ORIGINAL EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

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Getting more likes: the impact of narrative person and brand image on customer–brand interactions

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Abstract
Although in-feed social ads on social media are rapidly growing worldwide, scarce attention is paid to the content strategy of brands presenting in a human way. The present research examines if and how choosing narrative person (first-person vs. third-person) in the ads to match brand image (warmth vs. competence) can gain more user "likes" in the context of WeChat Moment Ads. Through five studies, we find that first-person narration alongside warm images gain more likes because it boosts the user's motivation of social belonging, while third-person narration accompanied by competent images earns more likes by stimulating the motivation of self-enhancement. We also confirm predictions that a relevant individual variable (self-monitoring) moderates the effects of different matches on liking intention. This study offers theoretical contributions to research on advertising content strategy and advertising language on social media, and it holds practical implications for marketers launching in-feed social ads on social media.

Keywords In-feed social ads · Brand image · Narrative person · User likes

Introduction

Popular social media platforms, such as Facebook and WeChat, have launched in-feed social ads into users' newsfeeds (Campbell and Marks 2015; Gan 2017). The United States and China are the two largest markets for in-feed social ads, accounting for nearly 20% and 12.5% of their domestic digital advertising markets, respectively (Useit.com 2017). According to eMarketer's (2017) prediction, the United States' expenditure on in-feed social ads will approach $23.22 billion in 2018. As a common format of native advertising, in-feed ads are

brand-related content that is consistent with the form, style, and function of the platform newsfeed (social feed, content feed, product feed) on which it appears (Lee et al. 2016; Aribarg and Schwartz 2018). In-feed social ads are the contents that are inserted into the social media newsfeed.

User "likes" are a direct performance of the ads. Researchers have verified that consumers frequently use brands' subtle cues to present themselves positively on social media (Ellison et al. 2007; Hollenbeck and Kaikati 2012). Clicking the "like" button helps consumers associate with appealing brand images to build their ideal self-concepts and

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desired social relations (Hollenbeck and Kaikati 2012). For brand marketers, consumers' likes not only enhance brand connections and customer engagements, but also benefit them through online brand endorsement (Bernritter et al. 2016; Hoffman and Fodor 2010; Malhotra et al. 2013). Likers who are experts or innovators can exert considerable positive effects on focal brands through their liking behaviors that are observed by their friends on social media (Escalas and Bettman 2003). These positive effects can help marketers promote brand images and increase product sales (Hoffman and Fodor 2010; Mochon et al. 2017). Therefore, in-feed social ads use likes as a metric of engagement (Wallace et al. 2014). For instance, the important Facebook ad metrics for boosted posts include likes, clicks, comments, and shares. Likes are the most authentic metric, since lots of likes help ads quickly gains credibility in the eyes of the people who come across them (Lyfemarketing.com 2018). For WeChat Moments ads, they are charged on a CPM basis (cost per 1000 impression), and impressions are triggered when a user clicks the "like" button (Kantar.com 2015; Sekkeistudio.com 2016).

The most significant feature of in-feed social ads that distinguishes them from other forms of advertising is brand presenting in a human way (Barcelos et al. 2018; Campbell and Marks 2015; Kwon and Sung 2011). Social media is a platform for communication between people. Thus, for companies, the ability to create such personal connection and interaction through in-feed social ads is the key to success (Campbell and Marks 2015). Hence, ads must be presented to users as resembling their friends' posts and engage with them on the same level as that of any other user. More importantly, brand-related content that contains human characteristics has a positive effect on customer–brand interactions (Barcelos et al. 2018; Lee et al. 2018), with the consumer placing brand communication on equal footing with communication from friends (Kwon and Sung 2011). In practice, a common method is to imbue brands with human characteristics by using human image and voice (Barcelos et al. 2018; Kwon and Sung 2011; Lee et al. 2018). While it is clear that brands should present in a more personal way so as to increase consumers' likes (Campbell and Marks 2015), less is known about how to design the brand-related content by using human image and voice (Lee et al. 2018). For companies, what can be an effective content strategy for getting more likes? The research addresses the issue of employing narrative person appropriately for different humanized perception of brand images in in-feed social ads.

Researchers have suggested that people classify social groups and individuals into warm and competent types. These two dimensions of human image account, almost entirely, for the manner in which people characterize others and are also applied to brand image perception by consumers (Fiske et al. 2007; Kervyn et al. 2012). Therefore, we use these two dimensions as the humanized perception of brand image.
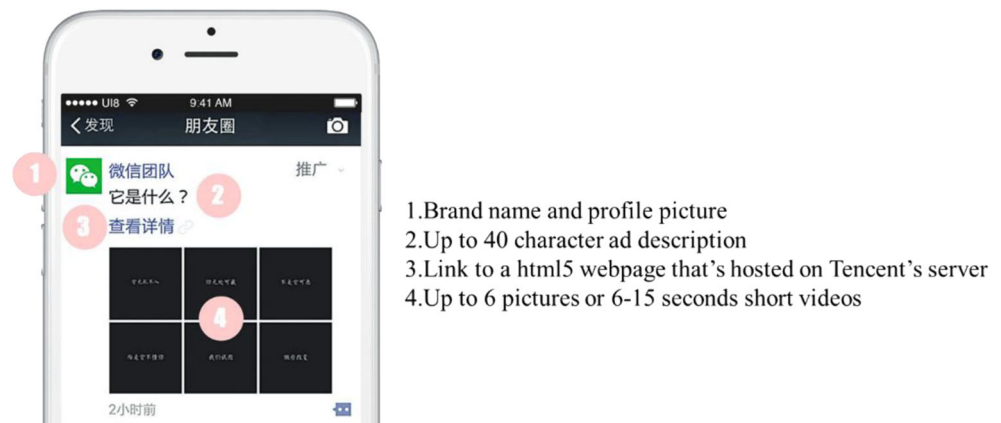
Given both the current pro-social intentions and current capabilities of brands, the feature of warmth creates customer perceptions of kindness, friendliness, trustworthiness, and helpfulness, while competence results in customer evaluations of effectiveness, intelligence, power (Kervyn et al. 2012).

According to the communication accommodation theory, first-person narration is appropriate as a linguistic strategy of convergence to express a warm image because it emphasizes interpersonal similarity and intimacy, which strengthen the affinity of a warm image to boost consumers' motivation of social belonging (Bernritter et al. 2016; Gallois et al. 2005; Pickett et al. 2004). By contrast, third-person narration is suitable as a linguistic strategy of divergence to express a competent image because it focuses on interpersonal discrepancy and superiority that may enhance the prominence of a competent image to boost consumers' motivation of self-enhancement (Dayter 2014; Gallois et al. 2005; Sekhon et al. 2015). Therefore, appropriately matched ads, by presenting the brands that consumers "like" to their friends, are conducive to satisfying consumers' self-expression motivations (Alexandrov et al. 2013; Hollenbeck and Kaikati 2012). Together, we propose that in-feed social ads tend to attract likes when the right narrative person is selected in the advertising discourses to match the suggested brand images, and when two underlying self-expression motivations are present.

This research considers WeChat Moments ads (similar to Facebook ads that appear on the timeline) as the context to examine if and how the match between narrative person in ads (first vs. third) and brand image (warmth vs. competence) affects users' liking intentions. WeChat Moments ads (see Fig. 1) were launched in January 2015 and enable companies to insert advertising messages into users' activity feeds (Clickz.com 2015; Chen 2017). Once a user likes an ad, it will be more likely to appear on the Moments feed of that user's friends and remain active for 7 days (Kantar.com 2015), with the like only visible to the user's friends. With over 1.04 million monthly active users, WeChat is the largest social network in China (Statista.com 2017). According to the annual public financial report of Tencent Co. (WeChat's owner, listed company in Hong Kong Exchange), the advertising revenue of WeChat Moments ads approached $1.25 billion in 2017.

Our findings make three contributions to the literature on advertising content strategy and advertising language on social media. First, our work reveals the matching effect between narrative person and brand image. Previously, consumer researchers have shown that consumers tend to "like" warm brands and remain distant from competent brands to avoid being perceived by others as self-bragging (Bernritter et al. 2016; Dayter 2014; Sekhon et al. 2015). Going beyond these prior works, we empirically demonstrate that first-person narration can increase the liking of brands associated with warmth, and third-person narration can increase the liking of brands associated with competence. Thus, depending on the

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Fig. 1 WeChat moments ads

1.Brand name and profile picture
2.Up to 40 character ad description
3.Link to a html5 webpage that's hosted on Tencent's server
4.Up to 6 pictures or 6-15 seconds short videos

person narration, both warm and competent brands can be endorsed on social media. Second, we build on this work and recognize two self-expression motives (social belonging and self-enhancement) as consequences of the matches between persons and brand images (Alexandrov et al. 2013). Specifically, matches between first-person narration and warm brands tend to boost a motive to social belonging, whereas matches between third-person narration and competent brands tend to stimulate a motive to self-enhancement. Finally, we extend prior research on personal pronouns to the advertising language domain to show the matching effect between persons and brand images. Linguistic research has demonstrated that selecting a first-, second- or third-person narrator in ads help advertisers interact with consumers (Cook 2001; Fairclough 1992, 2001). We extend knowledge about personal pronouns strategy by illustrating if and how the narrative person should be matched with brand images on social media to attract consumers' likes.

