

## **Social Media, Brand Community, User generated comments and Brand Loyalty: Study of Indian Youth**

**Bidyanand Jha**

*Kirloskar Institute of Advanced Management Studies Pune, Maharashtra*

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**Abstract:** *The emergence of online social networks influences people in various ways and moreover, the effect is predicted to be high on the young adolescents wherein we find that target group who is more exposed themselves to the online social media. It is believed that the social networks such as online brand communities influence the purchase intentions and in turn enhances brand trust and loyalty. Taking the perspective of the brand community building plus the brand trust and loyalty literatures, our goal is to show how brand communities based on social media influence elements of the customer centric model (i.e., the relationships among focal customer and brand, product, company, and other customers) and brand loyalty. A survey-based empirical study with 441 respondents was conducted. The results of structural equation modeling show that brand communities on social media have positive effects on customer/product, customer/brand, customer/company and customer/other customer relationships, which in turn have positive impact on brand trust and trust has positive impact on brand loyalty. The finding also demonstrates the fully mediating role of brand trust in converting the enhanced relationships in brand community and loyalty.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Since the internet and other media have been adopted and integrated into the daily lives of an increasing number of young adolescents in most of the countries, scholars and commentators are debating the impact of these new media on the activities, social relationships, and worldviews of the younger generations. Controversies about whether technology shapes values, attitudes, and patterns of social behavior are not new. In the recent past, the rapid expansion of television stimulated similar discussions of its cultural and social effects. Social media provide a virtual network place where people can enjoy expressing their opinions, exchange opinions, disseminate and control messages anywhere anytime. Marketers are now able to reach consumers and interact with them using social media. Previous studies have found that consumers tend to trust more user-generated messages, such as peer recommendations or consumer reviews, on social media than messages from traditional mass media. Consumers' comments about a product on social media produce a negative or positive brand buzz and the virtual messages affect consumer purchasing decisions. How seriously should marketers think about social media effects in marketing practices? "Social media is no longer a trend for marketers: It is a reality" (Williamson, 2010). Social media is an inevitable channel for customer support (Jacobs, 2009). Even though social media has been recognized as the most potentially powerful medium, there is lack of understanding in terms of why people use social media and how they perceive marketing messages on social media.

The market share of different online social networking websites have been grown for instance Facebook grew by 0.22 percent from November 2011 to October 2011. YouTube has the strongest growth among online social networking site with a 0.67 percent from November 2011 to October 2011. These measurements showed the membership of online social networks websites have been grown (Hitwise, 2011). Everyday people buy things that are relevant to their needs. At the same time they are making purchasing decisions. Specific consumer behaviour is defined as "the activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services" (Blackwell, Miniard & Engel, 2001). Consumer behaviors are influenced by personal and environmental factors (Blyth, 2008). A central part of consumer behavior is, consumers' purchasing decision that included several steps. Generally social networks such as groups or individuals who own the power over consumers can affect consumers' purchase decision (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2010). The online social networks provided facilities for consumers to interact with one another, accessing to information, comments, reviews, and rates that can help them for purchasing decisions in different ways (Heinrichs, Lim & Lim, 2011).

### **II. Review Of Literature**

#### **Social Media And Social Networking**

Social media includes various methods such as social networking, user-sponsored blogs, multimedia sites, company-sponsored websites, collaborative websites, podcasts, etc. Social media is "the media that is published, created and shared by individuals on the internet, such as blogs, images, video and more" (Strokes, p.

350), as well as online tools and platforms that allow internet users to collaborate on content, share insights and experiences, and connect for business or pleasure (Strauss & Frost, p. 326). Social network is “a type of web site model where individual members become part of a broader virtual community” (Strokes, p. 125) and/or “the practice of expanding the number of one’s business and social connects by making connections through individuals online” (Strauss & Frost, p.183). Thus, “Social media can be called a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting, while social networking is a tool and a utility for connecting with others”.

### **The Development Of Social Media Marketing**

In recent years, social networking sites and social media have increased in popularity, at a global level. For instance, Facebook is said to have more than a billion active users (as of 2012) since its beginning in 2004 ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)). Social networking sites can be described as networks of friends for social or professional interactions (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). Indeed, online social networks have profoundly changed the propagation of information by making it incredibly easy to share and digest information on the internet (Akrimi & Khemakhem, 2012).

