new communication landscape (Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlström, & Freundt, 2014). Brands are seen to be much more than names or logos (Barlow & Stewart, 2004). Brands are cultural constructions that survive in the consumers' spaces as they communicate values, attitudes, and identities (Hackley & Hackley, 2015).

The Internet has provided consumers with multiple digital communication channels to interact with and about brands (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). An estimate of 81% of Americans use the Internet to find information about products and services they want to buy (Purcell & Rainie, 2014), which lead them to connect with brands through different digital communication channels. American consumers who have positive experiences with a brand are 13% more like to keep the relationship with that brand (Echo, 2011). Brands with multiple communication channels are more likely to get feedback from consumers and turn those connections into more sales.

Not all products and brands are equal. Different products have different levels of relevance to consumers (Jaakkola, Aarikka-Stenroos, & Kimmel, 2014). Consumers have different levels of engagement depending upon brand categories. The concepts of high-stake and low-stake brands refer to the financial and time involvement that a product or service requires.

For instance, a consumer invests more time, energy, finances, and commitment when purchasing an automobile than a loaf of bread. A loaf of bread is a low-stake purchase because it is relatively inexpensive, short-lived, and repeated on a regular basis.

Brands are the principal connector between specific products and consumers (Schultz, Barnes, Schultz, & Azzaro, 2009). Brands have the ability to communicate and personalize the customer's experience while providing an opportunity for engagement (Keller, 2012). Strong connections between brands and consumers make consumers more likely to communicate with and about those brands through different communication channels (Keller, 2009; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013). For instance, if a consumer feels a strong connection with a brand, that consumer might be more likely to reach the brand's Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts.

Branding has become increasingly important as the variety of products and services increases and the number of communication channels expands (Ellwood, 2000). Current literature has mostly explored the functions and effects of one or two communication channels at a time to understand the consumer-brand communication process in business-to-consumer (B2C) settings (Friedman & Curall, 2003; Goman, 2011; Ko, Chang-Hoan, & Roberts, 2005). This research explores how likely are consumers to use face-to-face communication, email, telephone, websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to acquire information and express their positive and negative opinions with and about high-stake and low-stake brands.

Rationale

Understanding how consumers communicate with and about brands can assist brand managers in strategically utilizing traditional communication channels and social media. Companies have to monitor and respond to what is being said to and about them across a range of platforms (Smith, 2011). Understanding the consumers' preferred communication channels

will help brand managers communicate more efficiently depending on the consumers' needs and desires.

Consumers are daily exposed to innumerable commercial messages. Consequently, targeting those messages through the appropriate communication channels is essential for an effective relationship between brands and consumers (Agozzino, 2012). Branding is not just about marketing and advertising; it is about creating significant relationships between consumers and products (Schultz et al., 2009). Traditional approaches to branding that put emphasis on one-way communication channels are augmented by social media. New perspectives are needed to understand branding guidelines in the rapidly changing communication world (Keller, 2009).

Consumers' preferred brands usually align with their values and beliefs. Since multi-channel brand communication help consumers identify themselves with brands on rational and emotional levels (LePla & Parker, 1999), it is necessary to research where and how should brands communicate with consumers. However, there is little consensus on how brands should be developed in the modern interactive marketplace (Keller, 2009). Shin, Pang, and Kim (2015) stated that there is a lack of agreement among brand managers on the best communication channels to use when interacting with consumers. Brand managers will be able to prepare effective brand communication plans if they understand what communication channels they should use to communicate with consumers according to their preferences.

Literature Review

There is a diverse body of literature concerning the uses of multiple communication channels for consumer-brand interaction. There is also literature regarding brand engagement through specific communication channels such as face-to-face, telephone, email, blogs, websites, social media, and cross-media communication campaigns. Consumers choose to use various

communication channels based upon which they have available and what communication needs they aim to gratify. Consumers may need to acquire information and share feedback before, during, and after they acquire branded products and services.

The emphasis on consumer-brand communication has grown over time. Communication technologies have advanced so rapidly that they are now deemed as essential for brand's success. Contemporary brand communication is dynamic, multifaceted, and occurs whether the brand originates it or not (Schultz et al., 2009). There is a positive correlation between brand communication and consumers' preferences of low-stake and high-stake products (Punyatoya, 2011). Consumers have different reasons for communicating about high-stake and low-stake brands. There are various needs that can be gratified through different communication channels.

Uses and Gratifications Theory Applications

Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) has its roots in traditional media research (Katz, Blumer, & Gurevitch, 1974). This theory began looking at why people chose television, radio, newspapers, and films to gather various types of information and fulfill personal needs. Recently, U&G has been also used to study how consumers use social media channels (Chen, 2011; Porter & Donthu, 2008). U&G has always been a model of consumer media choice that provides a customer-to-media perspective as opposed to a media-to-customer perspective (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004). For U&G scholars, the basic questions remain the same: Why do people become involved in one particular type of mediated communication and what gratifications do they receive from it? (Ruggiero, 2000). U&G is often used to understand why consumers use different communication channels for different types of messages.

U&G in the Digital Landscape. Consumers are faced with branded messages in a variety of ways in the online environment (Ruggiero, 2000; Voorveld, 2010). Withing and

Williams (2013) found that 88% of consumers use social media for social interaction, 80% for finding information about sales, and 56% for expressing thoughts and opinions. In addition to these needs, Sundar and Limperos (2013) found certain gratifications for specific communication channels. For instance, some of the telephone's gratifications are sociability and time management. Internet's gratifications include passing time, seeking information, and convenience. In blogs of political candidates, which can be considered high-stake brands, some of the gratifications consumers seek are social utility, guidance, and information. These scholars also found that Twitter's gratifications are connection, self-expression, social interaction, and information sharing.

Cross-Media Communication Campaigns

Consumers understand brands holistically by creating meanings from multiple communication channels (Hackley & Hackley, 2015). Both offline and online channels are indispensable components to most companies' communication strategies (Murphy, 2011). Branding professionals can now accelerate the growth of all their customers' relationships by blending offline and online strategies (Smith, 2011). One reason that makes multi-channel communication plans succeed more than single-channel communication plans may be that the effect of seeing a brand repeatedly in different communication channels produce small but cumulative increases of brand awareness (Sutherland, 2009). Brand managers should keep a constant flow of communication with each effort by reinforcing and improving all the communication activities (Schultz et al., 2009).

According to Kirmani (2007), consumers associate high quality products with high levels of message repetition. However consumers may perceive message repetition as excessive and begin to doubt the brand's confidence in product quality; there is a negative curvilinear

relationship between message repetition and brand's quality perceptions (Kirmani, 2007).

Consequently, the use of message repetition among multiple communication channels should be

used carefully. Agozzino's (2012) findings indicated that it is more valuable for organizations to

use one social media tool effectively rather than multiple tools carelessly.

Consumer Engagement by Using Different Communication Channels

Recent studies highlight the dynamics of consumer-brand relationships in B2C

environments. Researchers have found differences on brand engagement effects and consumer

purchase intentions depending on the communication channels used by the brand. A particular

consumer may value differently the attributes of a communication method depending on their

own particular circumstances (Walker & Johnson, 2006). Some consumers prefer to use

traditional communication for their specific needs and desires; other consumers might prefer to

use social media channels. This study defines traditional communication as long-established

communication channels where brand-consumer communication usually occurs directly without

the intervention of third parties. Face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, and websites are examples of

traditional communication channels. Social media channels refer to internet-based applications

where consumers create and receive content (Percy, 2014). Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and

Instagram are examples of social media communication channels.