Literature review

Users' response to social media advertising

Researchers have identified several key drivers of consumer responses to advertising on social media. Consumer-related drivers have received the most attention (Taylor et al. 2011; Hollenbeck and Kaikati 2012; Marder et al. 2016; Zhang and Mao 2016; Bernritter et al. 2017). Taylor et al. (2011) demonstrated that filling and structuring time, self–brand congruity, and peer influence can affect users' attitudes toward social networking advertising. Positive self-presentation to friends is a vital driver of a user's interaction with brands on social media (Hollenbeck and Kaikati 2012; Marder et al. 2016). Other authors have paid attention to network-related drivers, idenitifying network embeddedness, attitude homophily, and status homophily as factors that can influence consumers' online brand endorsements and brand attitudes (Peng 2016;

Wallace et al. 2017). In addition, Sabate et al. (2014) explored ad-related drivers and found that the richness of content (images and videos) and well-chosen publication time increases the numbers of likes and comments. For the ad types, native ads are more effective in generating brand awareness than display ads (Aribarg and Schwartz 2018). Table 1 presents a summary of the social media advertising literature by independent variables.

Insufficient attention has been given to brand-related drivers that entice consumers to interact proactively with brands (Bernritter et al. 2016; Zhang and Mao 2016). Several studies have emphasized the effect of brands with human characteristics on consumers' response to the ads. For example, the advertising content related to brand personality—like humor and emotion—is associated with higher levels of consumer engagement (likes, comments, shares) compared to the directly informative content (Lee et al. 2018). Non-profit brands gain more consumers' online brand endorsements (likes, comments, shares, creates) than for-profit brands, because non-profit brands help user project a warm self-image to their friends (Bernritter et al. 2016). However, less is known about specific and effective content strategies with human characteristics on consumers' likes. In particular, we are unaware of work that considers how brands using human image and voice might affect consumers' likes.

Human image and voice in ads

Social media provides a place for interpersonal communication. To follow the norm of the platform, advertisers must introduce themselves and interact with users in a human way, which includes the use of human image (anthropomorphic brand image, a human representative of the company, and a human representative of the consumer) and voice (interpersonal communication language) (Lee et al. 2018; Barcelos et al. 2018; Campbell and Marks 2015; Kwon and Sung 2011). For example, using a human tone expressed by employees (the human representatives

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Table 1 Summary of prior work on social media advertising

Source	Independent variable	Independent variable type	Brand-related content strategy	Mechanisms measured	Dependent variable	Key findings
Taylor et al. (2011)	Informative, entertainment, quality of life, structure time, self-brand congruity, peer influence	Ads Consumer Network	No	No	Attitude toward to social-networking advertising	Based on media uses and gratification theory, the authors propose and empirically test a model of contented, structural, and socialization factors that affect users' attitudes toward social networking advertising
Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012)	Self-brand congruity	Consumer	No	Yes	Brand linkages	The congruity (or lack thereof) between selves (actual and ideal) affects conspicuous displays of brand preference via impressive management on social media.
Marder et al. (2016)	Negative projected impression	Consumer	No	Yes	Liking intention	Greater negative projected impressions related to political affiliation are associated with reduced intention to "like" a political party's Facebook page through social anxiety.
Zhang and Mao (2016)	Consumption motivations Connection motivations	Consumer	No	Yes	Purchase intention Word-of-mouth	Consumer online motivations (connection vs. consumption) lead to ad clicks on social media via perceived entertainment and informativeness values of ads, in which the mediating role of perceived congruity between ad and media content.
Bernritter et al. (2017)	Self-construal	Consumer	No	Yes	Online brand endorsements	High levels of interdependent self-construal positively affect consumers' intention to endorse brand online through increasing perception of brands' symbolic value.
Peng (2016)	Network embeddedness	Network	No	Yes	Sharing of sponsored ads	Network embeddedness between two users impacts information diffusion from one user to another, such as the sharing of sponsored ads on Digg and brand-authored tweets on Twitter.
Wallace et al. (2017)	Attitude homophily Status homophily	Network	No	Yes	Brand loyalty, Brand love, Word-of-mouth	Attitude homophily and status homophily positively affect self-congruence with a "Liked" brand through social tie strength.
Sabate et al. (2014)	Richness Time frame	Ads	No	No	Popularity of branded content	Richness of content (inclusions of images and videos) and opportune publication time significantly influence the number of likes and comments.
Aribarg and Schwartz (2018)	Native ads Display ads	Ads	No	No	Ads attention/ recognition Brand awareness	Native ads are more effective than display ads in the aspect of ads attention, ads recognition and brand awareness.
Bernritter et al. (2016)	Brand type	Brand	No	Yes	Online brand endorsements	Compared to for-profit brands, non-profit brands are more appealing as regards consumers' intention to endorse on social media to send a signal of warm self-image to their friends.
Lee et al. 2018	Brand personality content Directly informative content	Brand	Yes	No	Consumer engagement	Compared to directly informative content, the content with brand personality is associated with higher levels of consumer engagement with a message.
The present research	Brand image, narrative person	Brand	Yes	Yes	Liking intention	The correct match between brand image and personal pronouns increase liking intention.

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of the company), rather than the traditional corporate voice, can increase consumers' hedonic value on social media and also purchase intentions (Barcelos et al. 2018). The use of brand personality content, rather than directly informative content, can enhance consumer engagement with the message (Lee et al. 2018). These strategies help ads decrease the sense of commercial intrusion and strengthen the harmony between the ads and the social media environment (Campbell and Marks 2015; Kwon and Sung 2011).

Human voice can be contained in an advertising discourse. This is a special pragmatic communicative language that includes both monologic and dialogic communication (Bakhtin 1981). Monologic communication adopts a product-dominated narrative perspective to convey product advantages. This direct narration helps advertisers fully describe the product information. However, lacking a narrator prevents an advertiser from interacting and communicating closely with consumers (Bakhtin 1981; Halliday 1994). As the advertising industry has matured, advertising discourse has begun to absorb interpersonal language types such as dialogic communication (Barcelos et al. 2018). This personalized narrative, which focuses on consumers with person narration, enables a product or a brand seem closer, more real, and more human-like (Kelleher 2009; Park and Cameron 2014; Rayner and Carter 1997).

Research in linguistics has demonstrated that personal pronouns reveal the speaker's attitude, thus influencing the addresser's image and the relationship between the addresser and addressees (Rayner and Carter 1997). In an advertising discourse, using personal pronouns to narrate ads contributes to constructing images and building relationships (Fairclough 2001). In particular, using the first person to introduce a product helps present a lively and vivid product image, and using the first person to represent consumers is beneficial for constructing clear consumer images (Cook 2001; Puzakova et al. 2013). The second person refers to consumers who actively pull other consumers into the advertising dialogue, thereby helping create a simulated communication environment, which is conducive to building direct relationships (Fairclough 1989). In contrast to the explicit reference of the first and the second person, the reference of the third person seems ambiguous and indirect, thus increasing the complexity of the research (Kwon and Sung 2011; Pollach 2005). However, third-person narration may grab the consumer's attention and achieve unexpectedly substantial results (Thebalancecareers.com 2018). We summarize the previous findings on the humanized perception of brand image and narrative person in ads in Table 2.

Linguistics research on third person narration in ads has remained scarce, and specific attention to the context of customer–brand interactions on social media is lacking. We suggest that liking ads that are associated with an attractive image is a tool for consumers to shape and manage the self-identities they aim to display to their friends (Bernritter et al. 2016). Consequently, advertisers can use a human image and voice to construct an ideal consumer image and thus attract users to utilize it by liking. Therefore, this research focuses on a human representative of the consumer that serves as the brand image and narrative person.

Conceptual framework

In-feed social ads

Consumers anticipate interpersonal communication on social media where brands listen to their opinions, rather than simply pushing promotional marketing messages without considering what customers think, feel, and want (Millward Brown 2010). To enhance consumers' social engagement with ads (e.g., liking behavior), advertisers can take advantage of human image and voice to interact with consumers (Barcelos et al. 2018; Campbell and Marks 2015; Kwon and Sung 2011). Research on social media marketing reveals that when people encounter a brand associated with human features or behavior on social media, they often respond by showing social behavior and making social attributions that guide their interpersonal behaviors (Millward Brown 2010). Barcelos et al. (2018) demonstrated that a brand webpage that has content with a human tone can increase ongoing interactions and conversations between brands and consumers as well as among consumers. These in-feed social ads imbue their brands with human characteristics by playing the role of users' friends. Consequently, consumers treat these brand ads similarly to their friends by liking, commenting, and sharing (Kwon and Sung 2011).

