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Community Trust, Recommendation Trust, and Behavioral Intentions in Chinese Pet WeChat Groups: The Moderating Role of Perceived Commercialization

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This study examines how recommendation trust is formed and translated into behavioral intentions in pet WeChat groups. Focusing on the context of dog food and deworming product recommendations, the study investigates how community engagement and overall attitude toward the community shape general trust in the community, how general trust further influences trust in specific product recommendations, and how such recommendation trust subsequently affects purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention. In addition, belief about the degree of community commercialization and perceived commercialization are introduced as moderating variables to explore whether commercialization weakens the behavioral effects of recommendation trust.

A questionnaire survey was conducted among members of pet WeChat groups, and 384 valid responses were collected for empirical analysis. The data were analyzed mainly in SPSS for construct-level path testing and moderation analysis, while AMOS was used to support measurement-model checks. The results show that community engagement and overall attitude toward the community both have significant positive effects on general trust in the community. General trust in the community further has a significant positive effect on trust in specific product recommendations. Trust in specific product recommendations, in turn, positively influences both purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention. Regarding the moderating effects, belief about the degree of community commercialization does not significantly weaken the relationship between recommendation trust and behavioral intentions, whereas perceived commercialization significantly and negatively moderates the relationships between trust in specific product recommendations and both purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention.

The findings suggest that recommendation effectiveness in pet WeChat groups is rooted in community-based trust rather than in the mere presence of recommendation content. At the same time, commercialization becomes problematic when it is directly experienced by members as intrusive, excessive, or driven by hidden interests. This study contributes to broader online community and social-commerce literature by showing how trust can transfer from a community level to a recommendation level, and by identifying perceived commercialization as a boundary condition in the trust–behavior relationship. The study also offers practical implications for pet brands, group operators, and community-based sellers seeking to maintain trust while engaging in commercialization.

Keywords: Pet WeChat Groups, Recommendation Trust, Community Trust, Purchase Intention, Perceived Commercialization

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	*Meaning*	*Relevance / Usage Context*
AI	Artificial Intelligence	Refers to generative AI tools (ChatGPT, Claude) used for linguistic refinement in the writing process of this thesis.
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures	Statistical software used to support measurement model evaluation and confirmatory factor analysis.
AVE	Average Variance Extracted	Indicator of convergent validity; values above 0.50 regarded as acceptable in this thesis.
CA	Overall Attitude Toward the Community	Key construct capturing members' affective and evaluative orientation toward the pet WeChat group as a whole.
CB	Belief About the Degree of Community Commercialization	Moderating variable measuring members' broad perception of how commercial the group has become overall.
CE	Community Engagement	Central antecedent construct measuring members' active participation and involvement in pet WeChat groups.
CMB	Common Method Bias	Systematic error arising when all variables are collected from a single source or method; tested using Harman's single-factor test.
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019	Referenced in cited studies examining online consumer behavior and social commerce during the pandemic period.
CR	Composite Reliability	Indicator of internal consistency of each construct; values above 0.70 regarded as acceptable.
eWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth	Online consumer-to-consumer sharing of opinions, experiences, and recommendations about products or services.
f^2	Effect Size	Measures the relative substantive contribution of each predictor to an endogenous construct in the path model.
GPT	Generative Pre-trained Transformer	Underlying architecture of ChatGPT (GPT-5.5), one of the AI tools used for linguistic refinement in this thesis.
GT	General Trust in the Community	Core mediating construct reflecting members' overall belief in the trustworthiness and goodwill of the pet WeChat group.

HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations	Criterion for assessing discriminant validity; values below 0.85–0.90 indicate acceptable discriminant validity.
PC	Perceived Commercialization	Key moderating variable capturing members' direct experience of opportunistic behavior, intrusive advertising, or information overload in the group.
PI	Purchase Intention	Self-directed downstream behavioral outcome; reflects members' intention to purchase pet products recommended in the group.
PT	Trust in Specific Product Recommendations	Core construct reflecting confidence in the reliability and sincerity of individual product recommendations within the group.
Q^2	Predictive Relevance	Indicator of the construct-level model's out-of-sample predictive accuracy; values above zero indicate sufficient predictive relevance.
R^2	Coefficient of Determination	Proportion of variance in endogenous constructs (GT, PT, PI, WI) explained by the path model.
RMB	Renminbi	Official currency of the People's Republic of China; used to measure respondents' monthly disposable income in the survey.
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling	Statistical framework used to test relationships among latent constructs; referenced in analytical procedure.
SNS	Social Networking Sites	Online platforms facilitating social interaction and content sharing; used in the context of eWOM and online consumer behavior.
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences	Primary software used for data cleaning, descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, CMB testing, and path testing.
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor	Multicollinearity diagnostic; high values indicate problematic collinearity among predictors in the path model.
WI	Positive Word-of-Mouth Intention	Socially directed downstream behavioral outcome; reflects members' intention to share favorable product recommendations with others.
WOM	Word of Mouth	Consumer-to-consumer communication involving sharing of experiences and recommendations; defined as positive WOM in this thesis.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Pet Consumption and Community Information

Pet owners in China have been spending more on their pets in recent years, which makes China a suitable setting for this study. Pet consumption here is characterized by frequent shopping and repeat purchases, and the most popular products include pet food, deworming products, and nutritional supplements. Compared with standardized low-involvement goods, pet products require buyers to pay closer attention to suitability, safety, and long-term effects. As a result, consumers hold high expectations for brand comparison: after repeated purchase experiences, they tend to favor experience-based evaluations over one-off advertisements or short-term price promotions (Onofrei et al., 2022; Zhao & Shi, 2022; Shirazi et al., 2022).

Social media and social-commerce platforms in China, particularly WeChat-based communities, have changed how consumers search for pet products online. Studies show that when making purchase decisions, most users gather information from multiple sources, including community discussions, user reviews, and other owners' purchase experiences (Wang et al., 2022; Rashid et al., 2022; Yang, 2022). Consumers therefore do not visit these communities solely to obtain information; they also use them for interaction, comparison, judgment, and social participation.

This reflects a form of dependence rooted in pet companionship. When choosing pet food or deworming products, many owners rely on other owners' opinions to judge whether a product suits their own pet. Online communities with sustained interaction and shared experience therefore provide more accurate references for purchases that match an owner's preferences.
As pet product purchases are frequently based on repeated comparison and consultation, this study focuses on two downstream intentions: purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention. The former reflects a self-directed behavioral intention, whereas the latter reflects a socially directed behavioral intention.

1.1.2 WeChat Groups and Pet Recommendation Settings

WeChat is a widely used Chinese super app operated by Tencent that integrates instant messaging, social networking, mobile payments, and mini-programs, and WeChat groups provide a highly relevant setting for examining recommendation trust among Chinese pet consumers. Compared with open platforms, WeChat groups usually involve closer relationships, longer interaction, and richer contextual communication, which makes it easier for group norms and collective attitudes to develop (Sun & Sun, 2024).

Pet-focused WeChat groups usually have a dual nature. On the one hand, they function as mutual-help communities in which members share care experience and solve practical problems together. On the other hand, they also serve as consumption-oriented spaces for product discussion, brand comparison, and purchase recommendations. Recommendations in such groups are therefore

embedded in continuing interaction and social relationships rather than appearing as isolated pieces of information.

Recommendations in WeChat groups differ from those in public review sections because they carry stronger relational signals. Members care not only about whether the advice is correct, but also about who provides it, whether that person is trusted in the group, and whether other members show agreement.

1.1.3 Group Recommendations and Trust

Although pet WeChat groups contain many product recommendations, brand discussions, and shared purchase experiences, whether a recommendation is actually accepted depends on more than the quality of its content. It also depends on whether members perceive genuine experience, goodwill, and mutual help within the group. Previous studies have shown that trust is the primary route to purchase intention, recommendation behavior, and other action-oriented outcomes in online communities (Wang et al., 2022; Connolly et al., 2023; Senali et al., 2024).

In pet WeChat groups, however, trust cannot be assessed at a single moment. A group's overall atmosphere and the perceived sincerity of its members shape how recommendations are received. Successful past recommendations, cases in which a suggested product worked well, further strengthen members' confidence over time.

It is therefore necessary to distinguish general trust in the community from trust in specific product recommendations. Doing so makes it possible to separate the influence of the broader trust environment from that of trust attached to particular recommendations (Senali et al., 2024; Mensah et al., 2023).

Without this distinction, liking a group, feeling at ease within it, trusting its product recommendations, and acting on those recommendations risk being collapsed into a single construct, even though they refer to related but separate phenomena. They are therefore treated as analytically distinct in this study.

1.1.4 Community Commercialization and Recommendation Weakening

Interest-based WeChat groups also face a gradual process of commercialization. Over time, many such groups expand their scope to include group-buying campaigns, partnerships with merchants, and advertising posted by administrators. As more commercial content enters the group, members may come to view it as having become noticeably commercialized (Fan et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023).

Several mechanisms may be at work. Some members come to feel that recommendations serve merchants' interests more than their own; others are put off by intrusive advertisements, disrupted conversations, or information overload. As a result, the influence of recommendations on purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth may weaken even when the underlying information remains credible (Fan et al., 2024; Cuong, 2024; Ngo et al., 2024b).
Including commercialization in the analysis helps explain why some community recommendations remain persuasive over time, while others lose influence as commercial content becomes more visible.

Commercialization in itself is not necessarily a problem. Transparent collaboration, clearly labeled group-buying activities, and information-based recommendations can still be accepted by members. The difficulty arises when commercial boundaries are unclear, since members can no longer easily distinguish genuine sharing from disguised promotion.