Face-to-face communication. Face-to-face communication, or simply face-to-face,

offers instantaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between people. Kijima and Novani

(2012) claimed that face-to-face communication is still the most powerful human interaction as

no other communication channel offers the same level of closeness and immediacy than people

talking in the same room**.** Even in a digital-driven world, the need for face-to-face interaction is

highly important (Murphy, 2011).

Dietz-Uhler and Bishop-Clark (2001) found that face-to-face communication that comes after computer-mediated communication is perceived to be more meaningful than face-to-face discussions not proceeded by computer-mediated communication. This suggests that brand managers can start engaging with a consumer in an online environment and continue the engagement process in the company's physical location. While brand managers communicate through media, they also need to be open to face-to-face interaction (Goma, 2011). For example, airlines, which can be considered high-stake brands, may often require face-to-face communication to engage with their customers even when websites and social media channels are available (Kijima & Novani, 2012). However, face-to-face interaction may not be a realistic method of engaging all consumers in all situations in today's communication landscape.

Email communication. Brand managers prefer emails because they can be more flexible and asynchronous than other communication channels (Byron, 2008). Asynchrony allows brand managers to take their time to reply to customers in a more premeditated manner. Agozzino (2012) found a positive correlation between millennials who had interacted via email with the low-stake brand Starbucks and wanted their relationship with the brand to continue. Another study (Friedman & Curall, 2003) argued that the use of email increases the possibility of conflict escalation among those communicating by email. Therefore, the use of email as a brand's communication channel may be avoided when consumers are providing negative feedback.

Website communication. Websites offer a set of tools to create consumer-brand engagement. Interactivity is a key characteristic of websites (Voorveld, 2010). In the case of governmental websites, interactivity includes any feature that promotes user-government communication (Ferber, Foltz, & Pugliese, 2008). Ko, Chang-Hoan, and Roberts (2005) explained when consumers are more likely to engage with a website; consumers with high

information motivations are more likely to engage in a corporate website. These findings support the idea that brand managers should keep brands' websites interactive and with all the information consumers might need in order to engage with the brand or acquire its products and services.

Müller, Florès, Agrebi, and Chandon (2008) found positive correlation between visitors' satisfaction with corporate websites and their likelihood to revisit those websites and recommend them. They also found that opening complementary brand communication tools, such as email newsletters, make consumers to be more motivated to engage with the brand's website. Thus, brand managers should promote the company's website in all their brand's communication efforts to benefit from cross-media communication effects.

Social media communication. Social media has become a fundamental component of consumers' lives (Neudecker, Barczewski, & Schuster, 2015) and a relevant force in their decision making process (Kwok & Yu, 2013). Some authors have claimed that social media are more than communication channels, as they constitute powerful relationship tools (Men & Tsai, 2014). However, there is little understanding of how and why consumers use these online platforms (Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Some researchers believe that social media encourage brands to foster their relationships with customers, while other studies found contradictory results (Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013).

Steinmann, Mau, and Schramm-Klein (2015) found that the success of a brand in social media mostly depends on how that brand represents itself. Consumers are more likely to have positive perceptions of brands that are presented in social media in ways that fit the consumers' needs and preferences. Similarly, De Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2012) found that social media channels constitute exceptional vehicles for nurturing brand-consumer relationships. The

dynamic and frequently real-time interaction enabled by social media significantly changes the brand management landscape. A deep understanding of this change is critical for brand managers since social media can affect a brand's performance (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013). Social media may have positive and negative outcomes in a brand's communication process with its customers. For example, a customer can share a viral video that can boost or damage a brand's reputation in just a couple of days or even hours.

Even though social media channels allow consumers to strongly influence a brand's image over social media, brand managers should strategically engage with these messages. Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlström, and Freundt (2014) found that social media represents a threatening power for brand-consumer relationships. Passive behavior could be perceived as a neglecting attitude and could even spread to third-party websites or traditional media (Neudecker et al., 2015). Some airlines are using social media sites while others are blogging. These all are considered by some authors as competent ways to get the customers online community involved. Clients may get motivated to travel in those airlines and provide both positive and negative feedback (Kijima & Novani, 2012). In general, some of the main reasons for American consumers to join a brand's social media channels are to learn more about that brand, be entertained, get free content, and receive early information about new products (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011).

Despite brand managers' intentions to influence social media to their advantage, Fournier and Avery (2011) argued that the Internet was created not to sell branded products and services, but to connect people in collective conversations. These authors added that online consumers have emerged as fervent brand mediators and commentators by judging and critiquing brands in social media (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Furthermore, Universal McCann (2015) found that the

three main activities that social media users prefer to do are to stay in touch with friends, meet new people, and pass time. The more brand managers use social media to disseminate information and interact with consumers, the more their social media campaigns need to be personalized, tailored, and medium-specific.

Other studies have touched specific findings about blogging, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These are four of the most popular social media networks that connect brands with consumers with a Facebook and Twitter being the two main channels (Social Media Examiner, 2015). Blogging is used as one of the main type of content by the 64% of the surveyed B2C. Instagram use rose significantly from 28% in 2014 to 36% in 2015. Additionally, the Pew Research Center (2015) found that Facebook (70%), Twitter (49%), and Instagram (36%) are the three social networks that users use the most in a regular basis, which make them relevant for brand managers in order to connect and engage with consumers.

***Blog communication*.** Blogging has become a key marketing strategy and many companies have embraced this trend (Hackley & Hackley, 2015). Koening (2014) found that corporate blogs are valid instruments to affect communication by and about brands. Blogs are often perceived to be more credible and trustworthy than other branded communication efforts since blogging allows brands to be genuine and communicate their human sides (Akehurst, 2009; Grams, 2012).

There is an estimate of more than 172 million blogs producing more than one million posts every day (Akritidis & Bozanis, 2013). Blogging provides experts and enthusiasts with an easy way to make their voices heard (Scott, 2013). Because blogs are in between the control of companies and the control of consumers, blogs are in an ambiguous space between the brands and the consumers' perspectives. However, according to Colliander and Dalhén (2011),

consumers tend to believe more in blogs when its authors are not related to the brands they

follow. Consumers also trust in bloggers more than journalists because of the blogger's usual

intention of promoting a single point of view, which is unlike the traditional media's goal of

providing a balanced point of view that might influenced by corporate interests (Akritidis &

Bozanis, 2013). Brand managers that ignore independent product reviews and blog discussions

about their products and services are risking their reputation (Scott, 2013).

Due to this increase in the size of the blogosphere, bloggers opinions about brands are

now crucially important since they affect a large number of consumers. For example, a positive

opinion about a brand can significantly increase its commercial success whereas in contrast,

multiple negative statements can decrease its publicity and success (Akritidis & Bozanis, 2013).

However, on Agozzino's (2012) study, only 21.1% of millennial students reported interacting

with blogs. Meaning that brand managers need to evaluate if blogs are becoming less popular

within the millennial generation and more appealing to more mature audiences.

Facebook communication. Facebook is an outstanding method to engage customers

(Novani & Kijima, 2012). Facebook has a meaningful influence on brand communication and

acts as a successful tool for customer relationship management (Mathiou, Chiang, & Tang,

2013). As one of the most predominant social media tools, Facebook has received significant

research attention from many disciplines, but only a few studies have focused on how Facebook

can be used as an effective B2C communication instrument (Kwok & Yu, 2013).

According to Social Media Examiner (2015), 93% of marketers use Facebook to connect

their brands with consumers. This high number can make users perceive Facebook as a network

where they can find nearly any brand. However, since Facebook search capability only allows

consumers to find brands by name, Facebook can make it easier to connect with brands that

consumers already know as opposed to explore new brands in the consumer's initial information-seeking process.

