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MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

**THE EFFECTS OF VALUE CREATION PRACTICES ON
BRAND TRUST AND BRAND LOYALTY IN ONLINE BRAND
COMMUNITY**

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**THE EFFECTS OF VALUE CREATION PRACTICES ON
BRAND TRUST AND BRAND LOYALTY IN ONLINE BRAND
COMMUNITY**

Advisor: Professor Doyle Kim

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ABSTRACT

Increasing customer loyalty, to the company, should be the primary objective in today's increasingly competitive business environment. Every company relies mainly on its fixed customers and endeavors to increase the number of such clients as many researches confirm that loyal customers will generate lucrative returns. With the help of the advanced technology and the internet, customer relationship management technique is implemented through more diverse media channels including the newly popular social networking portal - Facebook. The paper is aimed to examine the performance of Facebook as an effective relationship strengthening tool to create brand loyalty among target audiences in the cosmetic industry. Like other businesses, beauty brands have started to create the online presence on Facebook with the purpose of reaching out for amassing numbers of potential customers and tightening relationship with their fan base. To provide answers to the prime research question, the research is carefully planned and various data collection methods are employed to obtain relevant information. This research used quantitative (questionnaire survey) method to retrieve reliable outcomes. The study is general on brand community and respondents are asked to assume the brand they follow of their choice to feel in the questionnaires.

The findings have shown interesting results. Facebook's unique features offer both simplicity and flexibility to connect and communicate with their audiences and can obviously be another good relationship building tool, yet companies are not able to manage to reach their ultimate goal, the loyalty. One key problem highlighted here is that what companies currently offer to their targets is irrelevant to their preference, thus they fail to keep ongoing engagement with their fans.

Based on the research conducted, it is imperative for companies to set a clear objective before

implementing any marketing campaigns on Facebook so as to ensure the content relevance for their target audiences. Continuous interaction between fans and brands is vital but it is important not to bombard fans with unnecessary information.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this study

This chapter will give the Introduction, outline the main research objectives and state the purpose of the study as well as how the paper will be structured. Marketers are very eager to learn about, organize, and facilitate brand communities (e.g., McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009; Zhou et al., in press), which include a series of connections and relationships among people who admire a brand (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). The reasons behind such interest in brand communities include the advantages of learning customer perceptions of new product offerings and competitive actions; maximizing opportunities to attract and collaborate closely with highly loyal consumers of the brand (Franke & Shah, 2003; McAlexander et al., 2002); influencing members’ evaluations and actions (Muniz & Schau, 2005); rapidly disseminating information (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Jin et al., 2009); and most importantly gaining a “holy grail” of loyal customers (McAlexander et al., 2002). On the other hand, the dramatic popularity and inherent advantages of the vast reach, low cost, high communication efficiency of social media are tempting many companies to participate in such spaces (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social networking sites have introduced new business platform with a more relevant role in the business models (Flavián & Guinalú, 2005), extended possibility to get consumers engaged with brands (Garretson, 2008), and mapped social connections (Ho, 2014). Facebook as an example allows consumers with a high possibility to interact with brands in a more direct way by communicating with the brand page (Kabadayi & Price, 2014). Given the significance of

social media, a virtual brand community has been widely discussed. While many studies investigate brand community characteristics (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001), Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) argue that the question of what needs and wants community members to seek to fulfill from joining a community has been grossly neglected. Precisely the answers of why people acknowledge themselves implicitly or explicitly to a community have not been well addressed. The work of Casaló, Flavián, and Guinalú (2007) discussed the benefits of joining the community, addressing that the relationship created via online community leads to the development of loyalty and trust. Members are emotionally bounded when their needs are satisfied. Therefore, it is important to provide more critical development of such relationship framework by generating benchmark in a more practical level.

The current study demonstrated that customers' commitment and behavior within brand communities vary significantly among different community types including offline and online community, fan pages, and small group brand community (Munnukka, Karjaluoto, & Tikkanen, 2015). For example, engagement enhances consumer's attitudes toward the brand and purchasing intention (Duffett, 2015; Yang 2012). Similarly, Shang, Chen, and Liao (2006) suggested that promoting community participation may also increase brand loyalty. Loyal and satisfied customers are more likely to engage in word-of-mouth (wom) favorable to the firm (Chen, Papazafeiropoulou, Chen, Duan, & Liu, 2014).

1.2 Thesis structure

This paper will be structured by its logical flows of arguments. This thesis is, therefore, divided into 5 chapters as follows.

Chapter 1 gives an introduction to the research, identifies research objectives and research questions as well as the dissertation structure.

Chapter 2 draws an overall picture of what the research is all about and gives an insight into the subject of studies.

Chapter 3 explain how the research hypothesis for this study was created based on the literature review and then model framework formed were planned and constructed relating to different research philosophies and research approaches. The methods employed to obtain relevant quantitative data are explained.

Chapter 4 shows how the research was planned and constructed relating to different research philosophies and research approaches. The sample collecting, methodologies, and results are shown and explained to measure the proposed hypotheses.

Chapter 5 provides result discussion, managerial implications and limitation of this paper. Directions for future researches are also suggested.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Brand community

A brand community is a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412) and it represents a form of association embedded in the consumption context positioned around one product. Similar to other communities, a brand community has three indicators that make a community recognizable. These indicators are shared consciousness, shared rituals and traditions, and obligations to society. Shared consciousness is a felt sense of connection among members within a brand community. These feelings lead members to feel that an invisible hand connects them to each other and separates them from outsiders (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006b; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Rituals and traditions are symbolic acts or gestures that are developed throughout the history of the brand and aim to perpetuate and communicate the symbolic meanings and culture of the brand community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). For example, consumers use a specific jargon inside the community which is a cultural element of the community that solidifies members’ bonds.

The third indicator is obligations to society which is the sense that commitment members have toward the welfare of their fellow members and the community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 200). This commitment is the main driver in participating in brand use practices through which members help each other optimize their brand use (Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009). Many scholars studied this topic conceptually and empirically to understand the dimensions and factors shaping

such communities (e.g., [Granitz & Ward, 1996](#); [Holt, 1995](#); [Muniz & O’Guinn, 1996](#); [Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001](#)).