1.1.5 Why Intentions Are the Dependent Variables

This thesis treats purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention as the two dependent variables. Two considerations motivate this choice. First, consumer decisions about pet products are usually made gradually rather than at a single moment, so intentions serve as a meaningful indicator of likely behavior. Second, a questionnaire-based design is better suited to capturing such downstream intentions than to measuring actual purchase behavior. This thesis therefore examines how recommendation trust is built in pet WeChat groups and how it is translated into these two parallel behavioral intentions.

1.2 Research Gaps

1.2.1 Limited Attention to the Pet WeChat Group Context

In recent years, many studies have examined social commerce, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), online community experience, purchase intention, and recommendation diffusion. Most of this work focuses on how interaction patterns, social influence, information quality, user experience, and trust shape consumers' evaluations and behavioral judgments (Zhao et al., 2023; Herzallah et al., 2025; Ahmad et al., 2025).

Most of these studies, however, focus on open social media, brand communities, review platforms, and general social-commerce sites. Pet WeChat groups have received relatively little attention, even though they are more relationally embedded, more private, and more closely tied to members' everyday lives. This leaves the pet WeChat group context underexplored.

This gap matters because pet WeChat groups combine private interaction, repeated advice exchange, and product-related decision making, which may shape recommendation trust differently from open review platforms or brand communities.

For this reason, the present study does not simply transfer existing social-commerce theories to a new setting under their original labels. Instead, it uses pet WeChat groups as the empirical setting for examining how recommendation trust is formed in a relational and product-specific community context.

1.2.2 Limited Differentiation of Trust Layers

Trust is a key predictor of how, and to what extent, individuals engage with e-commerce services under uncertainty, whether trust in the platform, in buyers and sellers, in products and services, or in communities and reviews. Within this broader trust landscape, trust at the level of WeChat-group recommendations is likely to operate at a particularly fine-grained level.

A member may trust the overall atmosphere of a pet WeChat group and believe that others share information in good faith, yet remain skeptical about a particular recommendation. Conversely, repeated successful recommendations can boost confidence in specific suggestions even when general trust in the wider community remains weak.

Few previous studies, however, have examined general community trust and trust in specific product recommendations simultaneously; this matters theoretically because it is difficult to explain how trust moves from the community environment to specific product recommendations if the two trust objects are collapsed into one construct. This leaves the trust mechanism insufficiently differentiated at the model level.

Building such a layered model is therefore theoretically useful because it clarifies trust transfer from a broader community object to a more proximal recommendation object. General community trust functions as a more distal environmental factor, whereas trust in specific recommendations is more proximal to behavioral intentions. This layered distinction directly supports the model path from general community trust to trust in specific product recommendations.

1.2.3 Limited Attention to Commercialization as a Weakening Mechanism

Existing research on online communities and social commerce mainly examines how trust, purchase intention, and word-of-mouth behavior can be strengthened through participation, interaction, social support, identity, emotional engagement, and information quality (Al-Khasawneh et al., 2023; Connolly et al., 2023; Busalim et al., 2023). These studies have been valuable in uncovering the positive mechanisms at work in online communities.

Far less attention, however, has been paid to mechanisms that may weaken these effects, even though online communities often contain both mutual-help interaction and commercial promotion. As a result, how recommendation trust is weakened when pet WeChat groups become more commercialized remains insufficiently explored.

This study therefore does not import the existing social-commerce framework wholesale, but instead investigates commercialization as a weakening mechanism in the specific context of pet WeChat groups.

To address this gap, the study incorporates two commercialization-related variables into its framework: belief about the degree of community commercialization and perceived commercialization, thereby examining not only how recommendation trust forms but also when its behavioral influence becomes weaker. The former captures members' broad sense of how commercial the group has become, while the latter refers to direct experiences of opportunistic behavior, intrusion, or information overload; together, they are used to test whether commercialization weakens the trust-intention relationships.

1.3 Research Questions and Contributions

1.3.1 Research Questions

Against this theoretical background, few prior studies have addressed general community trust and trust in specific product recommendations together. The multi-level structure of trust in WeChat-group recommendation settings has therefore yet to be fully articulated.

In addition, this study introduces commercialization-related variables into the theoretical model in order to examine whether the positive effect of recommendation trust on behavior weakens when members perceive stronger opportunistic conduct, more intrusive advertising, or greater information overload.

This thesis therefore aims to reveal how community-level factors shape users' trust in recommendations within pet WeChat groups, and to clarify how this trust is translated into purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention under different levels of perceived commercialization.

Three broad questions guide the analysis: (1) How do community engagement and overall attitude toward the community influence general trust in the community? (2) How is general community trust transferred to trust in specific product recommendations, and from there to the two behavioral intentions? (3) How do commercialization-related variables moderate the trust-intention relationships?

1.3.2 Delimitations

This study is limited to Chinese members of pet WeChat groups, and the recommendation context is restricted to dog food and deworming products. The dependent variables are purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention; actual purchasing behavior is not measured.

1.3.3 Theoretical Contributions

First, this thesis extends social commerce and online community research by showing how recommendation trust operates in a relationship-oriented private-domain community, rather than only adding pet WeChat groups as a new empirical setting.

Second, this thesis contributes to trust-transfer literature by distinguishing between general trust in the community and trust in specific product recommendations, thereby clarifying how community-level trust becomes attached to product-related recommendations.

Third, this thesis contributes to social-commerce boundary-condition research by showing that perceived commercialization can weaken the translation of recommendation trust into purchase and positive word-of-mouth intentions (Herzallah et al., 2025; Ahmad et al., 2025; Fan et al., 2024).

Overall, these contributions deepen understanding of how recommendation trust is formed and translated into behavioral intentions in pet WeChat groups.

More specifically, the thesis links community-level factors to behavioral intentions through trust, and it explains when this trust-based mechanism is weakened by commercialization.

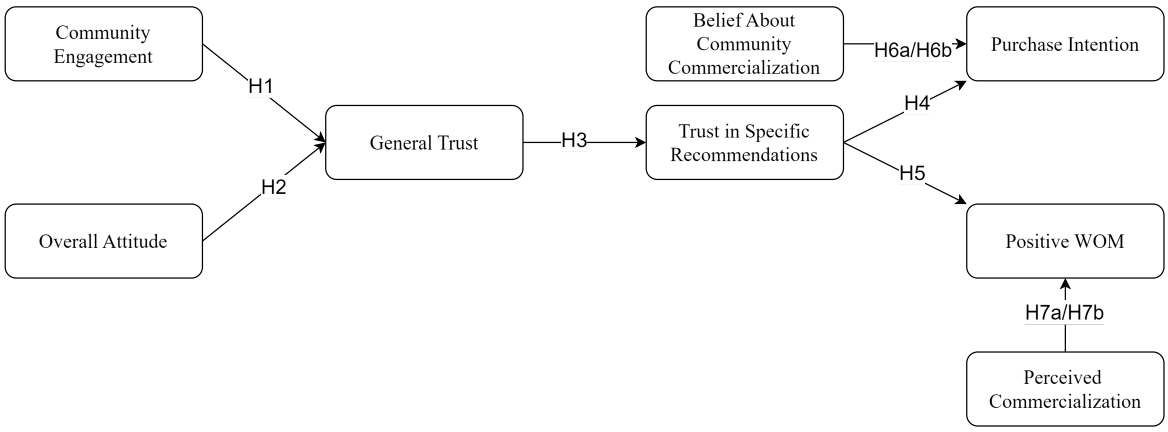
1.3.4 Practical Contributions

Specific practical implications are discussed later in the thesis. At this stage, it is sufficient to note that the findings may offer useful guidance for pet brands, group operators, and group-buying organizers active in WeChat-based recommendation environments. A detailed discussion is presented in Chapter 5.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesized Conceptual Model

This chapter reviews the key constructs in the conceptual model: community engagement, overall attitude toward the community, general trust in the community, trust in specific product recommendations, purchase intention, positive word-of-mouth intention, belief about the degree of community commercialization, and perceived commercialization. It explains how community-level factors shape trust, how trust is translated into two downstream intentions, and how commercialization-related perceptions may weaken these trust-intention relationships.

Figure 2.1: Overview of the Conceptual Model



2.1 Pet WeChat Groups as Recommendation-Oriented Online Communities

2.1.1 Basic Characteristics of Online Communities

Online communities are digital interaction spaces in which members communicate repeatedly around shared interests, problems, or goals. Through repeated interaction, members develop norms of information sharing, emotional support, and mutual assistance. In this sense, an online community is both an information environment and a social relationship system in which meanings, expectations, and roles are gradually formed (Connolly et al., 2023; Al-Khasawneh et al., 2023).

Online community relationships develop over time rather than through a single act of information transmission. Members do not only receive isolated messages; they repeatedly observe others, develop expectations about acceptable behavior, and judge who is knowledgeable, trustworthy, or influential within the group.

WeChat groups are a common form of online community in China. They are characterized by immediate communication, group-based interaction, semi-private boundaries, and relationship-oriented exchange. Compared with open platforms, such semi-private group settings tend to support more stable interaction patterns and more socially embedded recommendation processes (Sun & Sun, 2024).

For recommendation research, this means that the effectiveness of a recommendation depends not only on the content itself, but also on the social environment in which it appears. Recommendation effects are therefore both content-based and community-based phenomena.

2.1.2 The Dual Nature of Pet WeChat Groups: Mutual-Help Community and Consumption Recommendation Space

Pet WeChat groups have a dual nature. They function as mutual-help communities in which members share pet-care knowledge, ask and answer questions, solve practical problems, and provide emotional support. Such interaction allows members to accumulate experience-based information that may be more specific and useful than formal product descriptions.