Twitter communication. A content analysis made by Zhang, Jansen, and Chowdhury (2011) found higher volumes of word-of-mouth messaging after a brand created a Twitter account. These results indicate a dramatic influence of brand's engagement in word-of-mouth communication. Additionally, Pentina, Zhang, and Basmanova (2013) found that Twitter followers of a particular brand intended to continue their relationship with that brand and mention their positive experiences to their followers. Twitter is also effective to increase consumers' trust in brands (Pentina, Zhang, & Basmanova, 2013). As a result, brand managers can use Twitter for nurturing relationships and provide information. Nearly 66% of surveyed marketers by Social Media Marketing (2015) plan to increase their use of Twitter in 2015. This decision may allow Twitter users to find more brands to connect with and may also help brands nurture their relationships with consumers.

Instagram communication. Instagram is another engaging social networks (Lundberg, 2014) with more than 400 million active users and an average of 80 million new pictures per day (Instagram, 2015). Instagram also generates a substantial amount of brand communication (Klie, 2015). According to Peterson (2014), brands gain nearly 50 times more engagement on Instagram than on Twitter. Bylykbashi (2014) argued that Twitter's focus is to surface breaking news worldwide, where Instagram hosts captivating imagery. In order to engage with consumers through Instagram, brands need to communicate visually (Klie, 2015). Brands can incentivize brand ambassadors and influencers to share their positive experiences with brands in visual ways.

However, regarding negative feedback shared on Instagram, a study conducted by Guidry, Messner, and Medina-Messner (2015) studied fast food brands and concluded negative consumers' comments were not replied to. They concluded that it is important for brand managers to monitor the communication on Instagram and include this channel in their communication strategies. This lack of two-way communication between some low-stake brands and consumers who acquire information and share feedback via Instagram should be of concern for brand managers.

Consumers' Information Acquisition and Feedback About Brands

Brand managers should examine what motivates consumers to share experiences and what facilitates the sharing process. In some communication channels, the brand can control and deliver the communication about the customer experience, while in other channels consumers originate the content. Consequently, some practices enable the spread of only positive customer experiences, whereas other practices allow sharing both positive and negative experiences (Jaakkola et al., 2014). It is important to understand in what communication channels consumers tend to seek information and how is the process to gather this information.

Information acquisiton. The Internet has created a new medium for consumers to access information (Ratchford, Talukdar, & Lee, 2007). In fact, Ferber et al. (2008) claimed that the ultimate purpose of websites, or any communication channel, is to provide information. Kijima and Novani (2012) found that social media and face-to-face communication are two channels frequently used by customers to gather information about brands. On the other hand, Klein and Ford (2003) found an increase of use of websites to find information about high-stake brands, specifically for car dealers. They found an increasing trend in the time spent with the car dealers' websites and a declining trend in the time spent in face-to-face visits to automobile dealerships.

Ratchford, Talukdar, and Lee (2007) found that consumers who use the Internet seem to be more prepared with information. However, in the last few years, social media has been reported to be a primary source of information in the brand-consumer context (Men & Tsai, 2014).

Consumer feedback. Customers' evaluations of satisfaction are critical inputs in the development of both high-stake and low-stake brands strategies (Ofir & Simonson, 2001). Brands that are open to receive customer feedback are more likely to improve the relationship with their current and prospective consumers. The constructive effects of feedback occur in both satisfied and dissatisfied customers (Allen, Dholakia, & Basuroy, 2014). Consumers carry out many brand-related behaviors that may have both positive and negative consequences for brands (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlstrom, 2012). Nevertheless, there are some differences between positive and negative feedback in the customer-brand context. Consumers use social media for sharing comments and reviews about products and services and the brands that produce them (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010).

Positive feedback. Ferguson, Paulin, and Bergeron (2010) found in hospital patients— which can be considered consumers of high-stake brands due to the patients' personal involvement—that the higher the patient score on extraversion the greater is the likelihood of sharing positive feedback. This means that the general personality traits of the brand's targeted customers should be considered when preparing a brand's communication plan. Tuškej, Golob, and Podnar (2011) found that consumers are more likely to share positive feedback with family and friends when they have strong identification with brands, which enables the formation of meaningful consumer-brand relationships. Brands that share values with their consumers incentivize sharing positive feedback. Based upon the power of word of mouth communication,

positive feedback can be perceived from other consumers as a valuable reason to believe in specific brands (Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2011).

Negative feedback. According to Belew (2014), consumers are more likely to share more negative than positive experiences about brands when they provide negative emotion. Ofir and Simonson (2001) found that when brands expect feedback from consumers it could lead consumers to evaluate negatively the quality of the service.

Today, the Internet allows negative feedback to be multiplied and dispensed rapidly. This situation might decline a brand's reputation (Barlow & Stewart, 2004). When consumers dislike a brand's message, have issues with products or services or believe advertising to be unauthentic, they can express themselves on blogs, social media, online forums or even in the brand's website (Grams, 2012). Social media in particular provide numerous possibilities for consumers to voice publicly their complaints about brands.

Customer service strategies now involve the use of social media monitoring to find customer complaints and direct them to other appropriate communication channels (Kozinets, 2014). However, similar to Guidry et al.'s (2015) results about Instagram complaints, Einwiller and Steilen (2015) found that less than half of companies addressed consumers' complaints on Facebook and Twitter. Companies are not fully embracing the opportunities of social media to demonstrate their willingness to assist consumers. The response rate in social media leaves considerable room for improvement (Einwiller & Steinlen, 2015; Guidry, Messner, & Medina-Messner, 2015).

Research Questions

Based on the current literature, continual empirical research must be conducted to measure which are the consumers' preferred communication channels to communicate with and

about brands in the main eight evaluated communication channels. To create the research

questions of this study, it was taken into account who consumers may communicate with when

needing information about a brand in the pre-purchase phase and when wanting to provide

positive and negative feedback after purchasing the products and services of a brand.

RQ1. What are the preferred communication channels in high-stake brands versus low-stake

brands that consumers use when they want to acquire information?

RQ2. What are the preferred communication channels in high-stake brands versus low-stake

brands that consumers use when they want to share positive experiences:

    a. directly to a brand?

    b. with personal acquaintances?

RQ3. What are the preferred communication channels in high-stake brands versus low-stake

brands that consumers use when they want to share negative experiences:

    a. directly to a brand?

    b. with personal acquaintances?

This study primarily attempts to discover what are the communication channels that

consumers are more likely to use for asking questions, sharing positive feedback, and sharing

negative feedback about high-stake and low-stake brands. The findings can help brand managers

of high-stake and low-stake brands to understand what channels they can use to communicate

with consumers depending on their desired type of engagement. The results of these research

questions can also guide brand managers to connect with consumers on their preferred methods

for the specific type of interaction that those consumers are looking for.

Methodology

This exploratory study chose subjects based on convenience. The study surveyed 100 people. The respondents were mostly undergraduate students from the College of Liberal Arts and the Saunders College of Business of the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). RIT is a private, educational institution in New York. Some RIT faculty members and graduate students were also participants of this survey. Ethics approval from the Human Subjects Research Office and the Institutional Review Board at RIT was acquired prior distributing the survey. Participation was anonymous, unobtrusive, and voluntary. Participants were given a paper-and-pencil self-administered form.

Surveyed individuals were asked to fill a Likert scale survey with questions contextualized to every-day situations that these respondents are likely to experience when acquiring information and having positive and negative experiences with high-stake and low-stake brands.

The following questions were made to find answers to question RQ1:

"If you want to ask a question to a high-stake brand, such as brands of expensive laptops or universities, how likely are you to use these channels to ask that question directly to the brand?"