Similar to social media, consumers have their own motivations for joining brand communities. Brands fulfill important psychological and social needs by expressing who a person is and what group the person aligns oneself with ([Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998](#)). It is believed that consumers join brands communities to identify themselves with brands so that their social needs of being identified as persons with appropriate self-identity are met. In their own ways, consumers search for the symbols or signs in the communities which help them decipher who they want to be and how they really want to be identified by others. Pierce’s semiotic elements constitute an iconic interrelationship where the sign resembles the objects ([Grayson & Martinec, 2004](#)). [Schembri, Merrilees, and Kristiansen \(2010\)](#) show that identification of this type of interrelationships is aspirational since consumers want self association with signs which are desirable to them.

2.1.1 Shared consciousness of kind

It is the feeling that binds every individual to the other community members and the community brand and it is determined by two factors: legitimisation, the process of establishing a difference between true and false members, that is, those who have opportunistic behaviors and those who do not; and opposition to other brands. Members usually have a strong feeling against firms selling proprietary software, especially the Microsoft Corporation ([Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006](#)). For [Gusfield \(1978\)](#), one important element in a community is “consciousness of kind” which is the shared intrinsic connection felt among community members. [Weber \(1978\)](#) describes it as a shared knowing of belonging. [Muniz and O’Guinn \(2001\)](#) found that members of a community felt a strong connection with one another and they termed it as “they sort of know each other”

even if they have never met. This is the central facet of a brand community. They found that through processes of legitimacy and oppositional brand loyalty members of a brand community perpetuate their consciousness of kind. McAlexander et al. (2002) and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) found evidences of shared consciousness in brand communities. More importantly, these feelings of oneness exceed geographical boundaries which show that members felt belongingness to a large imagined community.

2.1.2 Shared rituals and traditions

These are processes carried out by community members that help to reproduce and transmit the meaning of the brand community indicators in and out of the community. Members relate to each other with the memory of major events in the history of the brand and they usually share certain behaviors, such as a specific language or way of dressing. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) and McAlexander et al. (2002) found shared rituals and traditions between brand community members and marketers both in computer mediated environments and in face-to-face contexts. Community members reinforce culture, history, and rituals of the community through processes of celebration of brand history, storytelling, advertising, and shared experiences. Also, most virtual communities create and use shared conventions and language (e.g., jargon, emoticons, or acronyms), maintain social roles, establish boundaries, enact rituals, show commitment to communal goals, and follow norms of interaction. These are one of the factors which unite the members of a community and represent vital social processes that bring and keep them together. This helps the meaning of the community be transmitted within and beyond the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Rituals and traditions are a symbolic form of communication that, owing to the satisfaction that members of the community experience through its repetition, is acted out overtime in a systematic fashion. Through their special meaning and their repetitive

nature, rituals contribute significantly to the establishment and preservation of a community's collective sense of self, which plays a role in building community identity. Rituals stabilize this identity by clarifying expected roles, delineating boundaries within and without community, and defining rules so that members know that “this is the way our community is” (Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

2.1.3 Moral responsibilities and Obligations to community

This reflects the feelings that create moral commitment among the community members. As a result of moral responsibility, there are two types of fundamental actions: integration and retention of members, which guarantees the community survival (e.g. by spreading bad experiences suffered by those individuals who chose a different brand); and support in the correct use of the brand (e.g. by sharing information about product properties). In cosmetic brand communities, this takes the form of the collective effort and social interactions carried out in order to develop and use the cosmetics brand, and the widespread use of cosmetic products among the community members. Thus, these communities provide consumer support with the ongoing use of the product. This community indicator is a felt sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole as well as to its members (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Moral responsibility has two main functions in communities which make it very important. First rituals contribute significantly to the establishment and preservation of a community's collective sense of self, which plays a role in building community identity. Second, rituals contribute significantly to the establishment and preservation of a community's collective sense of self, which plays a role in building community identity. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) and McAlexander et al. (2002) found that moral responsibility manifested itself in their communities.

2.2 Value creation practices

A new stream in the literature regards customers not as mere recipients of the products and values of the firm but as co-creators of value, competitive strategy and the firm's innovation processes (Franke & Piller, 2004; Schau et al., 2009). With a meta-analysis, Schau et al. (2009) identified four categories of practices through which customers co-create value in brand communities: social networking, impression management, community engagement, and brand use. They assert that people in brand communities are involved in such value creation practices that work together both to enhance the value people realize and to promote the collective health and welfare of social bodies centered on the brands. They believe that brand communities, manifested by their three indicators, positively influence these value creation practices. In fact, they argue that the three community communalities positively affect value creation practices especially in the context of social media which enhance communication, information dissemination and the capability of members to be in touch with each other. I elaborate more on these issues.

2.2.1 Social networking

They focus on creating, enhancing, and sustaining ties among brand community members (Schau et al., 2009). Welcoming, empathizing and governing are different social networking practices, which enhance similarities among members and homogeneity of brand communities (Schau et al., 2009). I believe social networking practices to be fostered by the community indicators (i.e., shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and obligations to society). Schau et al. (2009) bring exactly the same example (field note) for supporting social networking practices that Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) brought for supporting shared consciousness. This implies that these concepts

are highly related; moreover, social media could foster such practices as welcoming, empathizing and governing. However, there is no empirical support for it.

2.2.2 Community engagements

Community engagement is “the consumer’s intrinsic motivations to interact and cooperate with community members” (Algesheimer et al., 2005, p. 21). Interaction in social media contexts refers to activities such as sharing stories, photos, videos, liking and commenting on related materials in the community page. Community engagement also relates to the desirable effects that identifying with the brand community has on its members.

In my view, the concept of engagement goes beyond community participation; it is the process of working collaboratively with relevant partners who share common goals and interests. Although some researchers believe that the Internet, the World Wide Web and in general the new technologies make people increasingly detached from meaningful social relationships and less likely to engage in the community as they spend more time online (Davis, 2001; Gackenbach, 1998; Turkle, 1996), others reject this idea and say that “being wired” which they refer to being connected online has the potential to foster and build social associations and encourage community building (Dertouros, 1997). In particular the individuals who use internet communities to explore interests and gather data are found to be more, rather than less, socially engaged (Shah, Holbert, & Kwak, 2000). Thus I believe that communities in the context of social media have the capability to foster engagement.

2.2.3 Impression management practices

They are “activities that have an external, outward focus on creating favorable impressions of the brand, brand enthusiasts and brand community in the social universe beyond the brand

community’’ (Schau et al., 2009, p. 34). It includes practices such as evangelizing and justifying through which customers preach the brand, share good news about it and bring some arguments to encourage others to use the brand. Online communities foster impressionable facts about the brand through word-of-mouth communications and by sharing personal experiences. Consumers engage in these activities for altruistic nature or to attain higher status (Dichter, 1966; Gatignon & Robertson, 1986), but Kozinets et al. (2010) found that these intentions are more complex. Whatever their motivation, members of a community are involved in managing impressions activities. I believe that these activities are not only observable in social media communities, but are enhanced by the capabilities of social media.