The unique aspects of social media and its immense popularity have revolutionized marketing practices such as advertising and promotion (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Social media has also influenced consumer behavior from information acquisition to post-purchase behavior such as dissatisfaction statements or behaviors (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and patterns of Internet usage (Ross et al., 2009; Laroche et al., 2012).

Social media is “a group of internet based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and it allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Social media has many advantages as it helps connect businesses to consumers, develop relationships and foster those relationships in a timely manner and at a low cost as Kaplan and Haenlein discovered (2010).

Other functions of social media involve affecting and influencing perceptions, attitudes and end behavior (Williams & Cothrell, 2000), while bringing together different like-minded people (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997).

The much higher level of efficiency of social media compared to other traditional communication channels prompted industry leaders to state that companies must participate in Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and others, in order to succeed in online environments (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Laroche et al. 2012). Thus, more industries try to benefit from social media as they can be used to develop strategy, accept their roles in managing others’ strategy or follow others’ directions (Williams & Williams, 2008).

Social media websites provide an opportunity for companies to engage and interact with potential and current consumers, to encourage an increased sense of intimacy of the customer relationship, and build all important meaningful relationships with consumers (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder 2010) especially in today’s business environment when consumer loyalty can vanish at the smallest mistake, which can additionally have online propagation of their unfortunate encounter with a particular product, service, brand or company.

Trusov et al. (2009) explain that social networking platforms allow users to connect with each other and typically attract a small group of first time consumers. The greatest appeal of social media marketing is for the brand to make a strong impact on consumers and consumer groups (Brandz, 2010).

Customer opinions matter and impact on marketing strategy;

- Validation: Buyer and consumer reviews are as influential as the marketer’s claims of the brands features and benefits. This sets the stage for the brand to meet consumers’ expectations;
- Reach: Social media marketing allows marketers to reach a wider audience with more dramatic results in far less time and at lower costs; and
- Control: Control is the single biggest challenge in social media marketing.

### **Social Media Networking And Brand Communication**

The Chartered Institute of Marketing (2009) emphasised that communication as part of the promotion mix is essential in conveying the brand’s personality. Stelzner (2011) reported that marketers were engaging in social media marketing to improve on communicating the brand in online environments. This includes search engine optimisation (e.g. more hits on Google.com), communicating events and press releases and making traditional marketing tools (e.g. print display adverts, radio adverts and television adverts) available for consumers to download or review content (Rockendorf, 2010). Good promotion is a two way street and paves the way for dialogue with consumers (Stelzner, 2010; 2011).

Good promotion encourages dialogue with consumers and communicates the benefits and specifications of the product in an effort to persuade consumers to purchase the brand. Good promotions must be outrageous, yet socially acceptable and professional and must communicate value (The Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2009).

Stelzner (2011) questioned how social media marketers would change their marketing strategies going forward and the results indicated that 64% of marketers planned on increasing their use of search engine optimisation. The channels for driving this social marketing strategy were online event marketing, online advertising, press releases and seminars through social media platforms (Stelzner, 2011). Social media marketing has therefore become part of marketing strategy in global organisations in an effort to reach out to wider and larger audiences (Evans, 2010).

In recent years, brand management has been confronting two opposite tendencies: the loss of brand authenticity and the increasing influence of empowered consumers on brand communications (Burmam and Arnhold 2008). The social Web is changing traditional marketing communications. Traditional brand communications that were previously controlled and administered by brand and marketing managers are gradually being shaped by consumers that ultimately leads to purchase intentions of the consumers.

The rapid growth in the popularity of social media platforms in recent years has raised the question of whether this phenomenon has reduced marketers' control of brand management (Berthon et al. 2007). During the social media age, knowledge of both the influence of firm-created communication on consumer perceptions of brands and the influence of consumer online content creation on brands is important (Berthon, Pitt, and Campbell 2008; G. Christodoulides 2009).

### **Social media based brand community**

The Internet and Web 2.0 have empowered proactive consumer behaviour in the information and purchase process (Burmam and Arnhold 2008). In the information era, customers make use of social media to access the desired product and brand information (Li and Bernoff 2011). The growth of online brand communities, including social networking sites, has supported the increase of user-generated social media communication (Gangadharbatla 2008).