"If you want to ask a question to low-stake brands, such as a supermarket or a brand of office supplies, how likely are you to use these communication channels to ask that question directly to the brand?"

For seeking answers to questions RQ2a and RQ2b, the survey of this study asked respondents the following questions:

"If you have a positive experience with a high-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels to communicate your experience directly to the brand?"

"If you have a positive experience with a high-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels to share your experience with your personal acquaintances (family, friends, etc.)?"

"If you have a positive experience with low-stake brands, how likely are you to use these channels to communicate your experience directly to the brand?"

"If you have a positive experience with low-stake brands, how likely are you to use these channels to share your experience with your personal acquaintances (family, friends, etc.)?"

Finally, for finding answers to questions RQ3a and RQ3b, the survey of this study asked respondents the following questions:

"If you have a negative experience with a high-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels to communicate your experience directly to the brand?"

"If you have a negative experience with a high-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels to share your experience with your personal acquaintances (family, friends, etc.)?"

"If you have a negative experience with low-stake brands, how likely are you to use these channels to communicate your experience directly to the brand?"

"If you have a negative experience with low-stake brands, how likely are you to use these channels to share your experience with your personal acquaintances (family, friends, etc.)?"

With responses ranging from very likely to very unlikely intention in a five-point scale, respondents evaluated their intentions to use eight specific types of communication channels depending on their communication needs and desires. The evaluated channels were face-to-face

communication, telephone, email, websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Respondents filled a total of ten questions with five types of intentions and eight types of channels each. They were asked about where do they ask questions and look for information about high-stake and low-stake brands, and where do they share positive and negative experiences to personal acquaintances and directly to brands.

A series of *t*-tests were run to analyze the data. Two groups were created, group 1 is high-stake brands and group 2 is low-stake brands. The five possible answers to each question ranged from very likely (5) to very unlikely (1). The channels were divided in two groups of four: face-to-face, telephone email, and websites were categorized as traditional channels. Blogs, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were categorized as social media channels.

Results

Among the 100 respondents, 62% were female and 38% were male. While the age range of the participants varied from 19 to 55, the majority of the respondents (76%) were between 19 and 22 years old of age. The interval of the *t*-test results showed differences with a 95% of confidence.

Preferred Communication Channels to Acquire information: High-Stake Versus Low-Stake Brands

Paired *t*-tests showed that acquiring information about high-stake brands in traditional channels *(M* = 3.89, *SD* = 0.72) were significantly more preferred ($t_{(99)}$ = 8.07, *p* < .01) than acquiring information about low-stake brands in traditional channels (*M* = 3.17, *SD* = 0.78). In social media channels, paired *t*-tests showed that acquiring information about high-stake brands (*M* = 2.19, *SD* = 0.86) was not significantly more preferred ($t_{(99)}$ = -0.72, *p* = .46) than acquiring

information about low-stake brands ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.04$). Figure 1 shows the results for each

communication channel and the two examined type of brands.

Figure 1. Results of consumers' preferred communication channels to acquire information.

Traditional channels. The mean scores for acquiring information about high-stake

brands by using traditional channels were face-to-face ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.17$), telephone ($M =$

3.58, $SD = 1.24$), emails ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.32$), and websites ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.96$). The mean

scores for low-stake brands were face-to-face ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.43$), telephone ($M = 2.66$, $SD =$

1.29), email ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.37$), and websites ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.15$). Next, a paired *t*-test was

conducted to determine the significance of the differences. The results on Table 1 proved to be

significant.

Table 1

Mean Scores and Significance of the Differences Between Acquiring Information to High-Stake and Low-Stake Brands by Using Traditional Channels

Channel	High-stake brands		Low-stake brands			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Face-to-face	4.18	1.17	3.36	1.43	4.29	< .001
Telephone	3.58	1.24	2.66	1.29	6.87	< .001
Email	3.36	1.32	2.67	1.37	5.30	< .001
Website	4.46	0.96	4.00	1.15	3.97	< .001

Social media channels. The mean scores for acquiring information about high-stake brands by using social media channels were blogs ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.04$), Facebook ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.12$), Twitter ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.22$), and Instagram ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 1.00$). In low-stake brands, the mean scores were blogs ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.22$), Facebook ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.33$, Twitter ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.31$), and Instagram ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.15$). The results, shown on Table 2, did not prove to be significant ($p > 0.05$).

Table 2

Mean Scores and Significance of the Differences Between Acquiring Information to High-Stake and Low-Stake Brands by Using Social Media Channels

Channel	High-stake brands		Low-stake brands		t	p
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Blog	2.30	1.04	2.31	1.22	-.98	.92
Facebook	2.39	1.12	2.47	1.33	-.62	.53
Twitter	2.19	1.22	2.20	1.31	-.08	.93
Instagram	1.89	1.00	2.03	1.15	1.55	.12

Preferred Communication Channels to Share Positive Experiences Directly to Brands:

High-Stake Versus Low-Stake Brands

Paired *t*-tests showed that sharing positive experiences about high-stake brands directly to those brands in traditional channels ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.98$) was significantly more preferred ($t_{(99)} = 6.29$, $p < .001$) than low-stake brands ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.06$). In social media channels, sharing positive experiences about high-stake brands directly to those brands ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.06$) was significantly more preferred ($t_{(99)} = 3.85$, $p < .001$) than with low-stake brands ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.06$). Figure 2 shows the results for each communication channel and the two types of brands.

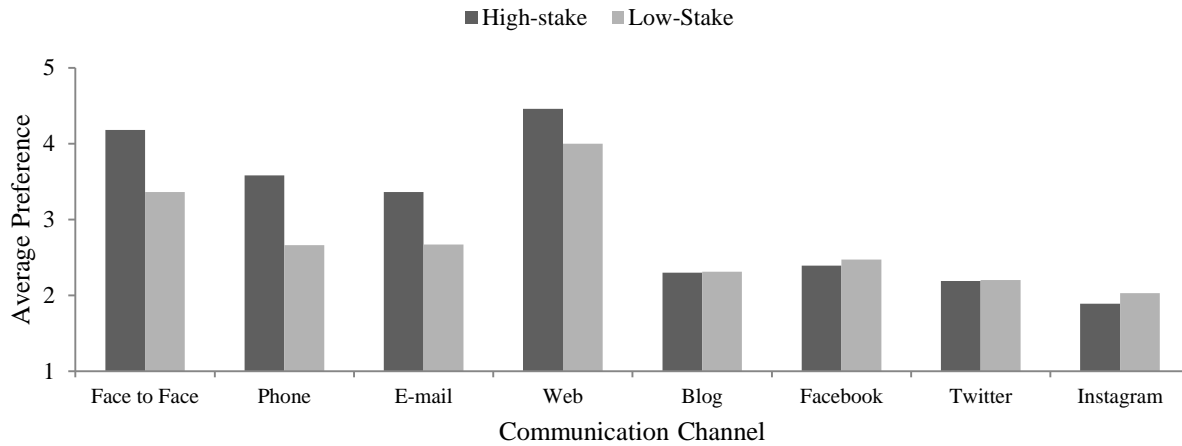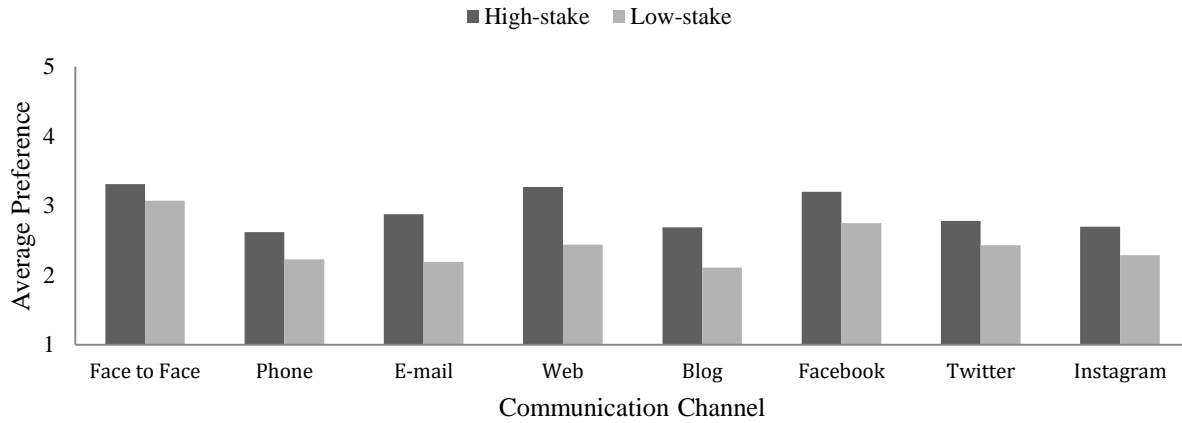*Figure 2*. Results of consumers' preferred communication channels to share positive experiences directly to brands.