Warmth and competence of brand image

Research on brand personality and the brand–consumer relationship has shown that brands can have various human characteristics, and that people relate to brands in many ways, similarly to how they relate to people (Aaker 1997; Fournier 1998). The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) suggests that interpersonal judgments are captured along two fundamental dimensions of warmth and competence (Fiske et al. 2002). These two dimensions of personal image nearly account for how people characterize others (Fiske et al. 2007). Applying to brand marketing, Kervyn et al. (2012) proposed the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF), which generalizes the humanized perception of brand image as warmth and competence. The BIAF has been supported and discussed in many studies of marketing and consumer behavior (Bernritter et al. 2016; Fournier and Alvarez 2012). For example, non-profits are seen as warm and for-profits are viewed as competent by consumers (Aaker et al. 2010).

Table 2 Summary of prior work on advertising in a human way and narrative person in ads

Source	Person deixis	Reference of person	Human image	Advertising goal	Effects on social media platform	Third-person effects	Key findings
Fairclough (2001)	Non-person	Non-reference	None	None	No	No	Monologic communication focused on product is great for a comprehensive introduction of the product, but not so good for forming advertising ideology.
Cook (2001)	First person	Company	A human representative of the company	Constructing company image	No	No	First person narration (refers to company) enhances the reality of communication scene, which in turn shortens the social distance between consumers and company.
Puzakova et al. (2013)	First person	Product	Anthropomorphic product image	Constructing product image	No	No	First person (refers to product) narration is beneficial for brand anthropomorphism. When humanizing brands goes wrong, the brand can negatively affect consumers' brand evaluation.
Cook (2001)	Frist person	Consumer	A human representative of the consumer	Constructing consumer image	No	No	First person (refers to consumer) narration is beneficial to increase potential consumers' product identity, so as to achieve the purpose of building consumer groups.
Cook (2001)	Second person	Consumer	A human representative of company and consumer	Building direct relations	No	No	Second person narration as a high involved deixis speaks directly to consumer to build direct relations.
Oskamp and Spacapan (1987)	Third person	Consumer	A human representative of the consumer	Constructing consumer image	No	Yes	Using third person (refer to consumer) makes self-praise in advertising more objective and reliable.
The present research	First person Third person	Consumer	A human representative of the consumer	Constructing consumer image	Yes	Yes	First person narration gains warm brands more "likes" by activating motivation of social belonging. While third person is better for competent brands by activating motivation of self-enhancement.

Matching brand image with narrative person to enhance liking intention

On social media, liking is a typical self-expression behavior, which helps consumers maintain and create online social capital (Ellison et al. 2007). The main motivation behind this behavior is social belonging and self-enhancement (Nadkarni and Hofmann 2012); the former refers to the need

to associate with others and obtain social acceptance (Baumeister and Leary 1995), whereas the latter refers to the need to feel good about themselves and seek positive evaluations from others (Jones 1973).

In the current research, we propose that browsing a warm image narrated in first person versus a competent image narrated in third person can systematically boost different self-expression motivations (Gallois et al. 2005; Berger and

Iyengar 2013; Pickett et al. 2004). In particular, we contend that browsing a warm image narrated in first person is more likely to boost the motivation of social belonging (Bernritter et al. 2016), whereas browsing a competent image narrated in third person is more likely to boost a motivation of self-enhancement (Dayter 2014; Sekhon et al. 2015). Our argument draws on the following evidence.

First, the idea that social belonging motives are active when people are browsing a warm image narrated in first person is supported by communication accommodation theory and empirical results. According to communication accommodation theory, communicators select appropriate linguistic strategies (convergence or divergence) to construct and maintain relationships with target people (Gallois et al. 2005; Giles and Ogay 2007). Convergence is defined as a strategy through which individuals adapt their communication behavior in such a way that it becomes more similar to their interlocutors' behavior. Conversely, the strategy of divergence leads to an accentuation of differences between self and others (Gallois et al. 2005). As a convergence strategy, first-person narration expresses sender convergence on receivers' characteristics (Cook 2001; Gallois et al. 2005). This strategy is beneficial for constructing one's shared social identity and showing similarity to others (Giles and Ogay 2007; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Warm traits are conducive to highlighting interpersonal self-promotion (Kervyn et al. 2012). The first person reinforces the amiable feature of a warm image and helps consumers establish an emotional connection with friends (Stivers et al. 2007). That prompts these users to engage in behaviors aimed at an affiliation with others to gain social belonging (Alexandrov et al. 2013; Hollenbeck and Kaikati 2012). This argument is supported by a prior finding that information including social connectedness helps people establish and maintain social relationships, and that social belonging concerns motivate people to use such an opportunity by spreading this information (Pickett et al. 2004).

Second, when consumers browse a competent brand narrated in third person, they become more sensitive to self-enhancement. Third-person narration used as a divergence strategy expresses sender divergence from receivers' characteristics (Cook 2001; Gallois et al. 2005). This is beneficial for building a personal identity and emphasizing distinctiveness from others (Giles and Ogay 2007; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Competence traits are conducive to emphasizing professional self-promotion (Kervyn et al. 2012). Third person enhances the prominent attribute of a competent image and helps consumers create a sense of superiority among their friends (Dayter 2014). Thus, when individuals aim to express self-achievement, they typically earn self-praise through third-person expression (Hareli and Weiner 2000). Therefore, a competent image narrated in the third person prompts consumers to engage in behaviors aimed at enhancing themselves and promoting a better image (Alexandrov et al. 2013;

Hollenbeck and Kaikati 2012). Similarly, research shows that positive product information and experiences help people exhibit competence, and self-enhancement concerns drive people to use such an opportunity to share a positive word-of-mouth (Berger 2014; Dubois et al. 2016; Chen 2017).

Boosting social belonging or self enhancement affects the liking behavior of in-feed social ads because it bolsters a naturally occurring motive. One could argue that social belonging and self enhancement are human motives that exist on their own, but this assumes that consumers have already reached a ceiling of the two motives (Berger and Iyengar 2013). In the present research, we suggest that matches between persons and brand images are more amenable to social belonging and self-enhancement motives, because the matches allow for additional opportunities for social belonging and self-enhancement.

In turn, we propose that the motivations of social belonging and self-enhancement, boosted by different matches, affect liking intention. Liking behavior is the outcome of the intention to construct and express an ideal self-identity that is initiated by the intention to satisfy self-expression motivations (Alexandrov et al. 2013). When browsing a warm image expressed in first-person narration, people become relatively sensitive to whether or not the ad allows them to bond with others. Thus, they "like" the ads to satisfy their social belonging motives. By contrast, when browsing a competent image expressed in third-person narration, people become relatively sensitive to whether the ad allows them to be distinct from others. Thus, they "like" the ads to fulfill their self-enhancement motive. The model presented in Fig. 2 depicts the relationship in our study. We formally state these ideas in the following hypotheses.

H1: Compared to third-person narration, first-person in-feed ads lead to a higher liking intention for a warm image.
H2: Compared to first-person narration, third-person in-feed ads lead to a higher liking intention for a competent image.
H3: The warm image and first-person narration match affects liking via social belonging.
H4: The competent image and third-person narration match affects liking via self-enhancement.

Methodology

We conducted five experiments to examine the effects of matches between brand image and narrative person on liking intention and the underlying mechanism by testing the mediating roles of social belonging and self-enhancement in WeChat Moments. In Study 1, we used real brands: a warm brand (Free Lunch for Children in Study 1A) and a competent

Fig. 2 Proposed framework
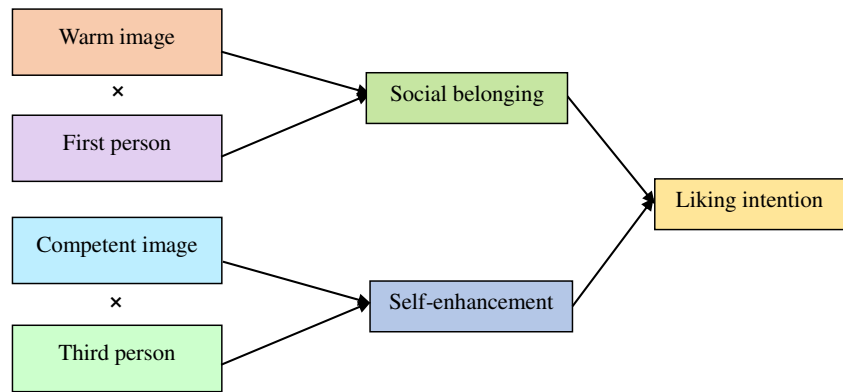
brand (Apple in Study 1B) to establish the basic main effects of different matches between brand image and narrative person on liking intention (H1 and H2). Study 2 replicated the effects by using a fictitious brand in order to eliminate interferences of consumers' prior brand knowledge and preference (H1 and H2). Study 3 tested the mediating roles of social belonging and self-enhancement (H3 and H4) by measuring the mediators. Study 4 examined the underlying mechanism via manipulating the mediators (H3 and H4) and further ruled out the alternative explanation of psychological distance.