2.4 Brand trust

Trust, from a business point of view, is defined by Morgan & Hunt (1994) as: “when one party has confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity” (Morgan & Hunt, 1999, p. 23). Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman (1992) define it as: “the willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence” (Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman, 1992, p. 315). These two definitions highlight the importance of reliance, integrity and trustworthiness of the parties involved in an exchange. Brand trust, is defined by Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman (1992) as: “the willingness of a consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function” (Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman, 1992, p. 315). From customer’s point of view, trust can be seen as expectations about the company’s trustworthiness that results from its skills, reliability or intentions. Moorman et al. (1992) highlight the importance of trust and define it as determinant for the relationship’s quality between the parties involved (Moorman et al., 1992, p. 315). When customers build trust toward a brand or a company, they also create positive thoughts and

feelings. For their next purchases, customers rely on their previous experiences and trust plays an important role influencing the purchase behavior. Additionally, Delgado-Ballester (2004) defined brand trust as “the feeling of security held by the consumer in his/ her interaction with the brand that is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer” (Delgado-Ballester, 2004, p.575). This highlighted the fact that trusts towards a certain brand or product is built during the time and is subject to developments. Doney & Cannon’s (1997) present another aspect of trust. The authors present trust in two forms. In the first one, trust relies on the fact that exchange partners provide a verbal or written proof that other partner can trust. For the second form, called benevolence, it means that a partner is interested in the other partner’s prosperity (Doney & Cannon, 1997, p. 36). This leads to the concept of trust, a sense of bi-directionality where both parties, the consumer and the brand for example, have their part to play in the other party’s well-being.

Brand trust is viewed as central in many studies (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Moorman et al., 1992). It is conceptualized as a notable factor in the firm success (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define brand trust as “the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function”. Brand trust arises after consumers’ evaluation of companies’ offerings. If companies provide beliefs of safety, honesty and reliability about their brands to consumers, brand trust will be generated subsequently (Doney & Cannon, 1997). It can be interpreted that brand trust is created and developed by direct experiences of consumers via brands. Marketers seek to achieve profit maximizations stemming from the loyalty of their customers in order to associate price premiums and increased market share (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). This concept, however, depends on another construct, brand trust, which is defined as “the confident expectations of the brand's reliability and

intentions” (Delgado---Ballester, Munuera---Alemán, & Yague-- Guillén,2003). Like many other marketing constructs, brand trust has also received a lot of attention from scholars Across various disciplines such as economics, psychology, sociology, management and marketing (Delgado et al., 2003), but still the study of brand trust has not flourished in the context of branding literature (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). This could possibly be accredited to the difficulty to integrate the various perspectives on trust and to find a consensus on its nature. However, researches have revealed that brand trust is an important factor to consider which connects to building strong brands and brand loyalty (Hunt, 1997; Srivastava, Shervani, & Fahey, 1998, 2001).

The main difference between brand trust and brand affect is; brand trust is viewed as a long process which can be occurred by thought and consideration of consumer experiences about the store while brand affect is consisted of impulsive feelings which can be formed, spontaneously (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Therefore brand trust can be discussed as a cognitive component (Casalo et al., 2007) which may induce emotional response, namely brand affect.

On the other hand, brand trust leads brand loyalty (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001). It is due to brand trust’s ability for creating highly valued relationship (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002). It shows that brand loyalty is part of the continual process of valuable and notable relationship which is produced by brand trust. Moreover literature shows support that brand trust is a determinant of loyalty (Wu et al., 2008; Berry, 1983).

2.4.1 Brand affect

Brand trust and brand affect are closely related dimensions. Like brand trust, brand affect has also been studied widely in marketing literature (Iglesias et al., 2011). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define brand affect as “brand’s potential to elicit a positive emotional response in the

average consumer as a result of its use”. In other words it can be described as consumers’ emotional response towards a brand in consequence of having an experience with the brand. Therefore I suggest that brand affect occurs under the favor of close relationship with the brand. Likewise, literature suggests that favorable and positive emotions are associated with the high level of brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002). It is shown that brand loyalty is greater under the condition of positive emotional affect that prompt consumers to enhance positive attitudes towards a brand (Dick & Basu, 2004). Many studies are empirically evident that brand affect has a significant role to create brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002; Sung & Kim, 2010).

2.5 Brand loyalty

Building and maintaining loyalty has been a central theme for many companies. They seek to maintain the strategic competitive leverage of loyal customers, as it provides them with various advantages, such as Premium pricing; greater bargaining powers with the distribution channels, reduced selling costs, stronger entry barriers to potential start-ups in the product or service category, along with strategic line and category extensions (Reichfeld, 1996). In order to understand the term of brand loyalty in the context of online brand community, the term and dimension of brand loyalty and loyalty itself must be defined. According to Aaker (1996) loyalty is created when experiencing a preference for a certain brand. The author defines brand loyalty as: “the degree of a consumer emotional attachment to a brand”. Loyalty can be bound to the brand but also the symbols or names (Aaker, 1996, p. 15). In Oliver’s study (1999) brand loyalty is defined as: “a deeply held commitment to repurchase or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive, the same brand or the same set

purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). Based on those two definitions, brand loyalty can be defined as a preference of costumers to repurchase a certain brand because of emotional attachment or commitment.

Aaker (1996: 8) defines *brand loyalty* is “A *measure of the attachment that a customer has to a brand*“. Brand loyalty indicates the existence of a bond between the customers and a certain brand and is often characterized by repeat purchases from customers. Minor and Mowen (2002:109) argues that loyalty can be based on actual purchase behavior of products associated with the proportion of the purchase. Based on the view that brand loyalty is defined as: the desire of consumers to make repeat purchases. Brand community researchers agree that one of the main functions, if not the main one, of a brand community is to make customers loyal to the brand (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; McAlexander & Schouten, 1998; McAlexander et al., 2002; Schau et al., 2009; Zhou et al., in press).