Pet WeChat groups also operate as consumption-oriented recommendation spaces. Members discuss product quality, compare brands, share purchase channels, comment on stores and promotions, and circulate group-buying opportunities. Pet products are therefore part of the everyday interaction context of these communities.

Recommendations in pet WeChat groups are therefore not isolated pieces of information. They are embedded in the community and contain both content cues and relational cues. Members evaluate not only whether the recommendation is appropriate, but also who provides it and whether it fits the group's shared experience and norms.

This relational and recommendation-oriented setting makes community engagement especially relevant, because active participation creates repeated exposure, familiarity, and social embeddedness, which can reduce uncertainty and support general community trust. Community engagement refers to the extent to which members actively participate in community activities by seeking information, expressing opinions, contributing content, and maintaining social ties. The concept has been widely discussed in online community research (Vivek et al., 2012; Connolly et al., 2023).

2.2 Community Engagement and Overall Attitude Toward the Community

Previous research on online communities and social commerce treats engagement as persistent participation, relationship building among users, and members' attachment to group activities. This provides a basis for examining engagement in pet WeChat groups (Vivek et al., 2012; Al-Khasawneh et al., 2023).

2.2.1 Community Engagement

In pet WeChat groups, more frequent interaction may help members become familiar with one another, observe others’ sincerity over time, and strengthen trust in the community environment. Community engagement is therefore treated as an important antecedent of general community trust in the conceptual model.

This understanding is consistent with online community research that treats engagement as a multidimensional construct involving participation in collective activities, relationship formation, and attachment to shared community goals.

Overall attitude toward the community refers to a member's general evaluation of the community as favorable or unfavorable. It reflects an evaluative response to the community and is conceptually distinct from trust (Bhattacherjee, 2001).

In online communities, a positive overall attitude suggests that members view the group as valuable, useful, or enjoyable. Such evaluations may make members more receptive to trust formation within the same community setting (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Connolly et al., 2023).

2.2.2 Overall Attitude Toward the Community

In pet WeChat groups, this general evaluation matters because members interpret recommendations in relation to the broader group atmosphere rather than as isolated messages. Overall attitude is therefore an important community-level variable in this thesis.

In consumer and community research, attitude captures a general evaluation of an object, group, or environment. When members hold a favorable attitude toward a pet WeChat group, they are more likely to view interactions in the group as useful, supportive, and worth continuing.

Overall attitude is distinct from trust, but it can provide an evaluative basis for trust formation because members who evaluate the group positively are more likely to interpret later information exchange as useful and reliable. Members who view the community positively may be more willing to treat information shared by other members as credible, which links this construct to general community trust in the model.

General trust in the community refers to members' belief that the community environment and other members are sincere, reliable, and helpful. Prior research has treated trust as a key mechanism for reducing uncertainty in digital and social-commerce environments (Mayer et al., 1995; Wang et al., 2022; Senali et al., 2024).

2.3 General Community Trust and Trust in Specific Product Recommendations

In digital communities and social commerce, trust helps members manage information risk and increases their readiness to rely on the community as a credible reference point (Wang et al., 2022; Connolly et al., 2023; Senali et al., 2024).

2.3.1 General Trust in the Community

In pet WeChat groups, general community trust is usually accumulated through repeated interaction and therefore provides a broader social basis for trusting product-related recommendations. Recommendations are often embedded in daily conversations and are evaluated in light of members' prior experiences with the group.

Trust in digital communities reduces uncertainty by lowering perceived information risk. When members perceive the community as trustworthy, they are more willing to share their own situations, continue participating, and use the group as a reliable reference point for later decisions (Wang et al., 2022; Connolly et al., 2023; Senali et al., 2024).

Trust in specific product recommendations refers to the extent to which members believe that recommendations about particular pet products, brands, stores, or purchase channels are reliable, practical, and relevant to their later decisions. It is more proximal to downstream behavioral intentions than general community trust (Senali et al., 2024; Mensah et al., 2023).

This construct therefore focuses on whether members trust a specific product-related evaluation or suggestion, such as a recommendation about a pet brand, product, store, or purchasing channel.

2.3.2 Trust in Specific Product Recommendations

General community trust and trust in specific product recommendations refer to different trust objects. This thesis treats the former as broader context-level trust and the latter as recommendation-level trust that is closer to purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention.

This distinction is consistent with recent social-commerce research, which suggests that different trust objects should not be collapsed into a single one-dimensional trust concept (Senali et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025).

At the recommendation level, the key issue is whether members believe that information about pet brands, products, stores, or purchasing methods is truthful and useful. This is different from whether members simply like the general group atmosphere.

General trust in the community and trust in specific product recommendations are related but distinct because they refer to different trust objects: the former concerns the community environment, whereas the latter concerns specific product-related advice. General trust arises from the broader community environment, whereas recommendation trust is attached to specific product-related information. In this thesis, general community trust is expected to support recommendation trust, while recommendation trust is expected to be more directly related to purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention.

Behavioral intention refers to an individual's conscious expectation or plan to perform a behavior in the future. It is widely used when actual behavior is difficult to observe directly in a survey setting (Ajzen, 1991; Warshaw & Davis, 1985).

2.4 Purchase Intention and Positive Word-of-Mouth Intention

Purchase intention refers to a member's intention to buy a recommended pet product or brand after being exposed to product recommendations in pet WeChat groups.

2.4.1 Purchase Intention

Because many pet products require comparison, consultation, and delayed decision-making, intention is a suitable measure for capturing members' likely purchase responses after receiving recommendations.

Purchase intention is therefore one of the two dependent variables used to capture the behavioral effects of trust in specific product recommendations.

In the community recommendation setting, purchase intention indicates whether trusted recommendation content has moved members toward a planned purchase. If members only read recommendations without forming such an intention, the recommendation remains informational and does not translate into a behavioral outcome.

Positive word-of-mouth intention refers to a member's intention to share favorable evaluations or recommendations about pet products with others in the future.

In this thesis, positive word-of-mouth intention captures whether members plan to pass on favorable product information after developing trust in specific recommendations.

2.4.2 Positive Word-of-Mouth Intention

Positive word-of-mouth intention is included because members of pet WeChat groups can act both as receivers of recommendations and as potential recommenders to others.

This thesis therefore treats purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention as two separate downstream intentions, so the model explains two parallel behavioral responses to recommendation trust rather than a sequential chain from word-of-mouth to purchase. Purchase intention represents a self-directed buying intention, whereas positive word-of-mouth intention represents a socially directed recommending intention.

This distinction is important because positive word-of-mouth intention reflects the re-diffusion of recommendation information. When members intend to recommend a product favorably, the original recommendation extends beyond individual acceptance and becomes part of a wider community-based diffusion process.

This thesis does not model positive word-of-mouth intention as an antecedent of purchase intention. Instead, both are treated as parallel downstream intentions rather than a sequential chain, because trusted recommendations in pet WeChat groups may lead members both to intend to buy and to intend to recommend.

Belief about the degree of community commercialization refers to members' general perception that commercial content in the group has become frequent, visible, or significant (Fan et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023).

2.5 Belief About the Degree of Community Commercialization and Perceived Commercialization

Members may interpret recommendation content differently when they believe that the community has become more commercialized, even if they have not directly experienced intrusive commercial behavior.

2.5.1 Belief About the Degree of Community Commercialization

In this thesis, this belief captures a broad judgment about the commercial level of the group rather than a direct negative experience of commercialization.

This construct is therefore different from immediate irritation, complaint, or perceived intrusion. It reflects members' general belief about how commercialized the group has become, which may influence how they interpret later recommendations.

Perceived commercialization refers to members' more specific and experiential perception of commercialization, including opportunistic behavior, interruptions, advertising pressure, and information overload (Fan et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023; Handoyo, 2024).

Compared with belief about the degree of community commercialization, perceived commercialization is more concrete because it is rooted in members' direct and experiential perception of commercialized elements in the group, such as advertising intrusion, hidden interests, or information overload.

2.5.2 Perceived Commercialization

This thesis treats perceived commercialization as a direct and experiential boundary condition that may reduce the extent to which recommendation trust is translated into behavioral intention.

When members perceive recommendations as merchant-oriented rather than mutual-help-oriented, the persuasiveness of experience-based and trust-based recommendations may decrease (Fan et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023; Handoyo, 2024).

Perceived commercialization may also appear through intrusive advertisements and information overload. Even when individual recommendations are not false, the overall commercial experience may weaken their persuasive effect.

The preceding sections therefore define the key constructs and show why they belong in a single conceptual model. The following section develops the hypotheses linking community-level factors, trust, behavioral intentions, and commercialization-related moderators.

2.6 Hypothesis Development and Conceptual Model

The conceptual model proposes that community-level factors shape general community trust, general community trust supports trust in specific product recommendations, and recommendation trust then influences purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention as two parallel outcomes.

2.6.1 Community Engagement, Overall Attitude, and General Trust

Community engagement and overall attitude toward the community are two community-level factors that are particularly relevant in pet WeChat groups because repeated interaction and favorable evaluation can make members more willing to regard the group as reliable and supportive.

Hypothesis 1: *Community engagement positively affects general trust in the community.*

Hypothesis 2: *Overall attitude toward the community positively affects general trust in the community.*

Members with a positive overall attitude toward the group are more likely to view the community as valuable and worth continuing to participate in. This favorable evaluation can strengthen their expectation that the community environment is reliable and supportive.

General trust in the community is expected to affect trust in specific product recommendations through a trust-transfer mechanism, because trust in a broader social environment can be transferred to more specific objects embedded in that environment (Stewart, 2003; Senali et al., 2024).

In pet WeChat groups, recommendation-level trust is unlikely to form independently from the surrounding social trust environment.