Traditional channels. The mean scores for sharing positive experiences directly to high-stake brands by using traditional channels were face-to-face ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.38$), telephone ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.28$), emails ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.26$), and websites ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.24$). The mean scores for asking questions to low-stake brands were face-to-face ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.49$), telephone ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.19$), email ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.15$), and websites ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.18$). Table 3 shows the significance of the differences.

Table 3

Mean Scores and Significance of the Differences Between Sharing Positive Experiences Directly to High-Stake and Low-Stake Brands by Using Traditional Channels

Channel	High-stake brands		Low-stake brands			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Face-to-face	3.31	1.38	3.07	1.49	1.96	.053
Telephone	2.62	1.28	2.23	1.19	3.12	.002
Email	2.88	1.26	2.19	1.15	5.50	< .001
Website	3.27	1.24	2.44	1.18	5.78	< .001

Social media channels. The mean scores for sharing positive experiences directly to high-stake brands by using social media channels were blogs ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.19$), Facebook ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.33$), Twitter ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.50$), and Instagram ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.46$). In

low-stake brands, the mean scores were blogs ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.06$), Facebook ($M = 2.75$, $SD =$

1.35), Twitter ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.29$), and Instagram ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.18$). Next, a paired t-test

showed significance for all of the results, which are presented on Table 4.

Table 4

Mean Scores and Significance of the Differences Between Sharing Positive Experiences Directly to High-Stake and Low-Stake Brands by Using Social Media Channels

Channel	High-stake brands		Low-stake brands		t	p
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Blog	2.69	1.19	2.11	1.06	6.07	< .001
Facebook	3.20	1.33	2.75	1.35	3.64	< .001
Twitter	2.78	1.50	2.43	1.29	3.50	.001
Instagram	2.70	1.46	2.29	1.18	3.85	< .001

Preferred Communication Channels to Share Positive Experiences with Personal

Acquaintances: High-Stake Versus Low-Stake Brands

Paired t-tests showed that sharing positive experiences about high-stake brands with

personal acquaintances in traditional channels ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.74$) was significantly more

preferred ($t_{(99)} = 4.06$, $p = < .001$) than low-stake brands ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.82$). In social media

channels, sharing positive experiences about high-stake ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.02$) was significantly

more preferred ($t_{(99)} = 5.42$, $p < .001$) than low-stake brands ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.00$). Figure 3

shows the results for each communication channel and the two examined types of brands.
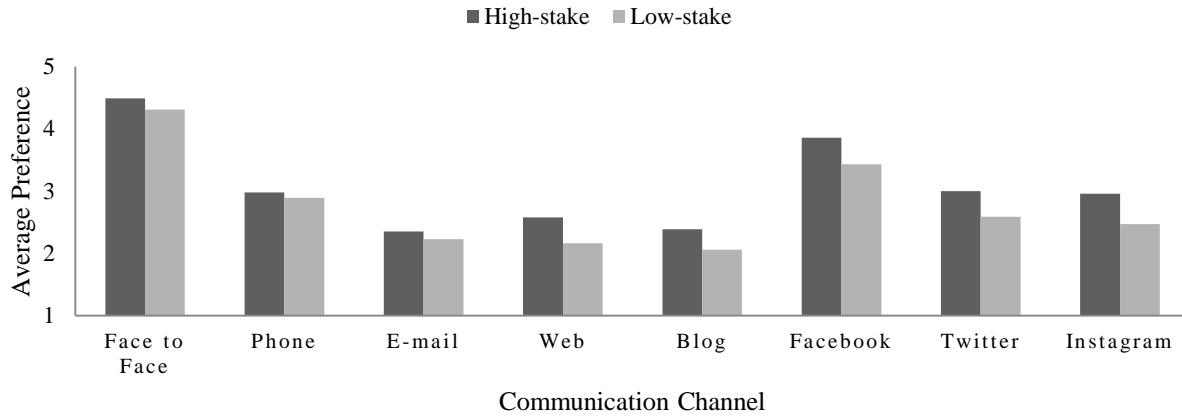
Figure 3. Results of consumers' preferred communication channels to share positive experiences with personal acquaintances.

Traditional channels. The mean scores for sharing positive experiences about high-stake brands with personal acquaintances by using traditional channels were face-to-face ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.90$), telephone ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.27$), email ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.17$), and websites ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.24$). The mean scores for low-stake brands were face-to-face ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.49$), telephone ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.38$), email ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.11$), and websites ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.08$). Table 5 shows the significance of the results.

Table 5

Mean Scores and Significance of the Differences Between Sharing Positive Experiences About High-Stake and Low-Stake Brands with Personal Acquaintances by Using Traditional Channels

Channel	High-stake brands		Low-stake brands			
	M	*SD*	*M*	SD	*t*	*p*
Face-to-face	4.49	0.90	4.31	0.92	2.19	.03
Telephone	2.98	1.27	2.89	1.38	0.95	.34
Email	2.35	1.17	2.23	1.11	1.44	.15
Website	2.58	1.21	2.16	1.08	4.17	$< .001$

Social media channels. The mean scores for sharing positive experiences with personal acquaintances by using social media were blogs ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.10$), Facebook ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.20$), Twitter ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.49$), and Instagram ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.48$). In low-stake

brands, the mean scores were blogs ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.07$), Facebook ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.28$),

Twitter ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.38$), and Instagram ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.36$). Table 6 shows the

significance of the results.