To be precise, loyalty may be defined as a non-random behaviour, expressed over time, which depends on psychological processes and closeness to brand commitment. According to Hallowell (1996), loyalty behaviours are explained by the belief that the value received from one seller is greater than the value available from other alternatives. In addition, satisfaction (Petrick and Backman, 2002) and commitment (Fullerton, 2003) also favour higher loyalty in the consumer. The literature has usually analyzed loyalty from two different perspectives:

attitudinal and behavioural (e.g. Bloemer and De Ruyter, 1998; Hallowell, 1996). This distinction implies that loyalty includes a psychological component, based on consumer feelings that motivate a general attachment to the products of an organization (Hallowell, 1996), and a behavioural one, based on aspects such as the frequency of visits to a store or the percentage of

expense (Nilsson and Olsen, 1995). However, due to the fact that measuring the psychological aspects of loyalty is usually difficult (Opperman, 2000), I only consider loyalty from a behavioural point of view which is the most habitual research practice (Nilsson and Olsen, 1995). However, despite qualitative evidence it is still unclear how the process of being more loyal happens in brand communities. Like researchers who refer to the power of online communities as a social structure, in building and enhancing trust and loyalty (Ba, 2001; Walden 2000), they argue that social media based brand communities enhance brand loyalty through the enhancement of brand trust. In fact, value creation practices affect brand trust through three mechanisms, enhanced by capabilities of facebook, and brand trust increases brand loyalty. Thus, brand trust would have a mediating role.

CHAPTER 3

HYPOTHESES AND RESEACH MODEL

3.1 Hypotheses

3.1.1 Antecedents of user behaviors

I believe social networking practices to be fostered by the community indicators (i.e., shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and obligations to society). Schau et al. (2009) bring exactly the same example (field note) for supporting social networking practices that Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) brought for supporting shared consciousness. This implies that these concepts are highly related; moreover, in my context, social media could foster such practices as welcoming, empathizing and governing. Muniz and Schau's (2005) study of the Apple Newton brand community found that even six years after Apple Computer Inc. had officially discontinued the Newton product; users still relied on themselves, as well as the larger community, to keep their Newtons operating and advocate the products' use to outsiders. During observing a jeep brand community, McAlexander et al. (2002) reported that participants shared their driving experiences in the form of ritual storytelling facilitated by a Jeep Brandfest event and skilled jeep drivers helped neophytes make a difficult stream crossing, which results in strengthening ties among all elements of brand community. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Social networking practices are positively influenced by the a) shared consciousness of kind, b) shared rituals and traditions, and c) sense of moral obligations of members of the community.

H2: Community engagement practices are positively influenced by the a) shared consciousness of kind, b) shared rituals and traditions, and c) sense of moral obligations of members of the community.

H3: Impression management practices are positively influenced by the a) shared consciousness of kind, b) shared rituals and traditions, and c) sense of moral obligations of members of the community.

Like researchers who refer to the power of online communities as a social structure, in building and enhancing trust and loyalty. Ba (2001) and Walden (2000) argue that social media based brand communities enhance brand loyalty through the enhancement of brand trust. In fact, value creation practices affect brand trust through social networking, community engagement and impression management, enhanced by capabilities of social media, and brand trust increases brand loyalty. Thus, brand trust would have a mediating role. All value creation practices increase the level of interactions between consumers and the product, the brand, other customers and marketers, all of which are elements of a brand community (McAlexander et al., 2002). Trust also involves a “calculative process” (Doney & Cannon, 1997, p37) related to the

value people receive from their relationships. So if people realize the utilitarian and hedonic values of their brand their trust would increase. In brand communities and through value creation practices, people develop close relationships and draw values from their long term interactions, which make them, trust and love the brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Zhou et al., in press). Based on these arguments I hypothesize:

H4: Social networking practices positively influence brand trust.

H5: Community engagement practices positively influence brand trust.

H6: Impression management practices positively influence brand trust.

Brand trust arises after consumers' evaluation of companies' offerings. If companies provide beliefs of safety, honesty and reliability about their brands to consumers, brand trust will be generated subsequently (Doney & Cannon, 1997). It can be interpreted that brand trust is created and developed by direct experiences of consumers via brands. 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 the 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 I refer to the literature on loyalty and trust, I 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. Brand trust has a significant impact on brand loyalty. According to Berry (1993) “trust is the basis for the loyalty). Therefore, trust is likely to lead to higher levels of loyalty among the partners. Sung and Kim (2010) add to this view that two components of brand trust have an impact on brand loyalty: expertise and trustworthiness. Here, trustworthiness must be understood as “consumer’s confidence in the brand quality performance” and expertise as the “extent to which a brand is perceived to be skillful and knowledgeable” (Sung & Kim, 2010, p. 644). Those two components arise from experiences that the consumers have with the brand and its products/services, and through time and repetition it will influence the loyalty of the consumers toward the brand. This concept of loyalty based on trust is also present in the work of Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) where the authors mention that trust can be considered as an antecedent of loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 83). Furthermore, this will be explained in a more detailed way in the next chapter, brand trust can be considered an important link between brand loyalty or brand commitment. Trust in online brand community has also an impact on the brand loyalty. For Laroche et al. (2013) trust can play the role of a mediator in order to canalize the community effects into brand loyalty (Laroche et al., 2013, p. 83). This follows the previous idea that brand trust leads to brand loyalty. Trust must therefore be instrumentalized as a mediator between members of the community and the brand itself. Laroche et al. (2013) advance that “building and enhancing brand communities and consumer experience within the context of brand community is to make customers loyal to the brand” (Laroche et al.,

2013, p. 78). They also present two factors essential to increase brand trust and consequently improve brand loyalty: the constant exchanges of information and a long-term relationship between consumers and the brand.

The main difference between brand trust and brand affect is that brand trust is viewed as a long process which can be occurred by thought and consideration of consumer experiences about store while brand affect is consisted of impulsive feelings which can be formed, spontaneously (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Therefore brand trust can be discussed as a cognitive component (Casalo et al., 2007) which may induce emotional response, namely brand affect.

On the other hand, brand trust leads brand loyalty (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001). It is due to brand trust's ability for creating highly valued relationship (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002). It shows that brand loyalty is part of the continual process of valuable and notable relationship which is produced by brand trust. Moreover literature shows support that brand trust is a determinant of loyalty (Wu et al., 2008; Berry, 1983). The relationship between trust and loyalty has been examined in different contexts. It is well-supported that trust is one antecedent of loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Chiu et al., 2010; Harris & Goode, 2004; Kim et al., 2011; Zhou et al., 2011b). We also hypothesize this relationship to test it in the context of social media based brand communities and to test if brand trust has a partial or full mediating role based on the literature review, I suggest the following hypotheses;

H7: Brand trust has positive effect on consumers' brand affect.