2.6.2 General Trust and Trust in Specific Product Recommendations

This study therefore treats the relationship between general community trust and trust in specific product recommendations as a separate path in the model.

Hypothesis 3: *General trust in the community positively affects trust in specific product recommendations.*

Members typically evaluate recommendations through their broader view of the group, including perceived sincerity among members, trust in the environment, and the mutual-help nature of communication.

When members trust specific product recommendations, they are more likely to form purchase intention because the recommendation reduces uncertainty and supports decision-making (Wang et al., 2022; Mohamed et al., 2024).

Trust in specific product recommendations is also expected to increase positive word-of-mouth intention, because members who trust the recommendation may be more willing to share favorable product information with others (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Álvarez Santamaría et al., 2024).

2.6.3 Recommendation Trust and Purchase/Positive WOM Intention

Trusted recommendations in pet WeChat groups are relevant to two parallel intention outcomes because they may reduce product uncertainty for the receiver while also encouraging the receiver to re-diffuse favorable product information to others.

Hypothesis 4: *Trust in specific product recommendations positively affects purchase intention*.

Hypothesis 5: *Trust in specific product recommendations positively affects positive word-of-mouth intention*.

Members are more likely to act on and share recommendations when they believe that the information provided by other members is useful, experience-based, and relevant to their own decision-making (Álvarez Santamaría et al., 2024; Mohamed et al., 2024).

Commercialization-related variables are included as moderators to examine whether the relationship between recommendation trust and downstream intentions weakens when members perceive a stronger commercial atmosphere or directly experience commercialization (Fan et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023).

Belief about the degree of community commercialization captures a broad judgment about the group's commercial level, whereas perceived commercialization captures members' direct experience of commercialized elements. These two variables may therefore affect the trust-intention relationship differently.

2.6.4 The Moderating Role of Commercialization Variables

Members in pet WeChat groups may be less likely to translate recommendation trust into purchase intention or positive word-of-mouth intention when commercialization raises concerns about motives, relevance, or information overload, because trust-based persuasion becomes weaker when recommendations are interpreted as merchant-oriented rather than mutual-help-oriented.

This thesis therefore examines whether commercialization weakens the effect of trust in specific product recommendations on the two downstream intentions.

Hypothesis 6a: *Belief about the degree of community commercialization negatively moderates the relationship between trust in specific product recommendations and purchase intention.*

Hypothesis 6b: *Perceived commercialization negatively moderates the relationship between trust in specific product recommendations and purchase intention.*

Hypothesis 7a: *Belief about the degree of community commercialization negatively moderates the relationship between trust in specific product recommendations and positive word-of-mouth intention.*

Hypothesis 7b: *Perceived commercialization negatively moderates the relationship between trust in specific product recommendations and positive word-of-mouth intention.*

H7a and H7b focus on whether commercialization-related perceptions weaken the effect of recommendation trust on positive word-of-mouth intention.

The conceptual model therefore includes community engagement and overall attitude as community-level antecedents, general community trust and trust in specific product

recommendations as two linked trust layers, purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention as two downstream intentions, and the two commercialization variables as moderators.

Accordingly, the final model tests four moderation hypotheses: H6a and H6b concern purchase intention, while H7a and H7b concern positive word-of-mouth intention. All four hypotheses examine whether commercialization-related perceptions weaken the relationship between trust in specific product recommendations and the two downstream intentions.

2.6.5 Summary of the Conceptual Model

Taken together, the conceptual model links community engagement and overall attitude toward the community to general community trust, then links general community trust to trust in specific product recommendations, and finally links recommendation trust to purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention.

The model also proposes that commercialization-related perceptions may weaken the conversion of recommendation trust into behavioral intentions, even when trust itself remains present.

This model therefore addresses not only whether pet WeChat groups support recommendation trust, but also how trust is formed, how it leads to two parallel intentions, and under what commercialization conditions its effect may weaken; these paths correspond to the hypotheses tested later in Chapter 4.

3. Research Design

3.1 Questionnaire Design and Distribution

3.1.1 Research Method and Questionnaire Approach

This thesis uses a questionnaire survey to examine pet WeChat group members' perceptions of community interaction, group atmosphere, recommendation trust, commercialization, purchase intention, and positive word-of-mouth intention. The questionnaire covers eight core constructs: community engagement, overall attitude toward the community, general trust in the community, trust in specific product recommendations, purchase intention, positive word-of-mouth intention, belief about the degree of community commercialization, and perceived commercialization. Because these constructs reflect perceptions and intentions, a structured self-administered questionnaire is suitable for collecting comparable responses across respondents (Dillman et al., 2014); however, this design cannot directly observe actual purchase behavior.

Compared with interviews, questionnaires can reach a larger number of pet WeChat group members and provide quantifiable data for reliability, validity, and structural analysis. Compared with a scenario-based experiment, this thesis does not measure immediate reactions to artificial stimuli; it examines trust judgments and behavioral intentions formed through accumulated experience in real pet WeChat groups. The survey therefore captures relatively stable perceptions in a natural community setting, while its limitation is that cross-sectional self-report data may involve common method concerns and cannot establish strong causal claims (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

The questionnaire was designed as one formal survey distributed across several pet WeChat groups. The items focus on dog food and deworming products, which are common pet product categories discussed in these groups. This product-specific wording helps respondents answer based on their own experience rather than a vague idea of pet products.

This thesis examines how recommendation trust is translated into purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention in pet WeChat groups. Both intentions are treated as behavioral precursors that indicate whether trusted recommendations move members toward buying or recommending. A questionnaire design is therefore appropriate for measuring latent perceptions and testing the empirical model.

3.1.2 Measurement of Variables

The questionnaire contains eight core constructs: community engagement, overall attitude toward the community, general trust in the community, trust in specific product recommendations, purchase intention, positive word-of-mouth intention, belief about the degree of community commercialization, and perceived commercialization. The background variables include gender, age, education, monthly disposable income, main type of pet, length of time in the WeChat group, activity level in the group, products purchased based on group recommendations in the past three months, and total products purchased in the same period. The construct names, item numbers,

response scales, product wording, and three-month purchase period are kept consistent with Appendix A.

Most core constructs were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Overall attitude toward the community was measured with a seven-point semantic differential scale, with higher scores indicating a more favorable attitude. All construct scores were calculated so that higher values indicate stronger agreement or a more positive evaluation.

To keep the construct focused, WOM is defined as positive word-of-mouth intention in this thesis and does not include negative or mixed WOM. The scale measures respondents' intention to share favorable experiences, advice, or recommendations about relevant pet brands, rather than complaints or criticism. Table 3.1 gives a general summary of the constructs, with all measurement items listed in Appendix A.

Table 3.1: Variable Measurement Table

Construct	Code	Number of items	Scale type	Sample item
Community Engagement	CE1–CE6	6	7-point Likert	I often actively seek information related to purchasing dog food or deworming products in this pet WeChat group.
Overall Attitude Toward the Community	CA1–CA3	3	7-point semantic differential	Overall, my evaluation of this pet WeChat group is: Bad (1) – Good (7).
General Trust in the Community	GT1–GT4	4	7-point Likert	I believe that this pet WeChat group is trustworthy overall.
Trust in Specific Product Recommendations	PT1–PT5	5	7-point Likert	I think recommendations about pet products in this group are usually reliable.
Purchase Intention	PI1–PI3	3	7-point Likert	If a particular pet product brand has been recommended in the group, I intend to purchase that brand's products in the future.
Positive Word-of-Mouth Intention	WI1–WI3	3	7-point Likert	If someone in the group asks for information about pet brands, I intend to offer recommendations.
Belief About the Degree of Community Commercialization	CB1–CB3	3	7-point Likert	I think the proportion of commercial content in this group is already relatively high.
Perceived Commercialization	PC1–PC8	8	7-point Likert	I feel that some recommendations in this group are more for serving certain merchants’ interests.

As shown in Table 3.1, CE1-CE6 measure community engagement, CA1-CA3 measure overall attitude toward the community, GT1-GT4 measure general community trust, PT1-PT5 measure trust in specific product recommendations, PI1-PI3 measure purchase intention, WI1-WI3 measure positive word-of-mouth intention, CB1-CB3 measure belief about the degree of

community commercialization, and PC1-PC8 measure perceived commercialization. This measurement structure is aligned with the theoretical model developed in Chapter 2.

3.1.3 Questionnaire Distribution and Sample Collection

The target respondents were members of several pet-related WeChat groups where dog food and deworming products were discussed or recommended. This sampling approach focused on users with relevant group experience rather than all social media users. Such experience was necessary because the study measures community participation, general trust, trust in specific recommendations, and commercialization-related perceptions.

The questionnaire was distributed through several pet WeChat groups focused on pet-care experience sharing, product discussion, and group-buying information.

In terms of research ethics, participants were informed that participation was voluntary, responses were anonymous, and the data would be used only for academic research. This explanation was intended to reduce evaluation pressure and social desirability bias. Specific group names are not reported because this protects participant privacy and the confidentiality of the WeChat groups, and the survey results are presented only in aggregated statistical form. No personally identifiable information was reported in the thesis, and the dataset was handled only for the purpose of academic research.

Unlike a scenario-based experiment, this thesis collected survey data from several existing pet-related WeChat groups. Because the study focuses on members' accumulated perceptions and intentions, it emphasizes real community experience rather than experimentally induced reactions.

A total of 384 valid responses were included in the cleaned dataset used for statistical analysis. The following sections describe respondents' demographic characteristics and usage patterns to assess the suitability of the sample.

3.1.4 Data Coding and Preprocessing

Before analysis, the questionnaire data were coded and preprocessed in SPSS and AMOS to ensure consistent scoring, clear variable definitions, and comparable measurement items.