To further deepen our framework, we designed Study 5 to include self-monitoring as a boundary condition. High self-monitors are "markedly sensitive and responsive to social and interpersonal cues to situational appropriateness," whereas low self-monitors are "less responsive to situational and interpersonal specifications of appropriate behavior" (Snyder and Gangestad 1982, p. 123). Since liking is a self-expressive behavior seen by their friends, high self-monitors care more about the ads' content than low self-monitors do. Thus, we suppose that the matching effects are stronger among high-self-monitoring consumers.

To examine the validity of our findings, we used real brands (Study 1) and fictitious brands in a variety of product categories including an electronic product, food, traveling product, and clothing (Studies 2, 3, 4, and 5). Moreover, we manipulated warmth through advertising content that contains helpfulness (Study 1), love (Study 2), kindness (Study 3), sincerity (Study 4) and mildness (Study 5) (Fiske et al. 2002; Kervyn et al. 2012). In contrast, we manipulated competence through advertising content that contains genius (Study 1), intelligence (Study 2), quality (Study 3), and efficiency (Study 4) and skill (Study 5) (Fiske et al. 2002; Kervyn et al. 2012).

Studies 1A and 1B: Narrative person match in a real brand scenario

Study 1A tests H1 that for a warm image, first-person narration leads to a higher liking intention compared to third-person narration. Study 1B tests that for a competent image, third-person

narration will be more appealing to consumers' likes compared to first-person narration. We chose a charity brand (Free Lunch for Children) and a luxury brand (Apple) as a warm and a competent brand, respectively. As they are real brands, we controlled for self-brand connection. Self-brand connection is the extent to which individuals have incorporated brands into their self-concept (Escalas and Bettman 2003). When the self–brand connection is high, consumers tend to click the "like" button to express their appreciation, just as they praise themselves (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Wallace et al. 2017).

Design and method

Studies 1A and 1B adopted a one-factor, two-level (narrative person: first person vs. third person), between-subjects design. Participants were recruited through a professional survey platform "Sojump.com" in exchange for a small payment. Three respondents in Study 1A and two in Study 1B hardly ever used WeChat Moments and were excluded from the following analyses, leaving a sample size of 78 (32 male) persons aged 17–35 years ($M_{age} = 22.88$, SD = 5.59) in Study 1A and 77 (37 male) persons aged 17–52 years ($M_{age} = 24.25$, SD = 7.30) in Study 1B. Participants were randomly assigned to the first-person and third-person conditions.

Research has suggested that judgments of warmth and competence play important roles in consumers' perceptions of organizations and brands (Fiske et al. 2002; Kervyn et al. 2012). For instance, non-profit organizations tend to be perceived as relatively warm, whereas for-profit organizations are perceived as more competent (Aaker et al. 2010). This is because non-profits usually show warmth and commitment to the social good, whereas for-profits tend to present competence and managerial skill (Moret 2004). Therefore, we chose a domestic Chinese charity brand called "Free Lunch for Children" to represent a warm brand, and a high-tech brand, "Apple," to represent a competent brand. We designed the corresponding ad discourse and picture to highlight the warm or competent image. Using the same stimuli, we conducted a pretest with a separate sample from Sojump ($N = 151$, 76 male, $M_{age} = 23.89$, ranging from 17 to 42 years). The

outcome supports our expectation. Participants were asked to report their perception of warmth and competence about brands on two three-item scales used by Grandey et al. (2005) and Judd et al. (2005) (warmth: warm, generous, friendly; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; $\alpha = 0.91$; competence: competent, effective, efficient; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; $\alpha = 0.86$). The findings indicate that the non-profit brand (Free Lunch for Children) was perceived to be warmer ($M_{warmth} = 5.67$, SD = 1.04) than for-profit brand (Apple) ($M_{warmth} = 3.94$, SD = 1.00, t (149) = 10.37, $p < .001$). Also, the for-profit brand (Apple) ($M_{competence} = 5.53$, SD = 1.00) was perceived to be more competent than the non-profit brand (Free Lunch for Children) ($M_{competence} = 3.92$, SD = 1.05, t (149) = −9.64, $p < .001$).

Next, we manipulated the narrative person by using first or third person. For the warm brand (Study 1A), the discourse was "Join us and give the children a hot meal with practical action," completed with a picture of a little girl eating a meal with a satisfied smile for the first-person condition. In the third-person copy, the discourse was "Join them and give the children a hot meal with practical action," with the same picture. For the competent brand (Study 1B), the discourse was "To be excellent and distinctive, the MacBook Pro highlights my brilliance," completed with a picture of a high-tech computer for the first-person condition. "To be excellent and distinctive, the MacBook Pro highlights his brilliance," with the same picture was shown in the third-person copy (see Web Appendix). All versions include a picture, logo, link, and discourse. The first-person and third-person copies were inserted randomly.

Next, participants were asked to rate the degree to which they agree with the following statement (Bernritter et al. 2016): "I would like to 'like' this advertising." We also measured participants' self-brand connection through a seven-item scale used by Escalas and Bettman (2003) (e.g., "Free Lunch for Children reflects who I am" and "I can identify with Free Lunch for Children"; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; $\alpha = 0.90$). None of the participants correctly guessed the purpose of the study.

Results

Study 1A A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on liking intention shows a significant effect of narrative person (F (1, 76) = 21.57, $p < .001$). This effect holds when we control for self-brand connection (F (1, 75) = 27.03, $p < .001$), which itself influences liking intention (F (1, 75) = 14.79, $p < .001$).

For the warm image, the first-person narration attracts more likes ($M_{first-person} = 5.88$, SD = 1.23) than the third-person narration ($M_{third-person} = 4.54$, SD = 1.31; F (1, 76) = 21.57, $p < .001$). H1 is supported.

Study 1B The result of ANOVA on participants' likes confirms a significant effect of narrative person (F (1, 75) = 7.36,

$p = .01$). This effect holds when we control for self-brand connection (F (1, 74) = 6.91, $p = .01$), which influences liking intention (F (1, 75) = 6.27, $p = .02$).

For the competent image, the third-person narration attracts more likes ($M_{third-person} = 4.60$, SD = 1.15) than the first-person narration ($M_{first-person} = 3.86$, SD = 1.23; F (1, 75) = 7.36, $p = .01$). H2 is supported.

Discussion

In accordance with Bernritter et al. (2016), results of Studies 1A and 1B show that regardless of narrative person, consumers tend to "like" warm image advertising on WeChat ($M_{warmth} = 5.17$, SD = 1.43) more than competent image advertising ($M_{competence} = 4.25$, SD = 1.24; F (1,153) = 18.26, $p < .001$). It implies that presenting warmth is more appropriate than displaying competence on social media. Study 1A indicates that first-person narration has a positive influence on the effect of warm images on liking intention. Study 1B supports the notion that first-person narration does not always benefit brand advertising. For a competent image, third-person narration is more appropriate than first-person narration.

Study 2: Narrative person match in fictitious brand scenario

Following the procedures in Studies 1A and 1B, we presented a new, fictitious phone brand "Mobile Sky" to exclude the interference of prior knowledge and preference on the brands. Study 2 manipulated brand image through an in-feed social ad that contained ad discourse and a picture.

Design and method

Study 2 adopted a 2 (brand image: warmth vs. competence) × 2 (narrative person: first person vs. third person) between-subjects design. A total of 195 participants (85 male, M_{age} = 19.29, ranging from 17 to 23 years) were recruited from a comprehensive university located in central China in exchange for course credit. They were presented with an ad discourse and a picture about a new brand ("Mobile" phone) promotion on WeChat Moments, with the ability to interact with the ad. Respondents were instructed to view a WeChat Moments page and imagine it as their personal page with a new brand promotion ad. In the warm image and first-person condition, the discourse was "Seeing love, let us no longer be apart," completed with a picture of parents video chatting with their children. On the warm image and third-person condition, the discourse was "Seeing love, let them no longer be apart," with the same picture. On the competent image and first-person condition, the discourse was "High-tech chip with

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natural sleek appearance shows my intelligent choice," completed with a picture of a high-tech phone. On competent image and third-person condition, the discourse was "High-tech chip with natural sleek appearance shows his intelligent choice," with the same picture (see Web Appendix).