H8: Brand trust has positive effect on consumers' brand loyalty.

Brand affect occurs under the favor of close relationship with brand. Likewise, literature suggests that favorable and positive emotions are associated with high level of brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002). It is showed that brand loyalty is greater under the condition of positive emotional affect that prompt consumers to enhance positive attitudes towards a brand (Dick & Basu, 2004). Many studies empirically showed that brand affect has a significant role to create brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002; Sung & Kim, 2010). In line with this discussion I propose the following hypotheses.

H9: Consumers' brand affect has positive effect on consumers' brand loyalty

3.2 Research model

Based on the literature review, I proposed the research model as follows. The model has three parts. The first part is brand community antecedents such as shared consciousness of kind, shared rituals and tradition, and moral responsibility and obligation. The second part is the value creation practices such as social networking, community engagement and impression management, and their effects on brand trust, brand affect and brand loyalty.

All the hypotheses of this research are illustrated in (figure 1.)

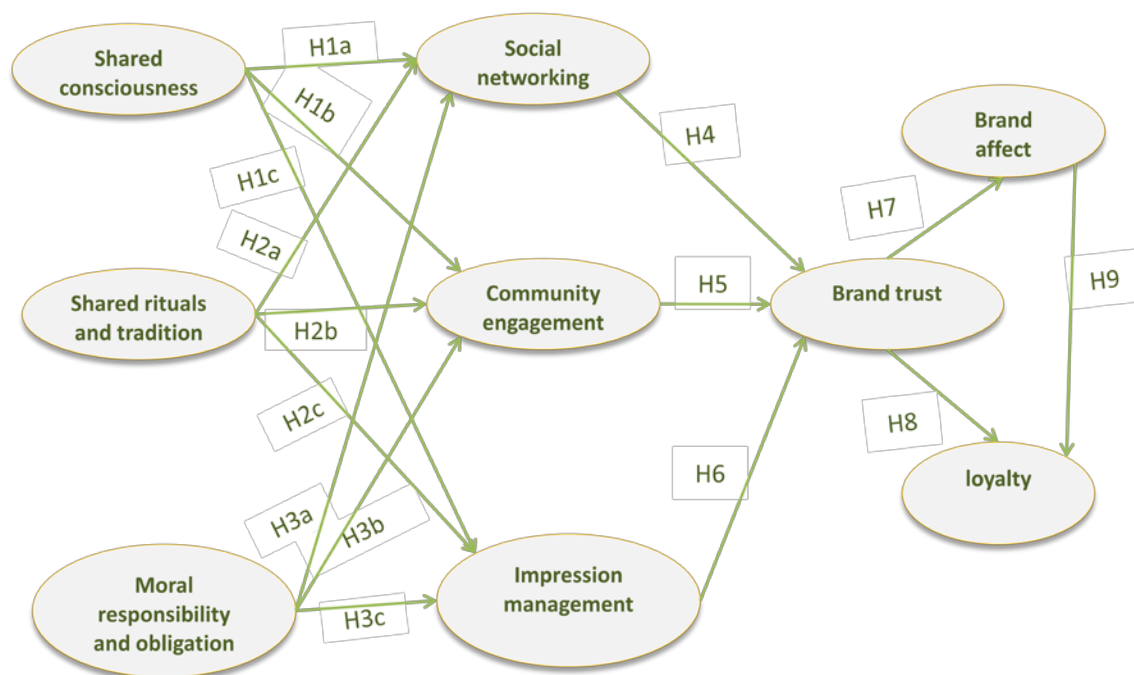


Figure 1: Conceptual model of the effects of brand community.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

4.1 Sampling

An online survey questionnaire was created with Google Forms (www.google.com/forms/about/) and then was sent via the network platform (facebook) which helped in the collection of the data. Participants are all Ugandans. Uganda's internet users account for 45.6% of all population and facebook subscribers are 2,200,000 or 5.3% as of June, 2017 (internet world statistics, 2017).

A total of 236 responses were obtained. Except 5 with insincere and incomplete reply, 231 were used for estimating the proposed research model.

Sample profile is shown in Table 1. 47.5% of the total respondents were male and 52.5% were female. 3 respondents are under 18 years old (1.3 %) and 5 people are over 45 years old (2.2 %). Respondents between 25 to 34 years old form the greatest percentage of (57 %), others are 18 to 24 years old (23.9 %), 35 to 45 years old (15.7 %) additionally, 121 (52.6%) of the participants were bachelor's degree holders, 75 (32.6%) were master, 16 (7%) high school, 10 (4.3%) doctors and 8 (3.5%) associate degree respectively. On the other hand, regarding their employment status, 41 (17.8%) are students, 101 (43.9%) employed for wages, 47 (24.8%) are self-employed, 29 (12.6%) are unemployed and 2 (0.9%) are retired.

Table 1. Sample profile

	Demographic variable	Frequency	%
Gender	male	105	47.5
	female	126	52.5
Age	Under 18	3	1.3
	18 to 24 years	55	23.9
	25 to 34 years	131	57
	35 to 45 years	36	15.7
	Over 45 years	5	2.2
Education	High school	16	7
	Associate's Degree	8	3.5
	Bachelor's Degree	121	52.6
	Master's Degree	75	32.6
	Doctoral Degree	10	4.3
Employment status	Student	41	17.8
	Employed for wages	101	43.9
	Self employed	57	24.8
	Unemployed	29	12.6
	Retired	2	0.9

4.1.1 Measurement

All constructs were measured based on the questionnaire developed from the literature review and the constructs in the questionnaires are 9 including, shared consciousness of kind, shared rituals and tradition, moral responsibilities and obligation to community, social networking, community engagement, impression management, brand trust, brand affects and brand loyalty.

Five point Likert scales rating from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, were used to measure all the constructs. The items for shared consciousness, shared rituals and traditions, and obligations to society were derived from the definitions given by [Muniz and O'Guinn \(2001\)](#) and they are consisted of two items each. The items were tested in a three factor confirmatory model and an acceptable fit was obtained, with Cronbach's alphas of 0.787, 0.668 and 0.557 respectively. The items of social networking, community engagement and Impression management were constructed from the definition given by [Schan et al. \(2009\)](#) and the scales developed by [Laroche, Habibi, Richard, and Sankaranarayanan \(2012\)](#). Each having cronbach's alpha of 0.695, 0.943 and 0.943 respectively.