Table 6

Mean Scores and Significance of the Differences Between Sharing Positive Experiences About High-Stake and Low-Stake Brands with Personal Acquaintances *by Using Social Media Channels*

Channel	High-stake brands		Low-stake brands			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Blog	2.39	1.10	2.06	1.07	3.10	.003
Facebook	3.86	1.20	2.43	1.28	4.18	< .001
Twitter	3.00	1.49	2.59	1.38	4.15	< .001
Instagram	2.96	1.48	2.29	2.47	1.36	< .001

Preferred Communication Channels to Share Negative Experiences Directly to Brands:

High-Stake Versus Low-Stake Brands

Paired *t*-tests showed that sharing negative experiences about high-stake brands directly

to those brands in traditional channels ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.91$) was significantly more preferred

($t_{(99)} = 6.63$, $p < .001$) than low-stake brands ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.06$). Sharing negative experiences

to high-stake brands in social media channels ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.06$) was significantly more

preferred ($t_{(99)} = 3.88$, $p < .001$) than low-stake brands ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.06$). Figure 4 shows the

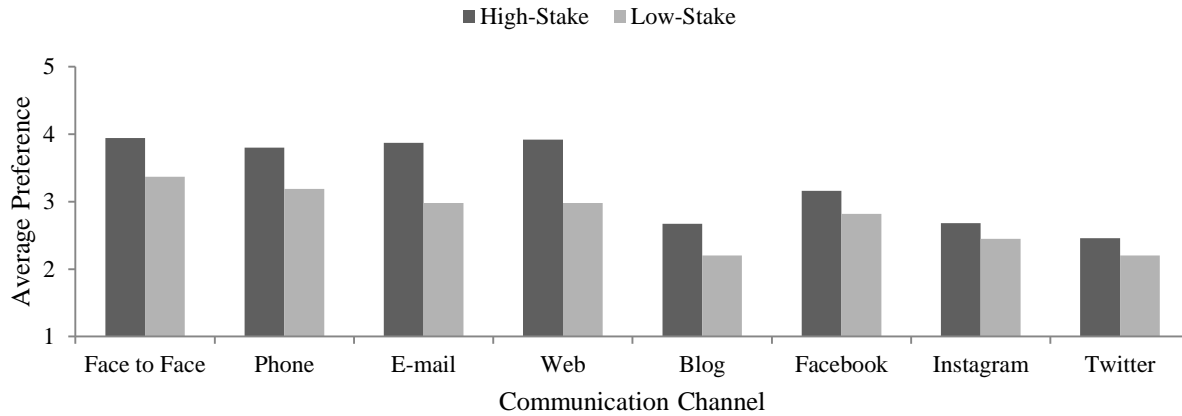results for each communication channel and two examined types of brands.

Figure 4. Results of consumers' preferred communication channels to share negative experiences directly to brands.

Traditional channels. The mean scores for sharing negative experiences directly to high-stake brands by using traditional channels were face-to-face ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.19$), telephone ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.33$), email ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.20$), and websites ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.10$). The mean scores low-stake brands were face-to-face ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.39$), telephone ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.44$), email ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.41$), and websites ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.35$). Table 7 shows the significance of the results.

Table 7

Mean Scores and Significance of the Differences Between Sharing Negative Experiences Directly to High-Stake and Low-Stake Brands by Using Traditional Channels

Channel	High-stake brands		Low-stake brands		t	p
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Face-to-face	3.94	1.19	3.37	1.39	3.55	.001
Telephone	3.80	1.33	3.19	1.44	3.98	< .001
Email	3.87	1.20	2.98	1.41	6.26	< .001
Website	3.92	1.10	2.98	1.35	6.49	< .001

Social media channels. The mean scores for sharing negative experiences directly to high-stake brands by using social media channels were blogs ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.28$), Facebook ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.34$), Twitter ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.39$), and Instagram ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.29$). In

low-stake brands, the mean scores were blogs ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.15$), Facebook ($M = 2.82$, $SD =$ 1.35), Twitter ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.41$), and Instagram ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.20$). Next, as shown on Table 8, paired t-tests showed significance for blog, Facebook, and Instagram.

Table 8

Mean Scores and Significance of the Differences Between Sharing Negative Experiences Directly to High-Stake and Low-Stake Brands by Using Social Media Channels

Channel	High-stake brands		Low-stake brands		t	p
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Blog	2.67	1.28	2.20	1.15	3.96	< .001
Facebook	3.16	1.34	2.82	1.35	2.81	.006
Twitter	2.68	1.39	2.45	1.41	2.18	0.31
Instagram	2.46	1.29	2.20	1.20	2.94	.004

Preferred Communication Channels to Share Negative Experiences with Personal Acquaintances: High-Stake Versus Low-Stake Brands

Paired t-tests showed that sharing negative experiences about high-stake brands with personal acquaintances in traditional channels ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.85$) was significantly more preferred ($t_{(99)} = 4.34$, $p < .001$) than sharing negative experiences about low-stake brands ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.88$). In social media channels, sharing negative experiences about high-stake brands with personal acquaintances ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.04$) was significantly more preferred ($t_{(99)} = 4.99$, $p < .001$) than sharing negative experiences about low-stake brands with personal acquaintances in social media channels ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.99$). Figure 5 shows the results for each communication channel and two examined types of brands.
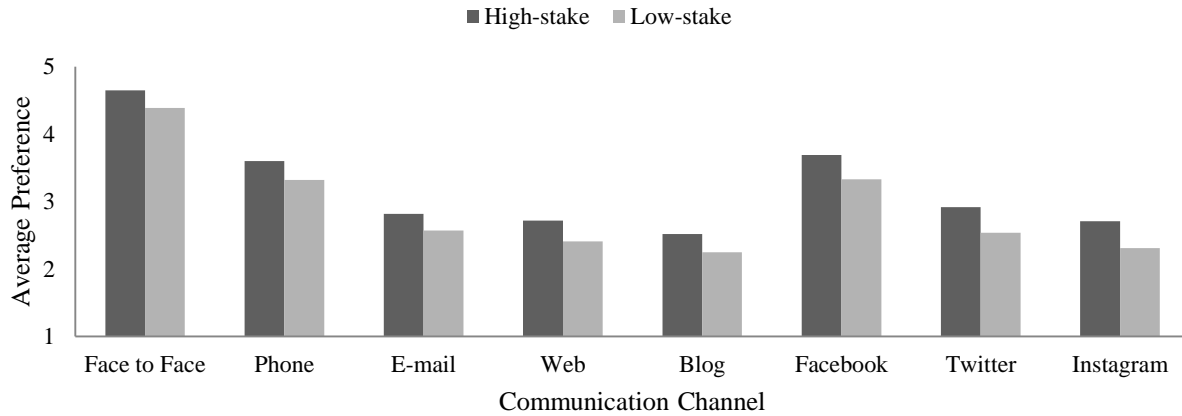
Figure 5. Results of consumers' preferred communication channels to share negative experience with personal acquaintances.

Traditional channels. The mean scores for sharing negative experiences about high-stake brands with personal acquaintances by using traditional channels were face-to-face (M = 4.65, SD = 0.65), telephone (M = 3.60, SD = 1.38), email (M = 2.82, SD = 1.37), and websites (M = 2.72, SD = 1.29). The mean scores for low-stake brands were face-to-face (M = 4.39, SD = 0.79), telephone (M = 3.32, SD = 1.44), email (M = 2.57, SD = 1.33), and websites (M = 2.41, SD = 1.21). Table 9 shows the significance of the results.

Table 9

Mean Scores and Significance of the Differences Between S*haring Positive Experiences About High-Stake and Low-Stake Brands* with *Personal Acquaintances by Using Traditional Channels*

Channel	High-stake brands		Low-stake brands			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Face-to-face	4.65	0.65	4.39	0.79	4.13	< .001
Telephone	3.60	1.38	3.32	1.44	3.98	< .001
Email	2.82	1.37	2.57	1.33	2.52	.013
Website	2.72	1.29	2.41	1.21	3.30	.001

Social media channels. The mean scores for sharing negative experiences with personal acquaintances by using social media channels were blogs (M = 2.52, SD = 1.17), Facebook (M = 3.69, SD = 1.33), Twitter (M = 2.92, SD = 1.52), and Instagram (M = 2.71, SD = 1.49). In low-

stake brands, the mean scores were blogs (*M* = 2.25, *SD* = 1.17), Facebook (*M* = 3.33, *SD* =

1.28), Twitter *(M* = 2.54, *SD* = 1.40), and Instagram (*M* = 2.31, *SD* = 1.25). Table 10 shows the

interval of the difference.