Participants were then asked a series of questions. To measure brand image perception, we asked them to evaluate the ads through three states of warmth (warm, generous, friendly; $\alpha = 0.92$) and three states of competence (competent, effective, efficient; $\alpha = 0.84$) used by Grandey et al. (2005) and Judd et al. (2005). Next, consumers' liking intention was measured on the seven-point Likert scale used by Bernritter et al. (2016) (1 = strongly disagree through 7 = strongly agree): "I want to give a '*like*' for this advertising." Subsequently, we also examined whether brand attitudes influenced by advertising discourse drive liking intentions. Participants were asked to rate the four following statements to measure their brand attitudes (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree; $\alpha = 0.94$; Kokkinaki and Lunt 1999): "I like this brand very much," "I'm very interested in the brand," "This brand is very appealing to me," and "This brand is very desirable to have."

Results

Manipulation check Results demonstrate that the warm ads are perceived as warmer ($M_{warmth} = 5.24$, SD = 0.96) than competent ads ($M_{warmth} = 3.55$, SD = .86, t (193) = 12.88, $p < .001$) and competent ads are perceived as more competent ($M_{competence} = 4.37$, SD = 0.72) than warm ads ($M_{competence} = 4.06$, SD = .88, t (193) = −2.57, $p = .01$). In addition, a 2 (brand image) × 2 (narrative person) ANOVA on brand attitude shows that the two-way interaction is not significant (F (1,191) = 0.20, $p = .66$). This result excludes the interference of brand attitudes.

Liking intention We ran a 2 (brand image) × 2 (narrative person) ANOVA on consumers' liking intention. As expected, the two-way interaction between brand image and narrative person is significant (F (1,191) = 15.61, $p < .001$, Fig. 3). The effect of brand image is significant (F (1,191) = 33.56, $p < .001$), but the effect of narrative person is not (F (1,191) = 0.01, $p = .95$). Consistent with Studies 1A and 1B, for the warm brand, first-person narration attracts more likes ($M_{first-person} = 4.94$, SD = 1.29) than the third-person narration ($M_{third-person} = 4.24$, SD = 1.02, F (1,191) = 7.93, $p = .01$). For the competent brand, third-person narration attracts more likes ($M_{third-person} = 3.91$, SD = 1.27) than the first-person narration ($M_{first-person} = 3.18$, SD = 1.42, F (1,191) = 7.70, $p = .01$).

Discussion

The results of Study 2 are consistent with those of Study 1 after allowing for interference from brand knowledge, preference,
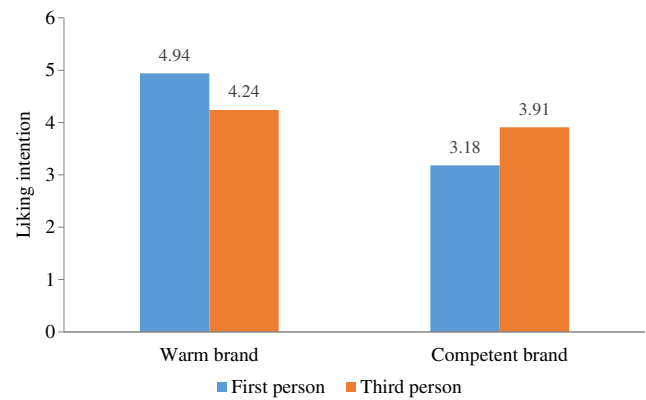

Fig. 3 Effect of brand image and narrative person on liking intention (Study 2)

and brand attitudes, providing additional support for the hypothesized interaction of brand image and narrative person.

Study 3: Mediation effect of social belonging and self-enhancement

Study 3 aimed to investigate the process underlying the initial results. Our theory proposes that narrative person exerts divergent effects on consumers' liking intention, causing the warm image to boost consumers' motivation of social belonging and the competent brand to stimulate a motivation of self-enhancement. In this study, we manipulated brand image through ad discourse. We used the same ad picture for the two brand images.

Design and method

We recruited 200 participants from two comprehensive universities located in central and southern China in exchange for course credit. We randomly assigned them (72 male, $M_{age} = 19.60$, ranging from 18 to 25 years) to a 2 (brand image: warmth vs. competence) × 2 (narrative person: first person vs. third person) between-subjects design. They were presented with an ad picture and discourse about a new brand ("Carol" milk) promotion on WeChat Moments, with the option to interact with the ad. For the warm image and first-person condition, the discourse was "I will be there with concern and care all the time." For the warm image and third-person condition, the discourse was "He will be there with concern and care all the time." For the competent image and first-person condition, the discourse was "High-quality milk, excellent production, distinguished quality enriches my noble life." For the competent image and third-person condition, the discourse was "High-quality milk, excellent production, distinguished quality enriches his noble life." All groups completed the experiment with the same picture of good milk from a high-quality farm (see Web Appendix).

Next, we measured brand image perception and liking intention similar to prior studies. Then, social belonging was measured using five items ($\alpha = 0.83$; Nadkarni and Hofmann 2012; Seidman 2013) such as "I give the brand advertising a '*like*' to feel closer to my friends." Self-enhancement was evaluated using four items ($\alpha = 0.86$) (Dubois et al. 2016; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004) such as "Giving the advertising a '*like*' shows others that I am an excellent consumer."

Results

Manipulation check The results demonstrate that the warm ads are perceived as warmer ($M_{warmth} = 4.54$, SD = 0.87) than competent ads ($M_{warmth} = 3.53$, SD = .97, t (198) = 7.74, $p < .001$), and competent ads are perceived as more competent ($M_{competence} = 4.69$, SD = 0.97) than warm ads ($M_{competence} = 3.44$, SD = .81, t (193) = −9.84, $p < .001$).

Liking intention A 2 (brand image) × 2 (narrative person) ANOVA on liking intention reveals a significant interaction effect (F (1,196) = 260.144, $p < .001$, Fig. 4). Consistent with our prior findings, for the warm image, first-person narration attracts more likes ($M_{first-person} = 4.82$, SD = 0.87) than third-person narration ($M_{third-person} = 3.28$, SD = 1.20, F (1,196) = 67.36, $p < .001$). For the competent image, third-person narration attracts more likes ($M_{third-person} = 5.12$, SD = 0.66) than first-person narration ($M_{first-person} = 2.38$, SD = 0.95, F (1,196) = 213.235, $p < .001$).

Mediation effect To test the expected underlying roles of social belonging and self-enhancement, we applied moderated mediation analysis with both factors entered as mediators (Hayes 2017; Model 7: 5000 bootstrapped samples).

The results show a significant overall indirect effect of social belonging (Index = 0.75, 95% confidence interval [CI]: 0.57 to 0.93) and self-enhancement (Index = 0.63, 95% CI: 0.14 to 1.78). The conditional indirect effect proves that
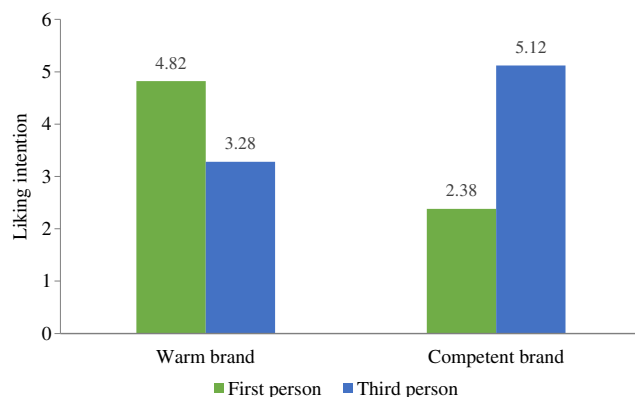
for the warm image, social belonging mediates the relationship between narrative person and consumers' liking intention (ab = −0.38, 95% CI: –0.66 to −0.18), but self-enhancement does not play a role (ab = −0.16, 95% CI: –0.41 to 0.03). However, for the competent image, self-enhancement mediates the relationship between narrative person and consumers' liking intention (ab = 0.63, 95% CI: 0.41 to 0.90), but social belonging does not play a role (ab = 0.19, 95% CI: –0.01 to 0.45) (see Fig. 5).

Discussion

The results of Study 3 indicate that consumers tend to strategically use liking behavior to satisfy their motivations to gain social belonging or self-enhancement, inspired by the match between brand image and narrative person of the in-feed social ads. Specifically, a match between warm image and first-person narration is found to influence liking intention via social-belonging satisfaction, whereas a match between competent images and third-person narration led to increased liking intention via self-enhancement satisfaction. These findings are important because they shed light on two new mediators, social belonging and self-enhancement, which have not yet been tested in the matching-driven advertising effectiveness literature.