Brand trust It was measured as a three-item index based on the four item index originally developed by [Chaudhuri and Holbrook \(2001\)](#) using a 5-point rating of agreement with three statements: "I trust my brand to give me everything I expect out of it," "I rely on this brand," and "My brand never disappoints me." The Cronbach's alpha for this index is 0.567. brand affects was derived by [Goodhardt, and Barwise 1990](#), and was measured by three similar rated items with the cronbach's alpha of 0.510 Brand loyalty it was derived from [Delgado-Ballester, Manuera-Aleman, and Yague-Guillen \(2003\)](#). The four items are measured on a eight 5-point Likert scale characterized by a cronbach's alpha of 0.623.

Table 2. Measurement items

Construct	Items	Item's content
Shared consciousness of kind	Sc1	I feel an intrinsic connection with members of the community.
	Sc3	I feel a sense of belonging with other members of the community.
Shared rituals and tradition	Tt1	Brand community develops the shared rituals and traditions among its members.
	Tt2	The shared rituals and traditions are a vital social process which unifies community members and brings individuals together.
Moral responsibility/obligations to community	Obsoc2	The community makes efforts in integrating and retaining members.
	Obsoc3	I feel responsible for the community members and other members.
Social networking	SN1	I keep in touch with members by notification.
	Sn2	I greet other members of the community often.
	Sn3	The community recognizes special occasions and sends members greetings
Community engagement	Ce1	I benefit from participating in the community activities.
	Ce2	I feel good and motivated after participating in the activities of the communities.
	Ce3	I feel able to reach my personal goals after participating in the activities of the community.
	Ce4	I feel able and motivated to support other members after participating in the community.
Impression management	IM1	Members shared brand good news.
	IM2	Members actively defend/refute the actions of the company's brand
	IM3	Members actively defend the brand reputation.
Brand affects	Ba2	The community makes me feel entertained.
	Ba3	I feel relief after I purchase a brand from this community.
	Ba4	I think the community makes me feel at peace.
Brand trust	BT1	I am confident of the brands reliability and intentions.
	BT2	I rely on my brand.
	BT4	This is an honest brand.
Brand loyalty	L1	I consider myself loyal to the brand.
	L2	If the brand is not available at the store I would buy the same brand from some other store.
	L3	I am willing to pay more for my brand.
	L4	I intend to keep purchasing the products of this brand in the future.

4.2 Data analysis and results

4.2.1 Exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to test the internal consistency of the constructs, that is, how closely items in one construct are related to each other. By using SPSS, an EFA with varimax rotation and nine factor loadings were run. Item that was highly correlated with more than one factor was removed. Consequently, only one item was deleted leaving 26 items accepted.

As a result, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index, which is a measure of sampling adequacy, was .925 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at $p = .000$. As shown in table 3, each factor loading is highly correlated with only one construct. Cronbach's alpha for each construct is also acceptable, ranging from .787 for product knowledge (PK) to .900 for community participation (CP). All of them were greater than the cut-off level of .06. Therefore, all of the items in each construct have a high internal consistency. Furthermore, the two constructs with items created by the author also have high Cronbach's alpha coefficients (.826 and .793 correspondingly), which are also acceptable.

Table 3. Results of exploratory factor analysis

items	Factor loadings									Cronbach's Alpha	Eigenvalue	Cumulative Explained Variance
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
Sc1	-0.40	-0.43	.035	-.049	.893	.044	.035	.049	.007	.787	4.327	16.644
Sc3	-.043	-.040	-.007	.010	.900	-.090	.054	.026	-.025			
Tt1	-.106	.080	-.086	.104	-.091	-.065	.201	.059	.759	.557	2.346	25.667
Tt2	-.016	.007	-.031	-.089	.061	.029	-.143	.000	.856			
Obsoc2	.057	.081	-.032	-.124	.025	-.045	.827	.097	.038	.668	2.165	33.996
Obsoc3	.014	-.027	.049	-.003	.062	-.003	.870	-.062	-.004			
SN1	.035	.098	-.190	.665	-.082	.058	.066	-.083	-.106	.695	2.057	41.906
Sn2	.014	-.025	.218	.810	.019	.014	-.142	.006	.051			
Sn3	-.070	.021	.049	.855	.023	.028	-.067	-.036	.057			
Ce1	.926	.153	-.025	.014	.000	.010	.040	-.034	-.035	.943	1.804	48.845
Ce2	.958	.142	.000	.000	-.064	-.037	.045	-.026	-.085			
Ce3	.794	.218	.075	-.015	.028	.093	-.050	.003	.057			
Ce4	.951	.107	-.018	-.030	-.064	-.082	.053	-.017	-.082			
IM1	.235	.850	-.058	.086	.042	.053	.045	.096	.039	.943	1.614	55.054
IM2	.189	.942	.032	0.22	-.077	.030	.012	.042	.033			
IM3	.185	.952	.034	.000	-.067	.015	.012	.041	.023			
Ba2	.098	-.063	.194	-.126	.105	.253	.084	.597	.174	.510	1.433	60.564
Ba3	-.096	.078	.029	.062	.032	.117	-.020	.788	.021			
Ba4	-.029	.112	-.164	-.091	-.022	-.112	-.001	.681	-.072			
BT1	.100	.198	-.011	.072	.178	.579	-.126	.145	.085	.567	1.325	65.661
BT2	.004	-.057	.012	.083	-.031	.752	.071	.086	.035			
BT4	-.106	.010	-.135	-.055	-.152	.780	-.041	-.059	.000			
L1	-.025	.144	.684	.101	.009	-.159	-.010	-.049	.039	.623	1.162	70.130
L2	.011	.012	.759	-.096	.121	-.150	.051	-.120	.031			
L3	.040	-.125	.717	-.043	-.024	.002	-.036	.081	-.060			
L4	-.003	-.008	.504	.115	-.066	.227	.020	.066	-.138			

4.2.2 Confirmatory factor analysis

To test the construct validity, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was run via AMOS. Poor factor loadings were found for two items of brand community measures (ob1, Sc2. Sc4, Tt3 and BT3 both are less than 0.4) so I dropped them out and run the model again. I found good fit indices for the CFA model including all latent variables assuming they are correlated (further analysis shows this is a true assumption since correlations among all variables are significantly greater than zero).