The directions of all core scales were kept consistent. Likert-type items were coded from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement. Semantic differential items were also coded from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating a more favorable attitude toward the community. This coding rule ensured comparability before reliability and validity testing.

Categorical background variables were converted into numerical codes according to their response options. Monthly disposable income and the two purchase-frequency items were treated as numerical variables. Responses that could not be clearly identified were treated as system missing values.

After cleaning, the codebook and SPSS-ready dataset were used for descriptive statistics, reliability and validity assessment, common method bias testing, and construct-level path

analysis. These materials ensured that the analytical process was based on a clear and traceable dataset. Table 3.2 presents the primary coding and preprocessing rules.

Table 3.2: Summary of Code and Preprocessing Rules

Variable type	Question range	Coding rule	Processing note
Likert statement items	Q1–Q6, Q10–Q35	1–7	1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree; higher scores indicate stronger agreement
Semantic differential items	Q7–Q9	1–7	1 = closer to left anchor; 7 = closer to right anchor; coded so that higher scores indicate a more positive community attitude
Categorical demographic items	Q36–Q38, Q40–Q42	Pre-set category codes	Encoded according to questionnaire options
Open-ended numeric items	Q39, Q43, Q44	Actual numeric values	Converted into numbers before analysis; unidentifiable answers treated as system missing

These coding and cleaning procedures ensured consistency in item order, variable naming, score direction, and missing-value handling. They also made the subsequent empirical analysis more traceable and reproducible.

3.2 General Data and Software Description

3.2.1 Sample Profile

This section presents the basic characteristics of the participants. After data screening, 384 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. The cleaned dataset contained 384 cases and 45 variables, including one case number, 35 core scale items, and nine background variables. No additional cases were excluded after cleaning.

In terms of gender, most respondents were female. In terms of age, most participants were between 25 and 40, with the 31-40 group forming the largest share. For education, bachelor's degree holders accounted for the largest proportion, followed by master's degree and junior college respondents.

For pet-related background, Table 3.3 shows that dog owners formed the largest group, followed by cat owners and respondents who owned both dogs and cats. Regarding group tenure, the largest share of respondents had stayed in their pet WeChat group for more than two years, while the remaining respondents were distributed across shorter membership periods. For activity level, the largest group reported sometimes participating in discussions, followed by those who occasionally spoke.

The continuous background variables further show variation in respondents' economic conditions and purchase experience. Monthly disposable income varied substantially, while the numbers of products purchased based on group recommendations and total products purchased in the past

three months remained relatively low. These variables provide additional context for interpreting respondents' purchase-related experience.

Table 3.3: Profiles of the Participants

Category	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	113	29.4%
	Female	259	67.4%
	Prefer not to say	12	3.1%
Age	18–24	50	13.0%
	25–30	118	30.7%
	31–40	125	32.6%
	41–50	69	18.0%
	51 and above	22	5.7%
Education	High school or below	29	7.6%
	Junior college	70	18.2%
	Bachelor's degree	180	46.9%
	Master's degree	91	23.7%
	Doctoral degree or above	14	3.6%
Main type of pet	Dog	181	47.1%
	Cat	103	26.8%
	Both dog and cat	77	20.1%
	Other	23	6.0%
Length of time in the group	Less than 3 months	32	8.3%
	3–6 months	85	22.1%
	6 months to 1 year	80	20.8%
	1–2 years	77	20.1%
	More than 2 years	110	28.6%
Activity level in the group	Almost never speak	62	16.1%
	Occasionally speak	103	26.8%
	Sometimes participate in discussions	107	27.9%
	Often participate in discussions	66	17.2%
	Very active	46	12.0%

Table 3.4: Descriptive Statistics of Continuous Background Variables

Variable	Valid N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Monthly disposable income (RMB)	384	10213.12	3723.77	1800.00	21190.00
Products purchased based on group recommendations in past 3 months	384	0.14	0.40	0.00	3.00
Total products purchased in past 3 months	384	1.21	1.12	0.00	6.00

3.2.2 Data Cleaning and Valid Sample

The raw data were reviewed and cleaned according to the coding rules described in this chapter before formal statistical analysis. Questionnaire items were renamed using the Q + variable code format, and item directions were aligned so that higher scores generally indicated stronger agreement or a more positive evaluation. This ensured comparability across indicators before construct scores and latent variables were estimated.

Special attention was given to the open-ended numerical items. D4 measured monthly disposable income, whereas D8 and D9 measured the number of relevant products purchased in the past three months. These responses were converted into numerical form before being entered into SPSS, and responses that could not be clearly interpreted were recorded as system missing values rather than guessed. This approach avoided arbitrary coding decisions.

After cleaning, all 384 cases were retained in the final valid dataset. The three open-ended numerical variables were cleaned and normalized so that valid entries could be used for descriptive analysis. Monthly disposable income, products purchased based on group recommendations, and total products purchased could therefore be treated as numerical variables. The full sample was then used for the main scale-based analysis.

The final dataset can be regarded as clean and ready for analysis. The codebook and SPSS-ready file are clear and traceable, and they support the descriptive, measurement, and structural analyses reported in this thesis.

3.2.3 Software and Analytical Procedure

SPSS was used for data cleaning, coding checks, descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, common method bias checks, construct-level path testing, and moderation analysis, with the common method bias procedures guided by prior methodological discussions of self-report survey data (Podsakoff et al., 2003). It was also used to compute construct-level composite scores for the subsequent regression-based analyses.

AMOS was used to support measurement-model checks, while the main relationships were examined through construct-level path testing in SPSS rather than a full covariance-based SEM. The construct-level path model tested CE -> GT, CA -> GT, GT -> PT, PT -> PI, and PT -> WI, together with the interaction terms PT x CB and PT x PC for the two trust-intention relationships. Direct paths from CB and PC to PI and WI were also included when examining moderation, so that the moderator role could be interpreted consistently.

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, demographic characteristics and key construct scores were described. Second, reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed. Third, common method bias was examined. Fourth, the construct-level paths and interaction effects in the trust-intention relationships were tested.

Together, these steps connect the questionnaire design with the empirical analysis and show how the cleaned data were used to test the proposed construct-level model.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

4.1.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

This section briefly reports respondents' demographic and usage characteristics to contextualize the empirical results. Because the detailed sample profile was already introduced in Chapter 3, the discussion here focuses only on features relevant to interpreting the model results.

As shown in Table 4.1, most respondents were female. Most participants were between 25 and 40 years old, and bachelor's degree holders formed the largest education group. Together, these characteristics show that the sample contains adult pet owners with relevant pet consumption and WeChat group experience, which supports the suitability of the sample for testing the proposed model.

Table 4.1: Demographics of the Respondents

Category	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	113	29.4%
	Female	259	67.4%
	Prefer not to say	12	3.1%
Age	18–24	50	13.0%
	25–30	118	30.7%
	31–40	125	32.6%
	41–50	69	18.0%
	51 and above	22	5.7%
Education	High school or below	29	7.6%
	Junior college	70	18.2%
	Bachelor's degree	180	46.9%
	Master's degree	91	23.7%
	Doctoral degree or above	14	3.6%
Main type of pet	Dog	181	47.1%
	Cat	103	26.8%
	Both dog and cat	77	20.1%
	Other	23	6.0%
Length of time in the group	Less than 3 months	32	8.3%
	3–6 months	85	22.1%
	6 months to 1 year	80	20.8%
	1–2 years	77	20.1%
	More than 2 years	110	28.6%
Activity level in the group	Almost never speak	62	16.1%
	Occasionally speak	103	26.8%
	Sometimes participate in discussions	107	27.9%
	Often participate in discussions	66	17.2%
	Very active	46	12.0%

Regarding pet-related characteristics, dog owners formed the largest group, followed by cat owners and respondents who owned both dogs and cats. Respondents also varied in group tenure and activity level, which provides background context for interpreting community engagement and trust formation without repeating the full sample profile.

Table 4.2 reports three continuous background variables: monthly disposable income, products purchased based on group recommendations in the past three months, and total products purchased in the same period. These variables indicate different levels of purchasing experience, which is relevant for interpreting purchase intention in the model.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Background Covariates

Variable	Valid N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Monthly disposable income (RMB)	384	10213.12	3723.77	1800.00	21190.00
Products purchased based on group recommendations in past 3 months	384	0.14	0.40	0.00	3.00
Total products purchased in past 3 months	384	1.21	1.12	0.00	6.00

4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs

Composite scores were calculated by averaging the items belonging to each construct. This produced construct-level scores for community engagement, overall attitude toward the community, general community trust, trust in specific product recommendations, purchase intention, positive word-of-mouth intention, belief about the degree of community commercialization, and perceived commercialization.

As shown in Table 4.3, the mean values of most constructs were above the midpoint of the seven-point scale. This suggests that respondents generally reported moderate levels of community engagement, trust, purchase intention, and positive word-of-mouth intention.

Table 4.3: Summary Statistics of Key Constructs

Construct	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
CE	1.00	6.83	4.035	1.256	-0.094	-0.618
CA	1.00	7.00	3.980	1.379	-0.051	-0.581
GT	1.00	7.00	4.210	1.332	-0.042	-0.591
PT	1.00	7.00	4.018	1.299	0.009	-0.680
PI	1.00	7.00	4.078	1.315	0.167	-0.430
WI	1.33	7.00	4.509	1.285	-0.101	-0.670
CB	1.00	7.00	3.823	1.331	0.070	-0.642
PC	1.25	6.88	4.222	1.191	-0.129	-0.612

The mean values of the commercialization-related constructs were also above the lower end of the scale, indicating that respondents perceived some degree of commercialization in pet WeChat

groups. However, the values do not suggest that these groups were perceived as fully commercialized spaces.