User-generated content (UGC) is a rapidly growing vehicle for brand conversations and consumer insights (George Christodoulides, Jevons, and Bonhomme 2012).

Because of its early stage of research, there is still no widely accepted definition for user-generated content (OECD 2007). According to the content classifications introduced by Daughterly and colleagues (2008), UGC is focused on the consumer dimension, is created by the general public rather than by marketing professionals and is primarily distributed on the Internet. A more comprehensive definition is given by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2007): "i) content that is made publicly available over the Internet, ii) content that reflects a certain amount of creative effort, and iii) content created outside professional routines and practices".

According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412), brand community is defined as a specialized non geographically bound community based on social relations among admirers of a brand. This community is similar to any other community which exist on social sites and includes all the characteristics of relationship, sharing emotions and developing members. . However, it is to be noted that creation and negotiation of meaning happens to be the most important thing in brand community. Other benefits of brand communities are facilitating information sharing, cementing the history and the culture of a brand, providing assistance to consumers, and positively influencing brand loyalty (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

The viral spread of technology and the abuse of geographical boundaries have made the two entities; "social media and brand community" come closer. The motivation to join the social media has also brought the brand manager and people together. The intersection of brand communities and social media lead to the concept of "Social Media based brand community".

Our goal is to show how these brand communities could affect brand elements and loyalty. We now develop our hypothesis.

### **Development of the model and the hypotheses**

Customer centric model of brand community and social media

The first models of brand community were focused on customer and brand; however McAlexander et al. (2002) added other entities that are related to the concept of brand community, i.e., product and company depicts the customer centric model of brand community.

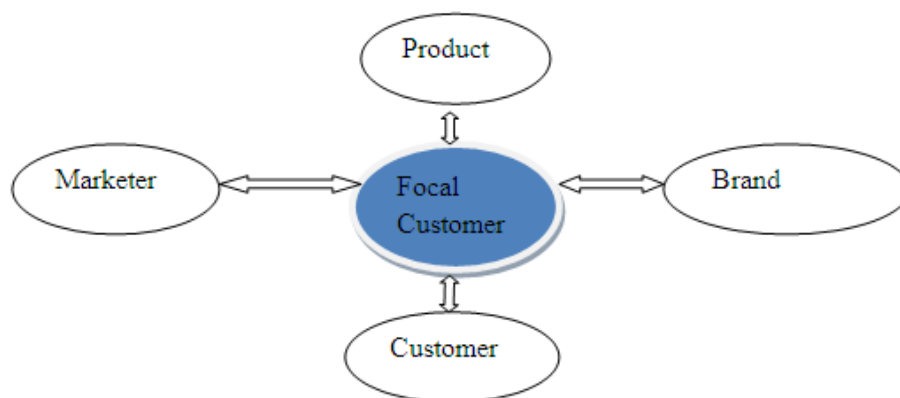


Figure 1: Customer centric model of Brand community (McAlexander et al., 2002, p.39).

McAlexander et al. (2002, p. 38), defines the community as relationship among the entities which includes brand, product, customer, company and social media, which is the mean for online community to exist. It is also found during his research that, events such as brandscan and brandfest motivates the members to come together and indulge in high-context interaction. These interactions bring out the meaning of conversation in terms of consumption experience, useful information and other valuable resources.

It is our believe that social media could also provide space for such high-context interactions among elements of brand community. When a member logs on a social media platform and explores the brand page, comments, shares a photo or experience, interact with marketers, ask questions about the brand, that member is participating in the community activities and the invisible communities becomes visible.

Active participation strengthen the bond between elements of brand community i.e., relationship between customers and brand, product, company and other customers. Thus:

**H1.** Social media based brand communities have positive effects on the: (a) customer/product relationship; (b) customer/brand relationship; (c) customer/company relationship; and (d) customer/ other customers relationships.

### Brand trust and brand loyalty

A lot of previous brand researchers have agreed upon the importance of customer loyalty in enhancing customer experience within the context of brand community (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998; McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Schau et al., 2009; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Zhou, Jin, Vogel, Fang, & Chen, 2011b).