As presented in table 4, all the factor loadings of the confirmatory model were significant (at p value = .000). The model Chi-square was 341.735, degrees of freedom (df) = 202 and Chi-square/df = 1.692 (< 2) at p value = .000 suggests that the model is acceptable.

The goodness of fit index (GFI) = .889; normed fit index (NFI) = .903; and comparative fit index (CFI) = .957 also confirm that the model is suitable because they are close to 0.9 besides, the root means square residual (RMR) = .055 (<.080), is considered acceptable.

Table 4. Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Constructs	Items	Standard Regression coefficient	Standard Error	t value	P value
Shared consciousness of kind	Sc1	.652			
	Sc3	1.020	.200	3.364	.000
Shared rituals & traditions	Tt1	1.698			
	Tt2	.228	57.966	.248	.804
Moral responsibilities & obligations	Obsoc2	.901			
	Obsoc3	.562	.483	3.302	.000
Social networking	SN1	.405			
	Sn2	.735	.302	5.542	.000
	Sn3	.884	.498	4.920	.000
Community engagement	Ce1	.915	.034	29.588	.000
	Ce2	.999	.020	53.236	.000
	Ce3	.705	.049	14.599	.000
	Ce4	.967			
Impression management	IM1	7.85	.041	18.883	.000
	IM2	.983	.015	65.153	.000
	IM3	1.000			
Brand affects	Ba2	.463			
	Ba3	.766	.737	3.055	.002
	Ba4	.354	.196	3.632	.000
Brand trust	BT1	.391			
	BT2	.604	.375	3.985	.000
	BT4	.680	.401	4.004	.000
Brand loyalty	L1	.557	.233	5.483	.000
	L2	.731	.286	5.351	.000
	L3	.553			
	L4	.304	.150	3.487	.000
Model fit indices	Chi-square =370.7 ;Degrees of freedom =.281 ; Probability level = .000; GFI = .893 ; AGFI = .867 ; RMR = .049 ; NFI = .886; IFI=.970 CFI =.969 ; RMSEA =.037				

With the standardized regression coefficients, average variance extracted (AVE) values were calculated as indicators of convergence. As shown in table 5, almost all the AVE values were larger than .05 except for the 3 variables which are below .5 but greater than .3 (brand affect, brand trust and brand loyalty) which suggests that on average, less than 50% error remains in the items. By running a discriminant validity test, the author discovered that all AVE values were greater than the squared correlations among the constructs. It implies that the results are acceptable for the CFA model.

Table 5. AVE and squared correlations

Constructs	Shared Consciousness of kind	Shared rituals and traditions	Moral responsibility And obligation to community	Social networking practices	Community engagement	Impression management	Brand affects	Brand trust	Brand loyalty
Shared Consciousness of kind	0.73								
Shared rituals and traditions	-0.285	0.963							
Moral responsibility and obligation to community	0.078	0.451	0.56						
Social networking practices	0.329	0.468	0.404	0.50					
Community engagement	-0.129	-0.06	0.832	0.027	0.816				
Impression management	-0.108	-0.092	0.862	0.034	0.063	0.860			
Brand affects	-0.262	-0.152	-0.003	-0.002	-0.010	0.075	0.309		
Brand trust	0.158	0.019	0.153	0.173	0.025	0.008	0.017	0.327	
Brand loyalty	0.008	0.017	0.025	0.004	0.013	0.015	0.008	0.178	0.316

Note: All coefficients are significant at $p < 0.01$. But 3 coefficients brand trust, brand affect and brand loyalty is less than .05.

4.2.3 Hypotheses testing

By using structural equation model (SEM) method via AMOS, all hypotheses in the proposed model were tested. The model fit indices were also calculated: Chi-square = 370.7, df = 281, p value = .000; GFI = .893, RMR = .049, CFI = .969, IFI = .970, TLI = .965, and RMSEA = .037.

These indexes suggest that the model is acceptable.

Out of 15 hypotheses, 10 were statistically supported while the other 5 were not supported as shown in table 6. Hypothesis 1 stating the relationship between shared consciousness of kind and social networking has the p value = .944, thus is not supported statistically. Hypothesis 2 showing the relationship between shared consciousness and community engagement with a coefficient of .100 is supported significantly. Shared consciousness of kind has a positive effect on impression management with coefficient of .350, so hypothesis 3 is supported. The relationship between shared ritual and tradition with social networking as in hypothesis 4 is not significant at p value .232

The effect of shared rituals and tradition on community engagement is significant with a coefficient of .029 making hypothesis 5 supported. However, hypothesis 6 showing the correlation between shared rituals & tradition and impression management is not significant with the p value = .284. Hypotheses 7 and 8 showing the relationship between moral responsibilities and obligation and social networking and moral responsibilities and obligation and community engagement are both marginally significant and have the coefficients of .046 and .075 respectively. The effect of moral responsibilities and obligation on impression management is significant with coefficient .124, so hypothesis 9 is supported. The relationship between brand affects and social networking (hypothesis 10) is not supported with a coefficient .679. On the

other hand the effect of brand affects on community engagement with the coefficient .083 and brand affects on impression management with the coefficient .088 are all marginally significant therefore supporting hypothesis 11 and 12 respectively. The effect of brand trust on brand affects is significant with the coefficient .032 making hypothesis 13 supported.

On the contrary, the effect of brand loyalty on brand affects is not supported with a coefficient .721. However the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty is positively significant with the coefficient .062, making hypothesis 15 supported.

Table 6. Hypothesis testing

Research hypothesis		estimate	S.E	Standardized coefficients	t value	p value	Results
H1	Shared consciousness → Social networking	.002	.034	.066	.070	.944	Not supported
H2	Shared consciousness → Community engagement	-.089	.054	-.128	-1.647	.100	supported
H3	Shared consciousness → Impression management	-.102	.057	-.139	1.781	.075	supported
H4	Shared ritual and traditions → Social networking	.090	.075	.035	1.195	.232	Not supported
H5	Shared rituals and traditions → community engagement	.258	.118	-.061	-2.182	.029	supported
H6	Shared rituals and traditions → impression management	.122	.114	.027	1.072	.284	Not supported
H7	Moral responsibilities and obligation → social networking	-.122	.061	-.185	-1.999	.046	supported
H8	Moral responsibilities and obligations → community engagement	.153	.086	.142	1.782	.075	supported
H9	Moral responsibilities and obligations → impression management	.135	.088	.119	1.538	.124	supported
H10	social networking → Brand trust	-.032	.078	-.035	-.414	.679	Not supported
H11	community engagement → Brand trust	-.087	.050	-.152	-1.735	.083	supported
H12	impression management → Brand trust	.080	.047	.147	1.704	.088	supported
H13	Brand trust → brand affects	.171	.080	.246	2.141	.032	supported
H14	Brand affects → brand loyalty	.030	.084	.035	.357	.721	Not supported
H15	Brand trust → brand loyalty	-.275	.148	-.220	-1.868	.062	supported