The skewness and kurtosis values were within an acceptable range for further multivariate analysis. The constructs therefore provided a suitable basis for the subsequent reliability, validity, and structural analyses.

4.2 Evaluation of the Measurement Model

4.2.1 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used to assess the internal consistency of each construct. A value above 0.70 is commonly regarded as acceptable for reliability assessment, especially in applied survey research.

Table 4.4 reports the reliability indices for the eight constructs. All Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.80, and all composite reliability values were above 0.90, indicating strong internal consistency across the measurement scales.

These results support the internal consistency of the scales, so the construct scores can be used for subsequent validity checks and construct-level path testing.

Table 4.4: Reliability Summary

Construct	Items	Cronbach’s alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
CE	6	0.911	0.931	0.693
CA	3	0.877	0.925	0.804
GT	4	0.871	0.912	0.721
PT	5	0.900	0.926	0.715
PI	3	0.855	0.912	0.775
WI	3	0.839	0.903	0.756
CB	3	0.861	0.915	0.782
PC	8	0.909	0.926	0.611

4.2.2 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity refers to whether items designed to measure the same construct are sufficiently correlated. In this thesis, convergent validity was assessed using item loadings and AVE, with loadings above 0.70 and AVE values above 0.50 regarded as acceptable.

As shown in Table 4.5, most item loadings were above 0.70 and were strongly associated with their intended constructs. This indicates that the items measured their corresponding constructs consistently.

The AVE values in Table 4.4 were all above 0.50, further supporting convergent validity. These results support convergent validity and indicate that the item-level measures are suitable for constructing composite scores used in the path tests.

Table 4.5: Item Loadings for Constructs

Construct	Question No.	Code	Loading
CE	Q1	CE1	0.865
CE	Q2	CE2	0.845
CE	Q3	CE3	0.826
CE	Q4	CE4	0.855
CE	Q5	CE5	0.813
CE	Q6	CE6	0.788
CA	Q7	CA1	0.898
CA	Q8	CA2	0.900
CA	Q9	CA3	0.891
GT	Q10	GT1	0.877
GT	Q11	GT2	0.867
GT	Q12	GT3	0.848
GT	Q13	GT4	0.803
PT	Q14	PT1	0.883
PT	Q15	PT2	0.853
PT	Q16	PT3	0.830
PT	Q17	PT4	0.838
PT	Q18	PT5	0.825
PI	Q19	PI1	0.902
PI	Q20	PI2	0.889
PI	Q21	PI3	0.849
WI	Q22	WI1	0.877
WI	Q23	WI2	0.898
WI	Q24	WI3	0.833
CB	Q25	CB1	0.891
CB	Q26	CB2	0.879
CB	Q27	CB3	0.883
PC	Q28	PC1	0.821
PC	Q29	PC2	0.813
PC	Q30	PC3	0.792
PC	Q31	PC4	0.811
PC	Q32	PC5	0.773
PC	Q33	PC6	0.763
PC	Q34	PC7	0.752
PC	Q35	PC8	0.724

4.2.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). Under the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of each construct's AVE should exceed its correlations with other constructs. For HTMT, values below 0.85 or 0.90 are commonly used as evidence of acceptable discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

As shown in Table 4.6, most diagonal values were larger than the corresponding inter-construct correlations. Table 4.7 also shows that all HTMT values were within the acceptable range. These findings support the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Although some trust- and behavior-related constructs were theoretically related, the discriminant validity results indicate that they remained empirically distinguishable. This is important because the thesis relies on separating community-level trust from recommendation-level trust when testing the layered trust mechanism.

Table 4.6: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	CE	CA	GT	PT	PI	WI	CB	PC
CE	0.832	0.290	0.589	0.459	0.232	0.209	0.104	0.044
CA	0.290	0.897	0.621	0.536	0.346	0.258	0.026	0.014
GT	0.589	0.621	0.849	0.707	0.376	0.346	0.092	0.037
PT	0.459	0.536	0.707	0.846	0.469	0.373	0.030	0.028
PI	0.232	0.346	0.376	0.469	0.880	0.261	0.047	0.016
WI	0.209	0.258	0.346	0.373	0.261	0.870	0.020	0.017
CB	0.104	0.026	0.092	0.030	0.047	0.020	0.885	0.236
PC	0.044	0.014	0.037	0.028	0.016	0.017	0.236	0.782

Table 4.7: HTMT Matrix

	CE	CA	GT	PT	PI	WI	CB	PC
CE	—	0.324	0.659	0.506	0.264	0.237	0.118	0.073
CA	0.324	—	0.709	0.602	0.400	0.299	0.045	0.041
GT	0.659	0.709	—	0.795	0.433	0.401	0.107	0.065
PT	0.506	0.602	0.795	—	0.534	0.428	0.041	0.056
PI	0.264	0.400	0.433	0.534	—	0.308	0.054	0.055
WI	0.237	0.299	0.401	0.428	0.308	—	0.031	0.047
CB	0.118	0.045	0.107	0.041	0.054	0.031	—	0.266
PC	0.073	0.041	0.065	0.056	0.055	0.047	0.266	—

4.3 Common Method Bias (CMB) Test

4.3.1 Procedural Remedies

Because all variables were measured through self-reported questionnaire responses, common method bias could affect the results. Procedural remedies were used during questionnaire design and data collection. Respondents were informed that the survey was anonymous, used only for academic research, and had no right or wrong answers. The questionnaire was also organized into thematic sections to reduce response confusion.

4.3.2 Harman’s Single-Factor Test

Harman's single-factor test was conducted by entering all 35 measurement items into an unrotated principal component analysis. The first factor explained 27.30% of the total variance, which is

below the commonly used 50% threshold. This result indicates that common method bias is unlikely to be dominated by one general factor.

4.3.3 Additional Statistical Check

As an additional check, the inter-construct correlation matrix was examined. The highest correlation among the main constructs was 0.707, which does not indicate severe common method bias. Taken together, the procedural and statistical checks suggest that common method bias is unlikely to seriously affect the analysis.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing and Structural Model Evaluation

The construct-level analysis tested the main paths CE -> GT, CA -> GT, GT -> PT, PT -> PI, and PT -> WI. H1 and H2 address RQ1, H3 to H5 address RQ2, and H6a to H7b address RQ3. The moderation models added the interaction terms PT x CB and PT x PC for the two trust-intention relationships, while also retaining the direct paths from CB and PC to PI and WI.

4.4.1 Structural Path Testing

After evaluating the measurement model, the hypothesized paths were tested using construct-level composite scores. Table 4.8 reports the standardized path coefficients for the five main effects.

The results show that general trust in the community positively affects trust in specific product recommendations. This supports the layered trust logic of the thesis: members who trust the community environment are more likely to trust product recommendations shared within that environment. Trust in specific product recommendations also positively affects both purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention.

Overall, the results support the main theoretical chain. Community engagement and overall attitude help establish general community trust, general community trust transfers to recommendation-level trust, and recommendation-specific trust encourages both purchasing readiness and positive recommendation intention.

Table 4.8: Results of Main Path Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	CE → GT	0.447	12.696	0.000	Supported
H2	CA → GT	0.492	13.975	0.000	Supported
H3	GT → PT	0.707	19.529	0.000	Supported
H4	PT → PI	0.467	10.455	0.000	Supported
H5	PT → WI	0.369	7.837	0.000	Supported

4.4.2 Moderating Effect Testing

The moderating roles of belief about the degree of community commercialization and perceived commercialization were then tested. Following the model specification, interaction terms were

added between trust in specific product recommendations and each commercialization variable. Direct paths from CB and PC to PI and WI were also retained to clarify the moderator role.

The purpose of this analysis was to test whether commercialization-related perceptions weaken the translation of trust in specific product recommendations into purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention.

The results show different patterns for the two moderators. Belief about the degree of community commercialization did not significantly moderate either trust-intention relationship, whereas perceived commercialization had a significant negative moderating effect on both purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention. This suggests that direct experiences of commercialization are more consequential than abstract recognition of commercialization intensity. The direct paths from CB and PC to PI and WI were also non-significant: CB -> PI beta = 0.028, $p > 0.05$; PC -> PI beta = -0.013, $p > 0.05$; CB -> WI beta = 0.003, $p > 0.05$; PC -> WI beta = -0.005, $p > 0.05$. Because PC showed significant interaction effects without significant direct effects, it is interpreted as closer to a pure moderator in the trust-intention relationships.

Table 4.9: Results of Moderating Effect Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	t-value	p-value	Result
H6a	PT × CB → PI	0.025	0.525	0.600	Not supported
H6b	PT × PC → PI	-0.164	-3.572	0.000	Supported
H7a	PT × CB → WI	-0.048	-0.951	0.342	Not supported
H7b	PT × PC → WI	-0.128	-2.644	0.009	Supported

4.4.3 Structural Model Evaluation

In addition to path coefficients, the construct-level model was summarized using explanatory power, supplementary predictive relevance, effect size, and multicollinearity diagnostics. Table 4.10 reports R^2, adjusted R^2, Q^2, and maximum VIF values for the endogenous constructs. Table 4.11 reports selected f^2 effect sizes. The moderation models included both interaction terms and the direct paths from commercialization variables to the two intention variables, consistent with the analytical procedure described in Chapter 3.

The R^2 values indicate that the construct-level path model explains a meaningful proportion of variance in the endogenous constructs, especially GT and PT. The Q^2 values were above zero, suggesting predictive relevance, and the VIF values did not indicate severe multicollinearity. Because the direct paths from CB and PC to PI and WI were not significant, the significant interaction effects of PC can be interpreted as closer to a pure moderating role rather than a quasi-moderating role, following Sharma et al. (1981).