McAlexander et al. (2002) advocates that the cumulative effect of enhanced relationship in customer centric model eventually results in customer loyalty; however it is still not clear how the process of increasing brand loyalty in brand community looks like. If we refer to the literature on loyalty and trust, we will find that trust plays the main role in developing loyalty.

Walden, 2000 explains that online communities, as a social structure, have positive effects on trust and loyalty. Enhanced relationships with customers and elements of brand community necessarily increase relationships and contacts between the brand and customers so that brand trust would be positively affected. Furthermore, relationship enhancement happens concurrently with information sharing and dissemination between different elements of the brand, which decreases information asymmetry, reduces uncertainty and increases predictability of the brand (Ba, 2001;

Lewicki & Bunker, 1995) which results in trust enhancement.

So, we hypothesize that:

**H2a.** The customer/product relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust.

**H2b.** The customer/brand relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust.

**H2c.** The customer/company relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust.

**H2d.** Customer/other customers' relationships have direct positive effects on brand trust.

The relationship between trust and loyalty has been examined in different contexts. It is also well supported by the literature that trust is one of the antecedents of loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Chiu et al., 2010; Harris & Goode, 2004; Kim et al., 2011; Zhou et al., 2011b).

The context of social media brand community is not explored; hence we hypothesize this relationship to test the mediating role of brand trust in brand loyalty, thus:

**H3.** Brand trust positively influences brand loyalty.

### III. Method And Findings

#### Subjects and procedure

Our target population consists of young consumer who are members of a brand community in any social media platform. So, the questionnaire was sent through several posts in websites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter along with distribution lists. We introduced the questionnaire as an opinion survey, and we asked participants to list the brand communities they are a member of and follow on social media. Furthermore, we asked them to keep in mind these brand communities while answering the questions. With this procedure, which is consistent with previous studies in online contexts (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Steenkamp & Geyskens, 2006), we collected 441 valid responses (48.9% male). The age range of the participants varied between 15 and 35.

#### Measures

The measures of all the constructs in the model were based on the literature. However, they were slightly modified to suit the context of the study. We adopted and modified items developed by Srinivasan, Anderson, and Ponnalu (2002) to measure community. We modified it aiming to capture the degree to which members feel bonded to each other, share information and experience, and the extent to which they find these exchanges useful.

The initial scale had six items (5 options Likert scale). The scales for the customer's relationship with product, brand, company and other customers were originally developed by McAlexander et al.(2002). We used three out of the four items scale originally developed by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) for brand trust. We derived a three items measure from Delgado-Ballester, Manuera-Aleman, and Yague-Guillen (2003) for brand loyalty. All items were 5 point Likert-type scales.

Before running structural equation modeling to test the hypotheses, for purifying and validating the measures, we first conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and subsequently reliability analysis to calculate Cronbach's alpha for the scale items to ensure internal consistency (Cronbach, 1970). All the items loaded properly on their intended scale except three items of social media based brand community that were deleted because they loaded very low on the intended construct. The 7 scales together explain almost 73% of the total variance. Then we calculated Cronbach's alphas for each construct. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alphas of the final constructs. As it is shown the reliability measure ranged from 0.617 to 0.856, which shows satisfactory levels of internal consistency.

Constructs	Number of Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Online brand community (OB)	3	5.88	1.808	0.660
Product (P)	4	6.43	2.107	0.731
Brand (B)	3	5.60	1.763	0.728
Company (Com)	2	3.83	1.253	0.727
Other customers (Oo)	3	6.02	2.045	0.719
Brand loyalty (L)	3	6.73	2.715	0.856
Brand Trust (BT)	3	5.26	1.56	0.617

**Table 1: Means, Standard deviation and reliability statistics for construct measures.**

Next, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using EQS measurement model. First, we found a very good model fit for a CFA with all 7 scales as free (unrestricted model);  $X^2 = 300.00$ ,  $df = 168$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.00, CFI (Bentler, 1990) = 0.96 and RMSEA = 0.04. Table 2 shows the factor loadings and R-squares of each item (please refer to Appendix for the questions).