Table 10

Mean Scores and Significance of the Differences Between Sharing Positive Experiences About High-Stake and Low-Stake Brands with Personal Acquaintances *by Using Social Media Channels*

	High-stake brands		Low-stake brands			
Channel	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Blog	2.52	1.17	2.25	1.17	3.12	.002
Facebook	3.69	1.33	3.33	1.28	3.75	< .001
Twitter	2.92	1.52	2.54	1.40	4.13	< .001
Instagram	2.71	1.49	2.31	1.25	4.02	< .001

Discussion

The goal of this research was to understand which channels consumers prefer to

communicate with high-stake and low-stake brands when acquiring information, sharing positive

feedback, and sharing negative feedback. In general, consumers are more likely to talk with and

about high-stake brands than low-stake brands. High-stake brands require a higher investment of

time and money, which may make consumers more likely to communicate with and about them.

The results answered the five research questions of this study and implications are presented for

brand managers.

Information Acquisition

Consumers are more likely to use websites (4.46 on a 5-point scale), face-to-face

communication (4.18), and the telephone (3.58) to acquire information about high-stake brands.

Regarding lows-stake brands, consumers were more likely to use websites (4.00), face-to-face

(3.36), and email (2.67) to acquire information. In general, consumers were more likely to

acquire information about high-stake brands by using traditional channels and slightly more

likely to use social media channels to acquire information about low-stake brands. Regardless of

the type of brand, consumers preferred to acquire information via websites and face-to-face

communication. Therefore, it is imperative for companies to put considerable effort in

maintaining these two traditional communication methods. Previous studies support the above

findings. Dietz-Uhler and Bishop-Clark (2001) found that consumers preferred to use websites as

a first method of information acquisition and visiting the brand's physical location as a second

more preferred method. Therefore, brand managers should make their brands' websites

appealing enough to attract consumers to their physical offices in order to benefit from this

claimed effective communication process.

On average, using websites was the most preferred method to acquire information about

both high-stake and low-stake brands. There are two main reasons that can explain this. First,

viewing websites is an anonymous way for a consumer to engage with a brand. In this non-

committal phase, consumers may not feel comfortable with sharing their personal information

required by other communication channels. Secondly, viewing websites can be extremely

convenient for today's connected consumers. Brand managers should include websites in their

communication strategies in order to move consumers from the non-committal phase to the next

phase of the buying process.

Moreover, it is interesting how there were no significant differences between acquiring

information about high-stake and low-stake brands using social media channels. While social

media channels are better suited to nurture pre-existing relationships with consumers (De Vries,

Gensler, & Podnar, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2014), this research revealed that social media channels

were not very important in the non-committal phase. In the information acquisition process,

consumers might not be ready to share experiences, but are looking for official information in order to aid them in the purchase decision.

Positive Experiences Shared Directly to Brands

Consumers were more likely to use face-to-face (3.31), websites (3.27), and Facebook (3.20) to share positive experiences about high-stake brands. Consumers were more likely to use face-to-face (3.07), Facebook (2.75), and Twitter (2.43) to share positive experiences with low-stake brands. Brand managers in general need to ensure these communication channels are ready to receive positive experience from consumers. Facebook is a successful method to engage consumers (Kijima and Novani, 2012) and can be an effective tool to increase brand loyalty. For example, the brand's Facebook page can occasionally incentivize consumers to share their positive experiences with that brand. Regarding face-to-face communication, brand managers can provide suggestion boxes and kiosks for consumers to share their feedback. Additionally, loyalty plans can be developed to benefit consumers who visit the brand's physical locations.

As stated by Zhang et al. (2011), Twitter is an effective tool to increase word of mouth communication with personal acquaintances. Since nearly half of the participants of this study expressed likelihood to share their positive experiences with low-stake brands, brand managers should occasionally ask consumers to share their positive experiences with the brand.

Positive Experiences Shared with Personal Acquaintances

When communicating with personal acquaintances about both high-stake and low-stake brands, consumers were most likely to use face-to-face, Facebook, Twitter, and telephone channels. Brand managers should create referral plans that emphasize these four communication channels by offering benefits to consumers who share positive experiences about their brands. Garnefeld, Eggert, Helm, and Tax (2013) found that not only referral programs increase sales,

but they also increase the loyalty of existing customers. Therefore, referral programs can be an effective strategy for brand managers to motivate consumers to share their experiences with personal acquaintances.

Negative Experiences Shared with Brands

Consumers were more likely to use face-to-face (3.94), websites (3.92), and email (3.87) to share negative experiences about high-stake brands. Consumers were more likely to use face-to-face (3.37), telephone (3.19), and email and websites (2.98) to share negative experiences with low-stake brands. In general, the results showed that consumers are more likely to use traditional communication channels to share negative experiences with brands. The reason may be that consumers are waiting for a thoughtful response from the brands to address their complaints. Consumers may still perceive traditional channels as more official than social communication channels. When talking directly to brands, consumers of both high-stake and low-stake brands might want a personalized response to their complaints instead of the public debate that social media channels usually create. Another reason for consumers to be less likely to communicate their negative experiences directly to brands via social communication channels can be that, as Einwiller and Steinlen (2015) and Guidry et al. (2015) found, brands are not responding to customer's complaints via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This issue can send consumers the perception that talking to brands via social media is not worth the effort.

Negative Experiences Shared with Personal Acquaintances

Consumers were more likely to use face-to-face (4.65), Facebook (3.69), and telephone (3.60) to share negative experiences about high-stake brands with personal acquaintances. The same three channels were the most preferred by consumers to share positive experiences about brands with personal acquaintances: Face-to-face (4.39), Facebook (3.33), and telephone (3.32).

Similar to the results of positive experiences shared with personal acquaintances, the three

channels preferred to share negative experiences with personal acquaintances about high-stake

brands were the same for low-stake brands. Face-to-face, Facebook, and telephone can be

considered the most social-oriented channels because they allow a more instantaneously

communication between consumers and their personal acquaintances.

It can be difficult for brand managers to monitor the consumers' personal conversations

with personal acquaintances in their day-to-day conversations, personal phone calls, and personal

Facebook accounts. Therefore, one of the only things that brand managers can do to reduce

sharing negative feedback with personal acquaintances through these three personal

communication channels is to offer good customer service, ensure the quality of the products and

services, and ask consumers for constructive feedback about their experiences with the brand.

Regarding Interactions via Instagram and Blogs

Even though Instagram and blogging were not part of the most preferred communication

channels in any type of interaction, they do have specific types of interaction that are

significantly higher than the rest. For instance, Instagram was more preferred by consumers who

want to share both positive (2.96) and negative (2.71) experiences about high-stake brands with

personal acquaintances. This means that Instagram may be an important tool for increasing the

word-of-mouth of high-stake brands. Brand managers can prepare effective Instagram strategic

plans to create awareness about their brands. Additionally, the results of this study showed that

blogging was more relevant when consumers want to share both positive (2.69) and negative

(2.67) experiences directly to high-stake brands. Regarding blogs and sharing feedback, the

study asked participants how likely they are to leave comments in the brand's blog. Brand

managers with blogs should encourage consumers to leave comments about their opinions of the

brand or about specific experiences they had with the brand to benefit from these specific outcomes.

Conclusion

This study showed that brand communication is context-oriented. This research explored the consumers' preferred use of communication channels to talk with and about high-stake and low-stake brands. These reasons were acquiring information, sharing positive feedback, and sharing negative feedback.