Table 4.11 reports selected f^2 effect sizes, which indicate the relative substantive contribution of each predictor. The trust-related paths show stronger effects than the moderation terms, suggesting that the trust-building mechanism is the main explanatory mechanism in this construct-level model.

Table 4.10: Structural Model Validation

Endogenous construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2	Max VIF
GT	0.568	0.566	0.562	1.092
PT	0.500	0.498	0.495	1.000
PI	0.247	0.238	0.213	1.115
WI	0.162	0.151	0.137	1.115

Table 4.11: Selected Effect Sizes (f^2)

Path	f^2
CE → GT	0.423
CA → GT	0.513
GT → PT	0.998
PT → PI	0.289
PT × CB → PI	0.001
PT × PC → PI	0.034
PT → WI	0.162
PT × CB → WI	0.002
PT × PC → WI	0.018

4.4.4 Summary of Empirical Results

Overall, the empirical results support the main theoretical chain proposed in this thesis. Community engagement and overall attitude toward the community both positively affect general community trust. General community trust increases trust in specific product recommendations, which in turn promotes purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention.

The moderation results show that commercialization does not operate in a single way. Belief about the degree of community commercialization did not significantly weaken the trust-intention relationships, whereas perceived commercialization did. This indicates that members' direct experiences of commercialization are more important than their general belief that the group is commercialized.

Taken together, the measurement and construct-level path results provide empirical support for the layered trust mechanism and for perceived commercialization as a boundary condition in pet WeChat group recommendations. The findings also provide a basis for the discussion of theoretical and practical implications in Chapter 5.

5. Discussion

5.1 Conclusion

This thesis examined how recommendation trust is formed and translated into purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention in pet WeChat groups. The model proposed that community engagement and overall attitude build general community trust, which supports trust in specific product recommendations and is then translated into purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention as two parallel downstream outcomes. It also examined whether belief about the degree of community commercialization and perceived commercialization weaken these trust-intention relationships.

Based on 384 valid questionnaire responses, the empirical results generally support the proposed theoretical framework. Community engagement and overall attitude toward the community both positively affect general community trust. General community trust further increases trust in specific product recommendations. Trust in specific product recommendations positively predicts both purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention. These findings address the first two research questions by showing how community-level factors build general community trust, how this trust transfers to recommendation-level trust, and how recommendation trust then influences the two parallel intention outcomes.

The moderation results show an uneven role of commercialization-related perceptions. Belief about the degree of community commercialization does not significantly weaken the trust-intention relationships. Perceived commercialization negatively moderates both the trust-purchase intention relationship and the trust-positive word-of-mouth intention relationship. Because the direct paths from CB and PC to PI and WI are not significant, these findings address the third research question and indicate that perceived commercialization is closer to a pure moderator than a direct predictor.

In functional terms, pet WeChat groups operate more like community-based recommendation systems grounded in belonging and mutual trust than one-time displays of promotional information. The results also show that recommendation effects may weaken when members directly experience commercialization as a disturbance to the mutual-help environment. Overall, recommendation trust in pet WeChat groups is shaped by community experience, layered trust, and commercialization-related boundary conditions.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The first theoretical contribution responds to the limited attention given to pet WeChat groups by extending social commerce and online community research to this Chinese private-domain setting. Previous studies have often examined trust, eWOM, purchase intention, and social interaction in open social media, brand communities, or general social-commerce platforms. By focusing on pet WeChat groups in China, this thesis examines a more relationship-oriented and semi-private setting in which recommendation processes are embedded in continuous

communication. This setting extends prior research by showing that, in semi-private community settings, recommendation trust and behavioral intention cannot be explained by recommendation content alone; they also depend on the social meaning generated through repeated group interaction.

The second theoretical contribution responds to the limited differentiation of trust layers by separating general community trust from trust in specific product recommendations. This thesis distinguishes general community trust from trust in specific product recommendations, instead of treating trust as a single undifferentiated construct. This distinction helps explain how trust operates at different levels in a recommendation setting. The results show that general community trust functions as a broader social foundation, whereas recommendation trust is more directly linked to purchase and positive word-of-mouth intentions. This layered view extends prior trust research by showing that the movement from community-level trust to recommendation-level trust is a meaningful mechanism rather than a simple shortcut or a single undifferentiated trust effect.

The third theoretical contribution responds to the limited attention to commercialization as a weakening mechanism by positioning perceived commercialization as a boundary condition in the recommendation-trust framework. Much prior community research emphasizes the positive effects of participation, interaction, and trust; this thesis extends that view by showing that commercialization may influence whether recommendation trust is translated into behavioral intentions. The results indicate that perceived commercialization is more consequential than a general belief that the community is commercialized, which challenges a simple assumption that commercialization awareness alone necessarily weakens recommendation effects. By differentiating these two commercialization-related variables, this thesis clarifies that direct experience of commercialization is a stronger boundary condition than abstract recognition of commercialization intensity.

The thesis also contributes by placing the two intention outcomes in the same conceptual system. It links overall attitude, general community trust, recommendation-level trust, purchase intention, and positive word-of-mouth intention within one model, while treating commercialization-related variables as moderators. This provides a clearer account of how recommendation trust is formed and translated in community-based social-commerce settings. At the same time, positive word-of-mouth intention was not modeled as an antecedent of purchase intention because this thesis treats both as parallel behavioral intentions arising from recommendation trust.

5.3 Practical Implications

Based on the findings, several practical implications can be offered for pet brands, WeChat group operators, community-based sellers, and group-buying organizers. The results suggest that recommendation effectiveness depends more on community trust than on recommendation frequency alone. Increasing the number of recommendations may not improve purchase intention if members do not trust the community environment. Because community engagement and overall attitude significantly strengthen general community trust, managers should build a mutual-help atmosphere in which members believe that recommendations are sincere, useful, and relevant to their needs.

Second, because trust in specific product recommendations significantly predicts both purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention, credible recommendation communication is essential. Group operators should encourage experience-based sharing, practical product comparisons, and transparent discussion while avoiding overt advertising. Recommendations based on real use experience are more likely to be trusted, accepted, and shared through positive word-of-mouth. This is especially important for dog food and deworming products, where suitability and safety are central concerns.

Third, the moderation results provide a practical warning about commercialization. Commercial activity does not necessarily destroy recommendation trust when it is transparent and limited. However, when commercialization is perceived as intrusive, excessive, or disguised as community-oriented sharing, its negative effect becomes more evident. Because perceived commercialization significantly weakens both trust-intention relationships while belief about commercialization does not, managers should pay more attention to members' direct experience of commercial intrusion than to their general belief that the group has become commercialized. Frequent advertising, opaque cooperation, and merchant-oriented recommendations may reduce the behavioral value of trust.

Effective community management should protect the mutual-help atmosphere of the group. Useful measures include clearly labelling commercial cooperation, explaining group-buying arrangements, reducing promotion frequency, separating discussion from promotion when necessary, and asking group leaders to explain the reasons for recommendations. These practices can help brands and group operators preserve recommendation trust while still using community-based communication.

Beyond short-term promotion, managers should focus on long-term trust maintenance. A short-term purchase gain is not valuable if repeated commercialization damages group trust over time. Stable trust can support both purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth intention. For pet brands, the long-term value of community-based recommendation depends more on trust preservation than on the intensity of short-term commercialization.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This thesis has several limitations. The first limitation concerns sample scope. The data were collected from Chinese members of pet WeChat groups and focused on dog food and deworming products, so the results mainly reflect this specific community and product setting. Although this setting is suitable for the research purpose, the findings may not fully represent all social-commerce users or pet owners across different online communities. Future research may examine other private-domain platforms, brand-specific communities, or cross-platform contexts to test whether the results hold in different social environments.

The second limitation is the cross-sectional research design, which means that the results should be interpreted as associations among constructs rather than definitive causal effects. Because all responses were collected at one point in time, this thesis cannot examine changes over time. Members' engagement, trust, and responses to commercialization may change as group norms,

administrative practices, and recommendation histories develop. Future research could combine questionnaires with behavioral data, observation, group-chat content analysis, or qualitative interviews to triangulate findings and obtain a fuller understanding of recommendation trust in pet WeChat groups.

The third limitation concerns measurement and method. Although the results are statistically reliable, they are based on self-reported questionnaire data, construct-level composite scores, and behavioral intentions rather than observed actual purchasing behavior. Respondents' answers may therefore be influenced by subjective interpretation, individual response styles, or contextual factors. Future studies may also test whether positive word-of-mouth intention and purchase intention have a sequential relationship, since the present thesis treats them as parallel outcomes rather than a causal chain; this would directly address whether recommending and buying intentions influence one another over time.

The fourth limitation is the explanatory scope of the model. Although this thesis examines attitude, trust, and commercialization, other factors may also influence recommendation effects. Future studies could examine tie strength, perceived expertise of recommenders, product involvement, risk perception, prior brand familiarity, and differences between member-generated and administrator-generated recommendations. These factors may help explain why members respond differently to similar recommendations under different commercialization conditions.

Finally, future research can refine the commercialization mechanism. This thesis distinguishes belief about the degree of community commercialization from perceived commercialization and finds that the latter has a stronger moderating role. Commercialization experience may include several dimensions, such as perceived opportunism, advertising intrusion, information overload, and fairness in commercial cooperation. Future studies could examine these dimensions separately to identify which aspects most strongly weaken trust-based recommendation effects. Such work would deepen theoretical understanding of online community commercialization and provide more specific guidance for recommendation governance in private-domain social commerce.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Questionnaire: Recommendation Trust and Behavioral Intentions in Pet WeChat Groups

Thank you for participating in this academic study. This questionnaire aims to understand community engagement, trust in the community and in specific dog food and deworming product recommendations, commercialization perceptions, purchase intention, and positive word-of-mouth intention in pet WeChat groups. The survey is anonymous, and all responses will be used only for academic research. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer according to your actual experience and feelings.