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	R-square
Brand community	Ob4	0.502	0.252
	Ob5	0.648	0.420
	Ob6	0.724	0.525
Consumer/ Product relationship	P1	0.615	0.378
	P2	0.718	0.516
	P3	0.638	0.407
	P4	0.59	0.349
Consumer/ brand relationship	B1	0.685	0.469
	B2	0.709	0.503
	B3	0.670	0.449



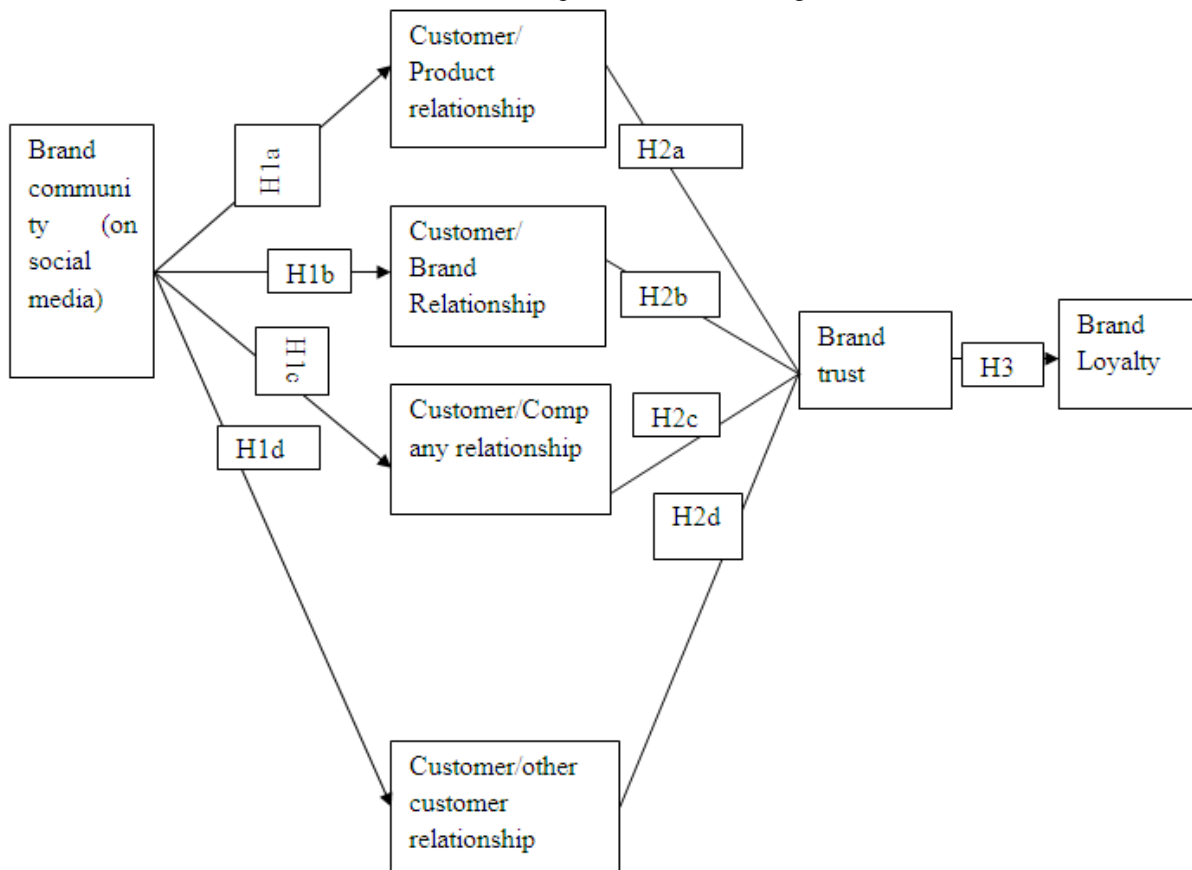
Customer/ Company relationship	Com1	0.772	0.595
	Com2	0.741	0.549
Customer / Other Customer relationships	Oo1	0.673	0.453
	Oo2	0.713	0.508
	Oo3	0.657	0.432
Brand Trust	Bt1	0.644	0.415
	Bt2	0.575	0.331
	Bt3	0.539	0.291
Loyalty	L1	0.794	0.630
	L2	0.857	0.735
	L3	0.803	0.645