In general, Face-to-face (3.90), Facebook (3.11), and websites (3.09) were the three main communication channels that consumers preferred to talk with and about brands. As stated by Kijima and Novani (2012), face-to-face communication is still the most powerful human interaction because no other channel offers the same level of closeness and immediacy than people talking in the same room. Facebook has shown in the last few years to be an excellent communication channel for consumer-brand communication (Mathiou et al., 2013).

In general, traditional communication channels were more preferred to acquire information and share negative feedback directly to high-stake brands. Differently, social media channels were more preferred to share positive experiences with and about high-stake brands. Traditional channels might offer consumers more direct and real-time interaction when seeking information and experiencing negative situations with brands. As stated by Henning-Thurau et al. (2010), consumers use social media for sharing their experiences with brands. Brand managers can use this information to encourage strong relationships with consumers (Men & Tsai, 2014).

This study indicated that the three interactions that consumers are more likely to pursue in brand communications contexts are sharing negative experiences directly to high-stake brands

(3.31), sharing negative experiences with personal acquaintances about high-stake brands (3.20), and acquiring information about high-stake brands (3.04). Therefore, high-stake brand managers need to pay more attention to how consumers use channels to communicate with and about them. Additionally, brand managers in general need to supervise more often what consumers are talking with and about brands in social media channels.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is subject to all the typical limitations of the self-report based research. Since it asked subjects about how they think they would act in real-life communication, it cannot be assumed that those were the exact ways that they would engage in their actual communication process. It is also possible that respondents might provide socially desirable responses. This study did not address personality traits, ethical or value oriented issues, socio-economical, racial or education status, or other demographic and socio-graphic factors. A final limitation of this study is that most of the subjects were typical college students. Therefore, they might have not enough experience engaging with high-stake brands.

Future studies might address those consumers who are more experienced with high-stake brands. Additionally, now that this study answered the "what" questions (what channels are preferred in which instances), future studies can attempt to answer the "why" questions (why are certain channels preferred more than others in certain instances). Future studies can also study a single type brand category or a particular brand performance. Finally, as new channels emerge, this type of research should be continually updated to allow brand managers to best harness the power of the new communication landscape.

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Appendix: Survey

Consumers' Communication Channels Preferences: High-stake vs. Low-stake Brands

Informed Consent Information

This consent agreement form is for a Master's Thesis in Communication being conducted by Carolina Rondon Diplan in Fall Semester of 2015. In this research study, we are investigating consumers' communication channel preferences when requesting information or providing feedback about various products.

Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. The decision to join, or not to join, is up to you. ***Participation in this study is completely voluntary***. Deciding not to participate will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits.

It is reasonable to expect the following benefit from this research: Understanding what communication channels consumers are more likely to use to interact with brands. However, we can't guarantee that you will personally experience benefits from participating in this study. Others may benefit in the future from the information we find in this study.

You will be asked to fill out a brief survey about communication channel preferences and various products. There are no incorrect answers to the questions on this survey. This survey takes less than 10 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions about the study you may contact me by phone 585-287-1617 or by e-mail cr7604@rit.edu. Once completed, a copy of the research will be archived on the School of Communication web site (www.rit.edu/communication).

Your responses to the questions on this survey will be kept completely anonymous and confidential, only the researcher and the faculty adviser will ever see the data.

There are no physical risks involved by participating in this study. Please do note that if at any time you do feel any discomfort in any way, you may choose to stop the survey. If you do feel discomfort after participating please be aware that there are resources here on campus at the RIT Student Health Center, who can help you without any payment (585-475-2255).

1- Interactions with high-stake brands

The term *high-stake brands* refers to brands of products that are expensive, require good deal of research and consideration, and will be used for a considerable length of time. If you want to **ask a question** to a high-stake brand, such as brands of expensive laptops or universities, how likely are you to use these channels to **ask that question directly to the brand**?

	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Face-to-face (visit an office, store, etc.)					
Make a telephone call					
Send an e-mail					
Search the info in the brand's website					
Leave a comment in the brand's blog					
Ask to brand's Facebook page					
Ask to brand's Twitter account					
Ask to brand's Instagram account					

2- Interactions with low-stake brands

The term *low-stake brands* refers to brands of products that are relative inexpensive, require minimum or no purchase decision research, and will be used for a short length of time. If you want to **ask a question** to a low-stake brand, such as a supermarket or a brand of office supplies, how likely are you to use these communication channels **to ask that question directly to the brand**?

	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Face-to-face (visit an office, store, etc.)					
Make a telephone call					
Send an e-mail					
Search the info in the brand's website					
Leave a comment in the brand's blog					
Ask to brand's Facebook page					
Ask to brand's Twitter account					
Ask to brand's Instagram account					

Positive experiences with high-stake brands 😄 💵💵

3- If you have a **positive** experience with a high-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels to **communicate your experience directly to the brand**?

	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Face-to-face (visit an office, store, etc.)					
Make a telephone call					
Send an e-mail					
Contact via the brand's website					
Leave a comment in the brand's blog					
Comment in brand's Facebook page					
Tweet mentioning the brand's Twitter account					
Comment mentioning brand's Instagram account					

4- If you have a **positive** experience with a high-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels to **share your experience** with your personal acquaintances **(family, friends, etc.)**?

	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Face-to-face					
Make telephone calls					
Send e-mails					
Write in websites (forums, digital newspapers, etc.)					
Leave comments in blogs					
Share in Facebook					
Share in Twitter					
Share in Instagram					

Positive experiences with low-stake brands 😄 🔳

5- If you have a **positive** experience with a low-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels to **communicate your experience directly to the brand**?

	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Face-to-face (visit an office, store, etc.)					
Make a telephone call					
Send an e-mail					
Contact via the brand's website					
Leave a comment in the brand's blog					
Comment in brand's Facebook page					
Tweet mentioning the brand's Twitter account					
Comment mentioning brand's Instagram account					

6- If you have a **positive** experience with a low-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels **to share your experience** with your personal acquaintances **(family, friends, etc.)**?

	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Face-to-face					
Make telephone calls					
Send e-mails					
Write in websites (forums, digital newspapers, etc.)					
Leave comments in blogs					
Share in Facebook					
Share in Twitter					
Share in Instagram					

Negative experiences with high-stake brands

7- If you have a **negative** experience with a high-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels to **communicate your experience directly to the brand**?

	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Face-to-face (visit an office, store, etc.)					
Make a telephone call					
Send an e-mail					
Contact via the brand's website					
Leave a comment in the brand's blog					
Share with brand's Facebook account					
Share with brand's Twitter account					
Share with brand's Instagram account					

8- If you have a **negative** experience with a high-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels to **share your experience** with your acquaintances **(family, friends, etc.)**?

	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Face-to-face					
Make telephone calls					
Send e-mails					
Write in websites (forums, digital newspapers, etc.)					
Leave comments in blogs					
Share in Facebook					
Share in Twitter					
Share in Instagram					

Negative experiences with low-stake brands 😐 💵

9- If you have a **negative** experience with a low-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels to **communicate your experience directly to the brand**?

	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Face-to-face (visit an office, store, etc.)					
Make a telephone call					
Send an e-mail					
Contact via the brand's website					
Leave a comment in the brand's blog					
Share with brand's Facebook account					
Share with brand's Twitter account					
Share with brand's Instagram account					

10- If you have a **negative** experience with a low-stake brand, how likely are you to use these channels to **share your experience** with your acquaintances **(family, friends, etc.)**?

	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Face-to-face					
Make telephone calls					
Send e-mails					
Write in websites (forums, digital newspapers, etc.)					
Leave comments in blogs					
Share in Facebook					
Share in Twitter					
Share in Instagram					

Demographic Information: Age: _____ Gender:_____