Instructions

For statement items, please use the following seven-point scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly disagree, 4 = Neutral, 5 = Slightly agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly agree. For semantic differential items, 1 indicates that your evaluation is closer to the left anchor, and 7 indicates that your evaluation is closer to the right anchor.

Part I. Main Questionnaire Items

I. Community Engagement (CE)

CE1: I often actively seek information related to purchasing dog food or deworming products in this pet WeChat group.

CE2: When I need to choose dog food or deworming products, I usually use discussions in this group as a source of information.

CE3. When other group members raise questions, I am willing to participate in the discussion.

CE4. I post or forward pet-care or product-selection information that I think may help other group members.

CE5. I feel that I am a member of this group and am willing to stay connected with other members.

CE6. I am willing to participate in interactions in this group because I can receive emotional support or companionship here.

II. Overall Attitude Toward the Community (CA)

Overall, my evaluation of this pet WeChat group is:

Code	Left Anchor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Right Anchor
CA1	Bad	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	Good
CA2	Negative	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	Positive
CA3	I dislike it	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	I like it

Response format: seven-point semantic differential scale.

III. General Trust in the Community (GT)

GT1. I believe that this pet WeChat group is trustworthy overall.

GT2. I believe that most information exchanges in this group are sincere.

GT3. I think members in this group usually share information with the intention of helping one another.

GT4. In general, I am willing to trust the information and suggestions provided in this group.

IV. Trust in Specific Product Recommendations (PT)

PT1. I think recommendations about pet products in this group are usually reliable.

PT2. I think key members in this group usually consider members' real needs when recommending pet products.

PT3. I think that evaluations of pet brands and pet product stores in this group are mostly based on real usage experiences.

PT4. When I am uncertain about a dog food or deworming product, I use recommendations in this group as a source of information.

PT5. Even if I lack information from other channels, I rely on this group's recommendations when choosing a brand or store.

V. Purchase Intention (PI)

PI1. If a particular pet product brand has been recommended in the group, I intend to purchase that brand's products in the future.

PI2. Among similar pet products, I plan to give purchase priority to brands that have been recommended in the group.

PI3. If I need to make a purchase in the future, I intend to buy a pet product brand that has been recommended in the group.

VI. Positive Word-of-Mouth Intention (WI)

WI1. If someone in the group asks for information about pet brands, I intend to offer recommendations.

WI2. If someone asks in the group, I intend to share my recommendations about relevant pet brands.

WI3. I intend to share my positive experiences with relevant pet brands with others.

VII. Belief About the Degree of Community Commercialization (CB)

CB1. I think the proportion of commercial content in this group is already relatively high.

CB2. I think information related to group-buying, merchants, or promotions appears quite frequently in this group.

CB3. Overall, I believe that this group is highly commercialized.

VIII. Perceived Commercialization (PC)

PC1. I feel that some recommendations in this group are more for serving certain merchants' interests.

PC2. I worry that some recommendations may involve hidden interests rather than being fully based on product performance.

PC3. I feel that the direction of discussions in this group may be influenced by commercial purposes.

PC4. I feel that group rules or administrators' decisions may be more favorable to commercial partners.

PC5. Commercial information in this group interrupts my experience of obtaining useful information.

PC6. There is too much advertising-related content in this group.

PC7. Commercial information in this group makes it difficult for me to focus on the content I actually want to read.

PC8. I think the amount of commercial information in this group exceeds the range that I can effectively process.

Part II. Demographic Information and Usage

D1. Gender: 1 = Male; 2 = Female; 3 = Prefer not to say.

D2. Age: 1 = 18–24; 2 = 25–30; 3 = 31–40; 4 = 41–50; 5 = 51 and above.

D3. Highest education level: 1 = High school or below; 2 = Junior college; 3 = Bachelor's degree; 4 = Master's degree; 5 = Doctoral degree or above.

D4. Monthly disposable income: Please enter a number in RMB. _____

D5. Main type of pet: 1 = Dog; 2 = Cat; 3 = Both dog and cat; 4 = Other.

D6. Length of time in this pet WeChat group: 1 = Less than 3 months; 2 = 3–6 months; 3 = 6 months to 1 year; 4 = 1–2 years; 5 = More than 2 years.

D7. Activity level in the group: 1 = Almost never speak; 2 = Occasionally speak; 3 = Sometimes participate in discussions; 4 = Often participate in discussions; 5 = Very active.

D8. Products purchased based on pet WeChat group recommendations in the past three months: Please enter a number. _____

D9. Total dog food and deworming products purchased in the past three months: Please enter a number. _____

Appendix B: AI Usage Report

Throughout the development of this thesis, several AI tools were used in a controlled, transparent, and strictly delimited manner. Generative AI models, including ChatGPT (GPT-5.5) and Claude (Anthropic), were employed exclusively for linguistic refinement, while Grammarly was used continuously to identify grammatical errors, spelling issues, and minor stylistic inconsistencies. None of these tools were used to generate theoretical ideas, empirical insights, methodological logic, or interpretations of results. Their role was confined to improving clarity, conciseness, and terminological consistency. All AI-generated suggestions were critically reviewed and incorporated only when fully aligned with the author's intended meaning and analytical reasoning.

ChatGPT and Claude were applied in three strictly limited ways. First, they assisted in rephrasing individual sentences or short passages to improve readability without altering substantive content. For example, when revising the literature review sections on community engagement and general trust in the community, AI was used to refine dense passages describing the theoretical distinction between general community trust and trust in specific product recommendations. AI-generated alternatives were reviewed for precision and accepted only when they preserved the original conceptual framing. Second, generative models were used to provide formal synonyms or alternative formulations of specific constructs to ensure terminological consistency across chapters. For instance, when standardizing terminology in the Theory section, prompts were used to request alternatives to phrasing around constructs such as 'recommendation trust' and 'perceived commercialization,' with strict instruction to preserve meaning. AI-generated suggestions were incorporated selectively and only when conceptually appropriate. Third, generative AI supported refinement of academic prose in the Discussion and Conclusion sections, particularly in smoothing transitions between paragraphs and reducing redundancy. In all cases, outputs were treated strictly as optional stylistic proposals. No conceptual mechanisms, no hypotheses, and no interpretations of empirical findings were generated by AI; all substantive reasoning, including the formulation of hypotheses, the moderation framework involving belief about the degree of community commercialization and perceived commercialization, and the interpretation of SPSS and AMOS results, remains entirely the author's work.

Examples of ChatGPT and Claude Interactions

1. Flow and clarity improvement (stylistic only)

Prompt example: "Can you improve the flow of the following paragraph without adding any new ideas? Keep all content intact but make transitions smoother and reduce redundancy: [inserted paragraph from the Literature Review on community trust]."

2. Rephrasing existing text

Prompt example: "Please provide two alternative phrasings for this sentence while maintaining the exact meaning: 'Members who perceive the group as heavily commercialized may discount product recommendations even when the underlying information is credible.'"

3. Terminological synonym generation

Prompt example: "Propose two or three formal academic synonyms or alternative formulations for the term 'recommendation trust' suitable for a social commerce methodology section. Do not introduce any new conceptual content; only vary the phrasing."

4. General language refinement

Prompt example: "Please check this paragraph for clarity and readability. Do not change the meaning and do not introduce any new conceptual elements: [paragraph from the Discussion section on perceived commercialization as a moderator]."

Grammarly

Grammarly was used solely for grammar, spelling, and punctuation review throughout the writing process. It provided mechanical corrections and did not contribute to content, structure, argumentation, or analysis.

Example of Grammarly Interaction

Original: "The result also suggest that perceived commercialization serve as a boundary condition in the trust-intention relationship."

Grammarly suggestion: "The results also suggest that perceived commercialization serves as a boundary condition in the trust-intention relationship."

Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Using AI tools surfaced several risks and led to purposeful mitigation strategies. The primary risk was distortion of analytical meaning: generative models occasionally proposed stylistic revisions that subtly shifted theoretical or methodological intent, for example, rephrasing 'perceived commercialization' in ways that blurred its distinction from 'belief about the degree of community commercialization.' This was mitigated by manually reviewing every suggestion and rejecting those that altered substance. A second risk was fabricated or ungrounded content. To avoid this, AI was never used to generate theoretical ideas, hypothesis formulations, or interpretations of SPSS or AMOS output; all such content was author-produced. A third risk concerned over-reliance on AI phrasing, potentially diluting the author's academic voice. To address this, AI use was restricted to sentence-level refinement, with no paragraph- or section-level generation permitted.

Reflections

Several insights emerged from using AI tools in the thesis-writing process. First, generative AI proved most effective at micro-editing, clarifying complex theoretical distinctions, reducing redundancy, and enhancing the readability of dense methodological descriptions, but remained unsuitable for macro-level reasoning or theory development. Second, the tools were particularly helpful in maintaining terminological consistency across a thesis that spans social commerce, trust theory, and community commercialization. Third, the process underscored that AI is most

valuable when used as a linguistic assistant under close human supervision, not as a source of conceptual content. All substantive reasoning, including the layered trust model, the moderation hypotheses, and the empirical interpretation of structural path results, was developed and executed entirely by the author. Ultimately, the experience demonstrated that, when applied responsibly, AI can enhance the communicative quality of academic writing without compromising originality, theoretical rigor, or analytical integrity.