**Table 2: Item factor loadings.**

Then we tested a restricted model in which all the correlations between latent variables were set to 1.00, resulting to  $X^2$  value of 942.541 with 190 degrees of freedom, RMSEA = 0.09 and CFI = 0.75. Comparing these two models we reject the restricted model in favor of the free model ( $X^2$  difference of 642.54,  $df = 22$ ). Furthermore, to show that the factors are orthogonal we compared the free model with another restricted model, in which all the correlations among factors were set to zero. This model resulted in  $X^2 = 1185.4$  with 189 degrees of freedom. We reject this model too in favor of the free model ( $X^2$  difference = 885.4,  $df = 21$ ). As another evidence for convergent and discriminant validity we compared the correlation between all the measures in the table. Almost all within construct correlations were larger than correlations among between construct items, implying convergent and discriminant validity.

**IV. Results**

We used EQS 6.1 to test the model and estimate the path coefficients in Fig. 2.



**Fig2: Models of the effects of brand community (on social media) Structural model estimation**

The fit indices for the full model are  $X^2(173) = 365.597$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , RMSEA = 0.05, GFI = 0.926, and CFI = 0.935. Although the  $X^2$  test is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) all the other statistics are within acceptable ranges. This indicates an acceptable model fit (For a review of fit indices see Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

As predicted, strong support was found for the effects of social media based brand community on the four elements of the customer centric model of brand community, i.e., customer relationships with the product, the brand, the company and other customers. The coefficient values for the four relationships are respectively: 0.723, 1.059, 1.258, and 1.369. All of these relationships are significant at  $p < 0.05$ , providing support for H1a, H1b, H1c and H1d. Fig. 3 summarizes these and other results.

All the effects of the customer relationships with brand elements on brand trust are supported as well. The customer/product relationship has a significant, positive effect on brand trust ( $\beta = 0.397$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), supporting H2a. The customer/other customers relationship also has a positive significant effect on brand trust, supporting H2d ( $\beta = 0.375$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The effect of the customer/company relationship on brand trust is also significant ( $\beta = 0.114$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), supporting H2c. The effect of customer/brand relationship on brand trust (H2b) is also supported ( $\beta = 0.178$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Finally, the relationship of brand trust on brand loyalty is positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.729$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), so H3 is supported. The findings reveal that brand trust mediates the effect of customer/product, customer/brand, customer/company, and customer/ other customers relationships on brand loyalty. We run another test with brand trust as a partial mediator to examine whether it has a partial or full mediating role in the model.

We added direct relationships from the four elements (i.e., customer/brand, customer/product, customer/company and customer/ other customers relationships) to brand loyalty in the basemodel (Fig. 2). In testing the new model with the same SEM procedure, none of the new relationships were found to be significant and the model fit did not improve. This implies that brand trust fully mediates the effects of the customer relationship with the four elements (brand, product, company, and other consumers) on brand loyalty.