Studies 4A and 4B: Manipulation the motives of social belonging and self-enhancement

Studies 4A and 4B further test the role of social belonging and self-enhancement in matching effect between persons and brand images. We have suggested that the match between warm image and first-person narration attracts consumers' likes because it provides an opportunity for social belonging, and the match between competent image and third-person narration attracts consumers' likes because it provides an opportunity for self-enhancement. To test these possibilities, people again browsed the Moments ads, but we also manipulated social belonging (Study 4A) and self-enhancement (Study 4B). Social belonging and self-enhancement should enhance consumers' liking intention, but if our theorizing is correct, these effects should be stronger with a warm image with first-person narration (compared to a warm brand with third-person narration) and a competent image with third-person narration (compared to a competent image with first-person narration), respectively.

Design and method

Study 4A adopted a 2 (narrative person: first person vs. third person) × 2 (social belonging: enhanced vs. control) between-subjects design in a warm image context. Study 4B adopted a 2

Fig. 4 Effect of brand image and narrative person on liking intention (Study 3)

Fig. 5 Underlying roles of social belonging and self-enhancement (Study 3). Note: the match effect between warm brand and first person discourse is driven by social belonging, and the match effect between competent brand and third-person discourse is driven by self-enhancement
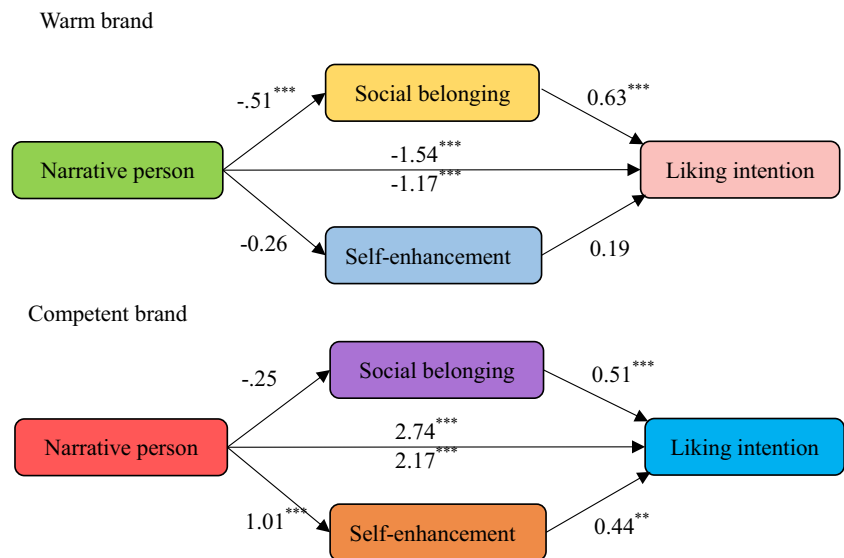
(narrative person: first person vs. third person) × 2 (self-enhancement: enhanced vs. control) between-subjects design in a competent image context. A total of 140 participants (62 male, M_{age} = 19.41, ranging from 17 to 23 years) in Study 4A and 139 participants (67 male, M_{age} = 18.89, ranging from 17 to 24 years) in Study 4B were recruited from a comprehensive university located in central China in exchange for course credit.

As in Study 3, participants were presented with an ad picture and discourse about a new brand ("Abel" airlines) promotion on WeChat Moments. In Study 4A, we manipulated the narrative person by using first or third person. For the first-person condition, the discourse was "Let us be happy to sail, warm to arrive." For the third-person condition, the discourse was "Let them be happy to sail, warm to arrive." We manipulated social belonging by telling half of the participants (social belonging enhanced condition) that they were being evaluated by their WeChat friends. After browsing the advertisements, they were told that their WeChat friends could see their "like" on an ad, and would rate them on how kind and warm they are according to the brand image (Pickett et al. 2004). Participants in the control condition received no such instructions. All groups completed the experiment with the same picture (see Web Appendix).

In Study 4B, we manipulated the narrative person by using first or third person. For the first-person condition, the discourse was "Fly with me to travel around the world without flight delay." For the third-person condition, the discourse was "Fly with him to travel around the world without flight delay." We manipulated self-enhancement by telling half of the participants (self-enhancement enhanced condition) that they were being evaluated. After browsing the advertisements, they were told that their WeChat friends could see their "like" on an ad, and would rate them on how cool and competent they are based on the brand image (Berger and Iyengar 2013).

Participants in the control condition received no such instructions. All groups completed the experiment with the same picture (see Web Appendix). Using the same stimuli, we conducted a pretest with a separate sample (N = 142, 47 male, M_{age} = 19.15, ranging from 17 to 22 years) to measure the warmth and competence of the brand image. The results indicate that the brand in Study 4A was perceived warmer (M_{warmth} = 5.29, SD = 0.80) than the brand in Study 4B (M_{warmth} = 3.57, SD = .81, t (140) = 12.68, p < .001). Also, the brand in Study 4B was perceived more competent ($M_{competence}$ = 4.47, SD = 0.91) than the brand in Study 4A ($M_{competence}$ = 4.17, SD = .73, t (140) = −2.17, p = .03).

Next, we measured liking intention similar to prior studies. Additionally, to rule out alternative explanations, we also measured participants' psychological distance through a three-item scale used by Yan et al. (2016) (e.g., "how close you felt to the brand in ads" and "how similarity to the brand in ads"; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much; α = 0.87). It is possible that first-person narration (vs. third-person narration) makes consumers feel close to the warm image. As a result, it increases their liking towards the brand. In contrast, third-person narration (vs. first-person narration) makes consumers feel distant to the competent image. Since psychological distance makes consumers process brands abstractly, a brand showing competence is preferred (Williams et al. 2013).

Results

Study 4A In addition to the main effects of narrative person (F (1,139) = 18.10, p < .001) and social belonging (F (1,139) = 6.67, p = .01), a 2 (narrative person) × 2 (social belonging) ANOVA on liking intention reveals a significant interaction effect (F (1,136) = 4.14, p = .04, Fig. 6). In addition, the effect of narrative person on psychological distance is not significant
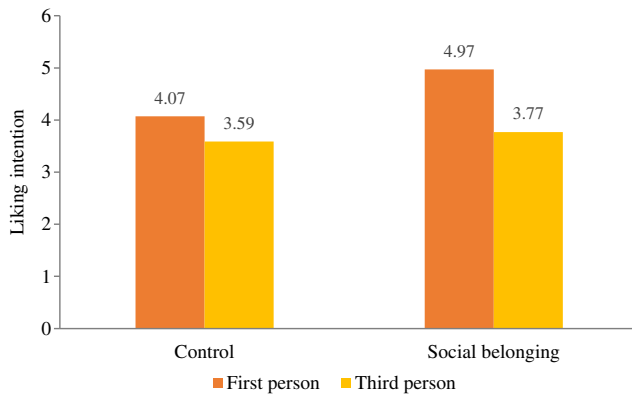
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Fig. 6 Impact of narrative person and social belonging for warm image (Study 4A)

(F $(1,139) = 1.26$, $p = .26$). This result excludes the alternative explanation of psychological distance.

As expected, in the warm image context, while social belonging leads first-person narration to attract more likes ($M_{social\ belong} = 4.97$ vs. $M_{control} = 4.07$, F $(136) = 14.26$, $p < .001$), it has less of an impact on third-person narration ($M_{social\ belong} = 3.77$ vs. $M_{control} = 3.59$, F $(1, 136) = 0.46$, $p = .5$).

Viewed in another way, consistent with prior studies, first-person narration leads participants in the control to click the "like" button ($M_{first-person} = 4.07$ vs. $M_{third-person} = 3.59$, F $(1, 136) = 3.75$, $p = .06$). The effect of narrative person is even stronger, however, among participants in the social belonging condition ($M_{first-person} = 4.97$ vs. $M_{third-person} = 3.77$, F $(1, 136) = 22.88$, $p < .001$).

Study 4B In addition to main effects of narrative person (F $(1,137) = 24.40$, $p < .001$) and self-enhancement (F $(1,137) = 4.24$, $p = .04$), a 2 (narrative person) × 2 (self-enhancement) ANOVA on liking intention reveals a significant interaction effect (F $(1,135) = 3.72$, $p = .05$, Fig. 7). In addition, the effect of narrative person on psychological distance is not significant
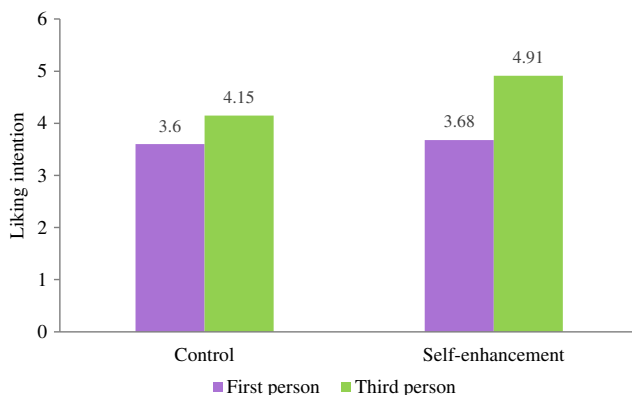

Fig. 7 Impact of narrative person and self-enhancement for competent image (Study 4B)

(F $(1,137) = 0.51$, $p = .48$). This result excludes the alternative explanation of psychological distance.