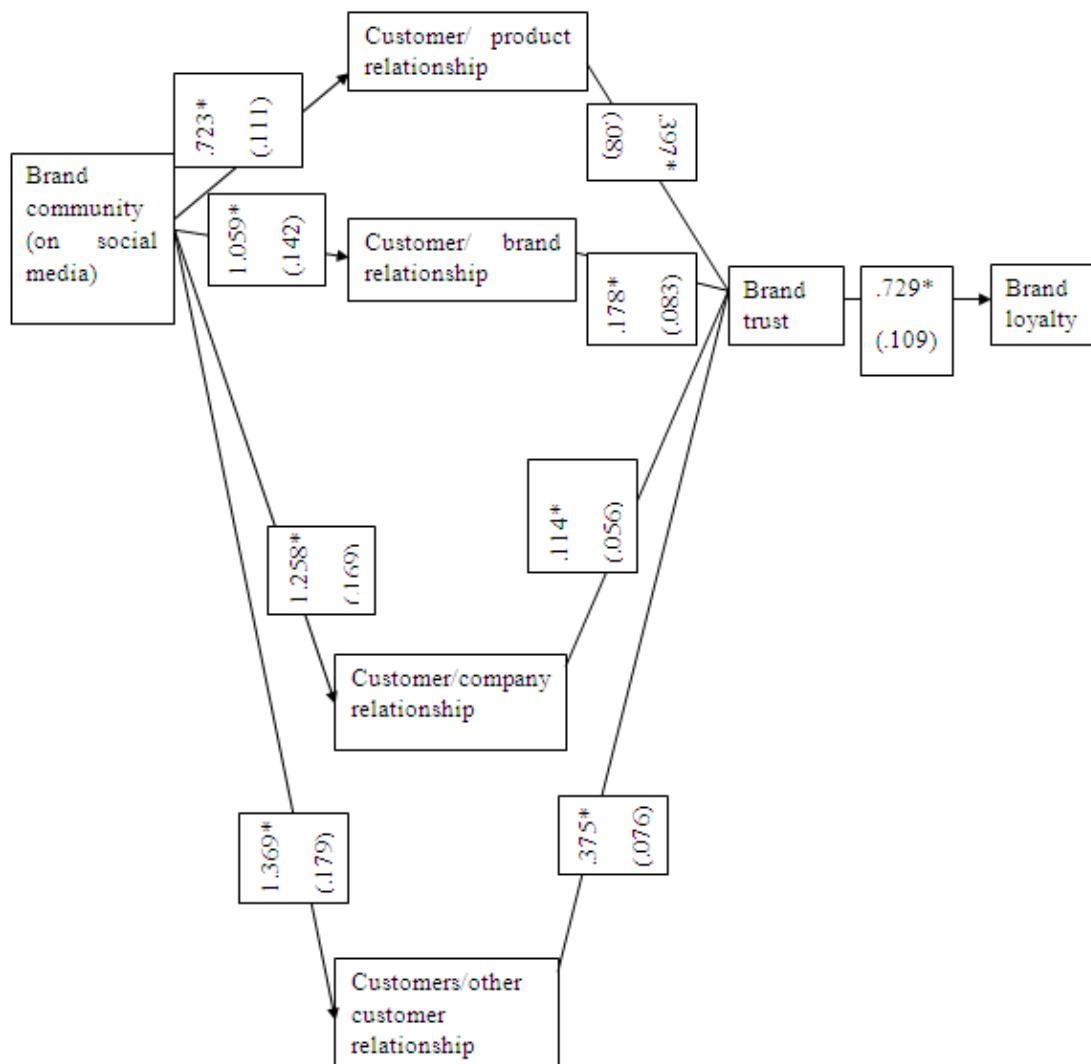


Fig3: Estimated model.\* $p < 0.05$ . Note: unstandardized coefficients are used and standard errors are in parentheses

## **V. Discussion and implications**

As discussed, there is a debate over the issues of social media, marketing and branding activities on social media, and few systematic studies with clear empirical results can be relied upon. Beside few exceptions, all we find in the literature are descriptive narratives about social media, its capabilities, and potentials in leveraging business activities. In addition, there are contradictions among scholars on these issues. For example some believe that social media is an ideal environment for businesses to reach their customers, while others believe brands crash the environment that is supposed to be for people and their friends (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Our purpose was to fill this gap, partly, and help other researchers to shed more light on these issues. Our study took the brand community perspective to examine if there are some benefits for brands in a social media context and to show how these benefits could be realized. Drawing on the brand community literature, we developed a unique model of the process by which a brand community can affect brand loyalty. Then we tested, supported and validated our model and hypotheses in the context of social media. We conclude that brand communities operating on social media can enhance brand trust and loyalty by improving customer relationship with the brand, other consumers, the company and the products. Our finding is somehow consistent with other studies that found participation in social virtual communities positively influences brand loyalty (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalú, 2010; Kardaras, Karakostas, & Papathanassiou, 2003).

An interesting observation from the final model is that the path through consumer relationship has the highest coefficients. This is consistent with the main characteristic of social media which is user generated content. Some researchers call social media as “people’s media” or “people’s web” which implies that the main goal of social media is to bring people together and to facilitate interactions among them (e.g., Fournier & Avery, 2011). This finding is consistent with this and shows practitioners that they should enhance customers relationships with each other to enhance loyalty and trust.

Our study contributes to the existing brand community and social media literatures and provides its own theoretical implications as well. First, we developed a new model of how a brand community can affect brand loyalty. As discussed earlier, previous studies emphasized that one main function of brand communities is to increase brand loyalty but our model shows how this can happen. We especially identified the role of brand trust as a translator of these effects, a role which was mostly neglected in previous studies.