As expected, in the competent image context, while self-enhancement leads third-person narration to attract more likes ($M_{self-enhancement} = 4.91$ vs. $M_{control} = 4.15$, F $(135) = 8.86$, $p = .003$), it has less of an impact on first-person narration ($M_{self-enhancement} = 3.68$ vs. $M_{control} = 3.60$, F $(1, 135) = 0.10$, $p = .8$).

Viewed in another way, consistent with prior studies, third-person narration leads participants in the control to click the "like" button ($M_{third-person} = 4.15$ vs. $M_{first-person} = 3.60$, F $(1, 135) = 4.73$, $p = .03$). The effect of narrative person is even stronger among participants in the self-enhancement condition ($M_{third-person} = 4.91$ vs. $M_{first-person} = 3.68$, F $(1, 135) = 24.78$, $p < .001$)

Discussion

Study 4 illustrates the role of self-expression in these effects. In the warm image context, compared to third-person narration, first-person narration gains more consumers' likes, but these effects were stronger among participants whose social belonging concerns were greater. In the competent image context, compared to first-person narration, third-person narration achieves more consumers' likes, but these effects are stronger among participants whose self-enhancement concerns are greater. The results show that in a warm image context, first-person narration is more amenable to social belonging motives than third-person narration, and in a competent image context, third-person narration is more amenable to self-enhancement motives than first-person narration. As such, we see a larger variation in response, accordingly. In addition, we eliminate an alternative explanation of psychological distance.

Study 5: Self-monitoring as a boundary condition

The purpose of Study 5 was to refine the framework of this research by considering the possible boundary condition. We chose an individual trait, self-monitoring, because it is well recognized in terms of a consumer's sensitivity to social situational cues. This is quite appropriate for our research context.

Self-monitoring is defined as the extent to which people can and do observe and control their expressive behavior and self-presentation (Snyder 1979). High self-monitoring consumers are more sensitive to social situational cues of what behaviors are better and appropriate, whereas low self-monitoring consumers lack self-presentation motivation and/or the ability to regulate their social behaviors to match such cues (Snyder and Gangestad 1982). Liking advertising on social media is a self-presentation behavior to the user's friends (Bernritter et al. 2016). Low self-monitoring

consumers are possibly inactive users who are less interactive with brand advertising. Therefore, we assume the effect of brand advertising on liking intention is only significant for high self-monitoring consumers.

Design and method

Study 5 adopted a 2 (brand image: warmth vs. competence) × 2 (narrative person: first person vs. third person) experiment with self-monitoring as an additional measured factor for all groups by studying a different product category ("Runner" sports shoe). We recruited a separate sample consisting of 185 participants (75 male, $M_{age} = 18.81$, ranging from 17 to 22 years) from a comprehensive university located in central China in exchange for a small payment. Participants were randomly assigned to the four conditions.

Participants were instructed to imagine that they were browsing their friends' updating feeds while new brand advertising appeared in their feeds. For the first-person condition, the discourse was "Greeting the dawn and stepping into the sunrise, I am waiting for the city to wake up gradually with birdsong," completed with a picture of an energetic youngster ready to run in the morning. For the third-person condition, the discourse was "Greeting the dawn and stepping into the sunrise, she is waiting for the city to wake up gradually with birdsong," with the same picture. For the first-person condition, the discourse was "I am at top speed and flexible. I am free to run and enjoy it every time," completed with a picture of someone running intensely. For the third-person condition, the discourse was "He is at top speed. He is free to run and enjoys it every time," with the same picture. Then, we measured brand image and liking intention similar to prior studies. Self-monitoring was measured following Allen et al. (2005) via an eight-item, seven-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.72$) using statements such as "I can express myself intentionally to make a good impression or please others."

Results

Manipulation check The results demonstrate that the warm ads are perceived as warmer ($M_{warm} = 4.82$, SD = 0.87) than competent ads ($M_{warm} = 3.56$, SD = .84, t (183) = 9.68, $p < .001$). Also, competent ads are perceived as more competent ($M_{competence} = 4.48$, SD = 0.97) than warm ads ($M_{competence} = 4.00$, SD = 1.31, t (183) = −2.82, p = .01).

We used Model 3 (Hayes 2017) to examine the moderated moderation effect of self-monitoring. The results show that the interaction of brand image, narrative person, and self-monitoring is significant (b = 1.42, t = 2.90, p = 0.01, 95% CI: 0.45 to 2.38). We then adopted "floodlight analysis" (i.e., the Johnson–Neyman procedure) to examine high vs.

low self-monitoring. This analysis leverages the Hayes (2017) PROCESS macro to examine the conditional effect of a focal predictor (narrative person in this case) across a range of moderator (self-monitoring) values. We suggest that the effect of narrative person on liking intention is significant only for high self-monitoring consumers, and not for low self-monitoring consumers.

Warm image When the self-monitoring value is 3.54, a marginally significant negative effect of narrative person (b = −0.59, t = −1.99, p = .05, 95% CI: −1.17 to 0.00) is found. When the value is lower than 3.57, the negative effect begins to fade. As self-monitoring increases, the beta coefficient for narrative person becomes increasingly more negative, maximizing at self-monitoring = 6.25 (b = −2.94, t = −3.74, p < .001, 95% CI: −4.50 to −1.38). As self-monitoring is from 3.54 to 6.25, the effect of narrative person steadily decreases from b = −0.59 to b = −2.94. Together, self-monitoring plays as a conditional boundary. It is consistent with our prediction (Fig. 8).

Competent image When the self-monitoring value is 3.61, a marginally significant positive effect of narrative person (b = 0.62, t = 1.99, p = .05, 95% CI: 0.00 to 1.25) is found. When the value is lower than 3.65, the positive effect begins to diminish. As self-monitoring increases, the beta coefficient for narrative person grows increasingly more positive, maximizing at self-monitoring = 6.13 (b = 2.01, t = 2.71, p = .05, 95% CI: 0.54 to 3.49). In summary, as self-monitoring goes from 3.65 to 6.13, the effect of narrative person steadily progresses from b = 0.62 to b = 2.01. Together, self-monitoring plays as a conditional boundary. It is consistent with our prediction (Fig. 9).
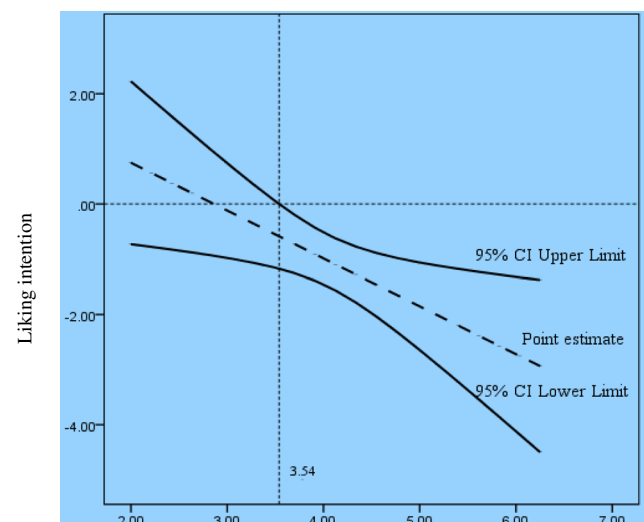

Fig. 8 Effect of narrative person on liking at different self-monitoring for warm brand (Study 5)
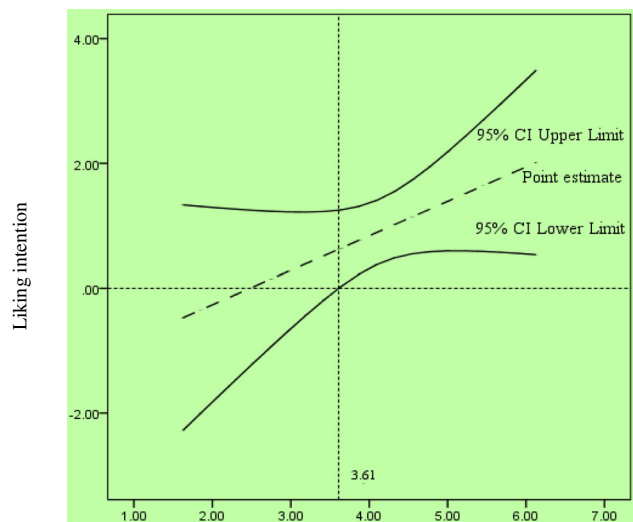
Fig. 9 Effect of narrative person on liking at different self-monitoring for competent brand (Study 5)

Discussion

Study 5 examined how self-monitoring moderates the effect of matches on liking intention. For high self-monitoring consumers, liking intentions significantly increase in response to both a warm first-person match and a competent third-person match, while low self-monitoring consumers do not intentionally change their behavior to cater to their friends. It seems they are not interested in online brand endorsements. As a result, brand advertisements do not attract consumers' liking intention in such conditions.