Although we tested our model in the context of social media, we believe this model might be valid in other contexts as well. Second, as some researchers stated, social media has its own unique characteristics that demand researchers to treat it as a distinct research area (Hu & Kettinger, 2008; Soliman & Beaudry, 2010), and this research extends the concept of brand community to social media and helps scholars have more insight about brands operating in social media contexts.

This study also helps practitioners in their involvement with social media. The vast reach, being placeless, having low cost, and the popularity of social media motivate all marketers to try to take advantage of it in different ways. Our model and results show that with creating and enhancing brand communities based on social media, and by facilitating feelings of community, usefulness, information sharing, and strengthening the social bonds among members and other elements of the brand, marketers can increase brand trust and loyalty.

## **VI. Limitations and future research**

Our goal was to show how brand communities based on social media can, in general, affect customer relationships with brand elements as well as brand loyalty. Toward this goal and using the elements of brand community, we tested our model in the context of social media. Surveying a random sample of users of social media and brand communities allows us to have generalizable results; however, in future research other possible moderating and mediating variables, such as brand type, culture, characteristics and facilities of the community on social media, could be included to produce deeper insights about how these relationships act in different situations.

Although our findings show that brand communities based on social media could produce positive effects for brands, it might be considered that social media is not always an ideal environment for brands in which to operate. In some cases it might be a risky environment for businesses (Fournier & Avery, 2011), as customers are becoming more powerful than ever before. They can easily interact, speak and broadcast their thoughts while companies have less power to manage the information available about them in the new space (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Moreover, customers could easily get involved in online complaints if they are dissatisfied, or upset with the brand (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Mangold and Faulds (2009) give some interesting examples of how fatal the negative user generated information could be.

Therefore, we advise businesses to be cautious about their activities on social media in terms of establishing their brand communities as well as other efforts, and researchers to conduct more studies about the potential negative consequences of social media based brand communities and introduce effective techniques to manage communities in such environments. Brand communities are dynamic phenomena with dynamic effects



and interactions among their elements (McAlexander et al., 2002; Schau et al., 2009). So, one of the interesting avenues for future research might be to trace this dynamism in the context of social media to see how the effects evolve over time. Due to the achievability of social media platforms, conducting these types of study might be easier than before. So, longitudinal studies could enable researchers to create more insight about the dynamic interactions among the community elements.

### VII. Conclusion

We showed the role of brand communities in enhancing customer relationships with elements of the brand community elaborated by McAlexander et al. (2002). To the extent that a brand community based on social media acts to provide benefits to its members, to facilitate information sharing and to enhance customers' bonds to each other, it cements the customers' relationships with the brand, the product, the company and other customers. These enhanced relationships result in enhanced brand loyalty, but we showed that brand trust has a fully mediating role in this process. All in all, our findings show how social media could be a platform for brands to achieve the same desired outcome from their brand community activities; that is having more loyal customers.

#### Appendix. Summary of measures

1.	Brand Community	<b>Ob4-</b> The members of this community benefit from the community <b>Ob5-</b> The members share a common bond with other members of the community <b>Ob6-</b> The members are strongly affiliated to other members
2.	Product	<b>P1-</b> I love the product of the brand <b>P2-</b> I am proud of the product <b>P3-</b> The product is one of my prized possessions <b>P4-</b> The product is fun to use
3.	Brand	<b>B1-</b> I value the heritage of the brand <b>B2-</b> If I were to replace the product, I would replace with another product of the same brand <b>B3-</b> My brand is of highest quality
4.	Company	<b>Com1-</b> The company understands my needs <b>Com2-</b> The company cares about my opinion
5.	Other customers	<b>Oo1-</b> I have met wonderful people because of the community <b>Oo2-</b> I have a feeling of kinship with the other owners <b>Oo3-</b> I have an interest in the community because of the other owner in the brands
6.	Brand loyalty	<b>L1-</b> I consider myself to be loyal to the brand <b>L2-</b> If the brand is not available in one store, I will buy the same brand in other store <b>L3-</b> I am willing to pay more for my brand
7.	Brand Trust	<b>BT1-</b> My brand gives me everything that I expect out of the product <b>BT2-</b> I rely on my brand <b>BT3-</b> My brand never disappoints me

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