General conclusions and discussion

This research examines how and why the match between brand image and narrative person in the context of WeChat Moments ads can gain users' likes. We find that a warm brand generally (but not constantly) obtains higher liking intentions than a competent brand in WeChat Moments. When a competent brand speaks in the third person, it also attracts consumers' likes (Studies 1 and 2). We also verify that consumers' likes are driven by two motivations, namely, social belonging and self-enhancement. Liking a warm brand with first-person narration satisfies consumers' social belonging motivation, whereas liking a competent brand with first-person narration helps consumers attain self-enhancement. First- (third-) person narration appears to be a linguistic strategy of convergence (divergence) that can be used to enhance the affinity (prominence) of warm (competent) brands. Thus, the matches boost consumers' motivations of social belonging (self-enhancement) for self-expression behaviors (Studies 3 and 4). In addition, we prove that the matching effect exists only for high self-monitoring consumers who tended to adopt brand cues for positive self-presentation (Study 5). Given the

growing social media marketing budge, strategies that allow firms to enhance the effectiveness of their in-feed social ads are crucial in digital, data-rich, and developing market environments. Content with human characteristics is an effective communication strategy.

Theoretical contributions

Social media advertising has increasingly attracted the attention of researchers. In examining the drivers of users' responses to social media advertising, most research concerns consumer characteristics and media features, and neglects the role of brand-related factors (i.e., Taylor et al. 2011; Wallace et al. 2017; Zhang and Mao 2016). Our research focuses on the human image and voice design of brand advertising. This research is a pilot work on narrative person in social media advertising. We provide three contributions to the related research fields.

First, our work furthers the knowledge of how to use content strategy in a human way by brand advertising to attract consumers' online interactions. Previous research has shown that Facebook posts and messages involving aspects of brand personality and human tone of voice positively influence consumer response and engagement on social media (Lee et al. 2018; Barcelos et al. 2018). These content strategies are more persuasive and lively than directly informative content, since content in a human way can be incorporated into non-advertising social surroundings and consumers tend to select brands that are consistent with their online self-concept (Govers and Schoormans 2005; Belk 2013). Furthermore, our research illustrates a different way by using a human representative (consumer image) and voice (personal pronouns) to appeal to consumers' self-expression on social media through brand advertising.

Second, our research contributes to on the domain of social media advertising by revealing a previously unexplored factor, that is, the narrative person of advertising discourse. Extant literature posits that only warm images are enticing to consumers' endorsement on social media between two typical brand images (Bernritter et al. 2016). We demonstrate that warm and competent images can offer positive signals for consumers, depending on the narrative person applied to advertising discourse. That is, first-person narration is effective for a warm image, and third-person narration is suitable for a competent image.

Furthermore, we demonstrate that this effect is driven by the impact on consumers' motivations of social belonging and self-enhancement. Researchers suggest that users' motivations to use social media include internal and image utilities (Toubia and Stephen 2013), self-enhancement and emotional connection, self-needs (e.g., self-enhancement and self-affirmation), and social needs (e.g., social comparison and social bonding) (Alexandrov et al. 2013). We advance prior findings by clarifying that different matches influence advertising effects through varied motivations. A warm first-person match influences liking intention through social-belonging

satisfaction, whereas a competent third-person match works through self-enhancement satisfaction.

Third, our research advances the understanding of the advertising language on social media. While previous studies have largely focused on relationships built through first- (referring to the brand or company) and second- (referring to consumers) person narration in the advertising discourse, this research explores the skillful use of the third person in the specific context of social media. Findings show that first-person (referring to consumers) narration is beneficial for expressing a warm image, whereas third-person (referring to consumers) narration is conducive for presenting a competent image (Cook 2001; Puzakova et al. 2013). In addition, this finding broadens the application of linguistic research on the communication accommodation theory to marketing research.

Managerial implications

Our research also has important practical implications for marketers. First, we provide a clear applicability to content strategy on social media. Given the growing social media marketing budget, strategies that allow firms to enhance the effectiveness of their social media advertising through advertising design must be identified. Content with human characteristics is an effective communication strategy (Kwon and Sung 2011; Lee et al. 2018; Barcelos et al. 2018; Campbell and Marks 2015), and our research suggests that companies can use warm and competent images combined with appropriate narrative person to present their brands. For example, warm images such as helpfulness (Study 1), love (Study 2), kindness (Study 3), sincerity (Study 4), and mildness (Study 5), are appealing to users on social media. A first-person narration combined with a warm image significantly affects liking behavior. However, competent images, including the traits of genius (Study 1), intelligence (Study 2), quality (Study 3), efficiency (Study 4), and skill (Study 5), attract consumers. A third-person narration combined with a competent image remarkably affects liking behavior. One takeaway from our study is that first person (third person) narration is more effective when the brand image is warm (competent) on liking intention in a social media context (Fig. 10).

Second, we provide new target selection criteria for self-monitoring. Researchers have suggested that high self-monitoring consumers tend to regard social media as places where they can expand and develop their offline relationships to maintain and create online social capital (Ellison et al. 2007). Such individuals are shown to be more sensitive to advertising cues and tend to use these cues for impression management. Our research suggests that the matching effect exists only for high self-monitoring consumers. Therefore, marketers should choose active users to deliver their ads and thus obtain

	First-person	Third-person
Warm image	More likes A warm image of affinity	Less likes A warm image of estrangement
Competent image	Less likes A competent image of arrogance	More likes A competent image of prominence

Fig. 10 The match between brand image and narrative person. Note: warm image includes helpfulness, love, kindness, sincerity, and mildness, competent image includes genius, intelligence, quality, efficiency, and skill

numerous interactions, disseminations, and promotions. According to WeChat's advertising system, companies can target users on the basis of their location, interest, age, gender, device, and phone network. Furthermore, the results of this work also provide another user's selection criteria-self-monitoring.

Limitations and directions for future research

This research considers only two separately humanized perceptions of brand images. There are four quadrants according to the two dimensions of warmth and competence. Researchers have expanded and deepened theory and proposed a complementary relationship between warmth and competence (Aaker et al. 2012). If a brand is strongly promoted in terms of both warmth and competence traits (golden quadrant), and warm advertising is provided for a luxury brand and competent advertising for a charity brand, then are these brands or ads attractive to consumers? How do these mechanisms work? Recent research has suggested that warmth traits must be separated from morality traits because the two have divergent effects on impression formation (Goodwin et al. 2014). We suggest that future research continues to explore different effects of morality advertising and warmth advertising on advertising effectiveness. Furthermore, another worthwhile avenue for further research is related to the effect of different brand personalities (i.e., sincerity, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness) and brand anthropomorphism on consumer responses on social media (Aaker 1997; Lee et al. 2018).

This research focuses on likes because liking is the most direct and simple self-expression behavior. In addition to likes, clicks, comments, and shares are also key metrics of the ads' engagement (Sekkeistudio.com 2016; Digipanda.com 2018). Research has demonstrated that sensory and visual features lead to likes; rational and interactive features lead to

comments; and sensory, visual, and rational features result in shares (Kim and Yang 2017). Brubaker and Wilson (2018) employed a longitudinal content analysis of 1393 Facebook posts from 100 of the world's leading brands and found that visual content strategy captured consumers' attention but did not have an impact on consumer engagement. If companies aim to achieve consumer engagement, then pairing a compelling visual content with a text-based engagement strategy is an effective content strategy. These findings invite the possibility that different consumer engagements are likely to be triggered by different psychological processes. It is possible that one matching strategy increases liking intention but decreases commenting, sharing, or clicking intention, whereas the other strategy decreases liking intention but increases commenting, sharing, or clicking intention. Furthermore, the same ads in different social media contexts may have different advertising effectiveness. Such difference is expected given that users can only view likes and comments from within their friend network (WeChat), whereas they can observe likes and comments from other people (e.g., Instagram and Sina Weibo).

We test the effects of first-person and third-person narration on the ads. However, narrative person involves singular personal pronouns and plural personal pronouns, as well as male pronouns and female pronouns. Future research may explore the role of other narrative persons in social media advertising. We only examine self-monitoring as the moderator. Individual differences in self-monitoring differentiate active users from the inactive ones. This process is effective in selecting advertising recipients on the basis of their self-monitoring, rather than on other demographic variables. Future investigations may find other individual variables for improving advertising effectiveness.

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