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion of the results

This study looked at the fast growing phenomenon of brand communities established on social media. Drawing on the literature on brand community, I proposed a model of the effects of brand community on shared community identities, value creation practices and the way they convert to brand loyalty through brand trust. Using SEM I found support for the model and most of the hypotheses. I found that brand communities established on social media enhance feelings of community among members and contribute to creating value for both members and the company. Furthermore; the model shows how brand loyalty is increased in brand communities. The whole model shows that value creation practices enhance loyalty through brand trust as a mediator, only two of the value creation practices (community engagement and impression management) contribute to brand trust. Therefore, social media need to create more values by increasing the benefits of the community and the brand to members remain loyal to the community.

Concerning the fast growing phenomenon of brand communities established on social media, Laroche et al. (2012) proposed a model of the effects of brand community on brand community identities, value creation practices and the way they convert to brand loyalty through brand trust and brand affect. Contrary to my findings the results show that brand affect is not a mediating factor into deepening brand loyalty. This paper investigated value creation practices on brand trust, brand affects and loyalty. Contrary to the expectations, findings show that only one of the practices (social networking) does not contribute to brand trust. According to Laroche et al.

(2012), the effects of practices in social media--based brand communities evolve over time. Therefore, the effects of these practices may not have evolved enough to significantly affect brand trust and loyalty. Since the concept and prevalence of social media is new in the world, and especially in the context of my study, the effects are emerging as time goes on and consumer engagement in the activities of social media deepens. The nature of practices may also cause differences. That is why the results of this study differ from those of Laroche et al. (2012). The model of Laroche et al. (2012) developed shows how brand loyalty is increased in brand communities. The whole model shows brand trust mediated between loyalty, and value creation practices enhancing loyalty. My finding fully supported the mediating role of brand trust. Furthermore, Laroche et al. (2012) mainly concentrated on general notions and concepts in the brand community and social media literature. However, this study investigates more variables, brand practices, which in turn might have affected the results.

Contrary to the previous study, my finding shows that the effect of shared consciousness on impression management is significant. This is in line with Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) legitimacy, an element of shared consciousness, exists for some brand communities but not for others. The effects of shared rituals and tradition on social networking and impression management are found not to be significant thus making hypothesis H4 and H6 not supported. In this article, I demonstrated the effects of brand communities established on the platform of social media on the underlying elements and practices in communities as well as on brand trust and brand loyalty. I believe that due to the importance, uniqueness and rapid growth of social media, marketers and researchers should pay special attention to this phenomenon and examine well established notions and theories in the social media contexts. To sum up briefly, from my findings it seems appropriate to echo the optimism of brand community researchers such as

McAlexander et al. (2002), Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) and Algesheimer et al. (2005) and to suggest that social media-based brand communities offer brand owners the ability to enhance value, brand trust, brand loyalty and feelings of community among members. Companies may do well to take advantage of the opportunities that such brand communities present.

I added another new path H7 then tested for the construct reliability and the results as shown below Chi-square = 369.917, degrees of freedom = 280, Probability level = .000

Then I later calculated the critical values differences between the original fits and the new fits and the results show support for the first model being better than the new model making the first model the accepted model for this study.

5.2 Managerial Implications

My study contributes to existing brand community knowledge in several ways and has theoretical implications. First, I extended the concept of brand community to social media and created more insights on this important phenomenon. Recently, the uniqueness of social media has been acknowledged by researchers as a distinct research domain (e.g., Hu & Kettinger, 2008), so my study provides more insights into this domain. Second, I developed a nomological network that shows how a community affects community indicators, practices, brand trust and brand loyalty; then I tested it in the context of social media. Although, some of the previous researchers showed qualitatively the existence of such effects in brand communities (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), I modeled these effects in online environments, and tested the model quantitatively. My findings explicitly show how practices could affect brand loyalty as their relative weights. For example, I show that brand communities

affect loyalty through value creation practices (impression management and community engagement) through brand trust. However, in interpreting the results I should be cautious because of the apprenticeship effects of such practices. Third, I created new scales to measure some of the constructs which could be used by other researchers.

This work has important practical implications for managers. The vast reach, low cost and popularity of social media are prompting all brand managers to take advantage of such characteristics, so that they, almost blindly, want to be on social media. Our findings help them have more insights into this process. First, it shows that brand communities based on social media have the same advantages and benefits as offline brand communities. They positively influence the shared consciousness, shared rituals and obligations to society of community members. Furthermore, they result in enhancing value creation practices. Second, my findings show that if managers wish to enhance brand loyalty, they have to promote community impressions management and community engagement practices in their brand communities. Impression management practices refer to disseminating information activities that help members more optimally use their branded product; impressions management involves practices that manage external impressions and images of the brand (Schau et al., 2009). Obviously these activities could be promoted easily with social media capabilities of sharing information and connecting people. Another important observation from the model is the relative importance of obligations to society. The path coefficients from obligations to society to value creation practices are larger than the coefficients of other paths. This implies that marketers could enhance value in communities by emphasizing obligations and commitment to society. The more members feel committed and obligated to society the more they would get involved in practices that create value for the community.

My findings illuminate opportunities to grow, not simply exploit, “customer competence” (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000), and thereby build more co-creative (Vargo and Lusch 2005) brand partners. This research re-affirms the importance of encouraging practices among brand communities (Bullet point 2007; Prospero 2007). More significantly, it suggests how. Companies wishing to encourage co-creation should foster a broad array of practices, not merely customization, as is the current focus of open source and toolkit based approaches (Etgar 2008; Franke and Pillar 2004; Prügler and Schreier 2006; von Hippel 2005).

5.3 Limitations and directions for future research

The author has mostly faced several limitations and constraints during the process of primary data extraction. As the majority of respondents are expected to be Ugandan facebook users, this would mean that facebook community page is the only research object therefore the obvious limitation could possibly be the fact of generalizability. For further research works, this research could be extended to other social network sites like twitter, blogs and other people.

Furthermore, I showed that brand communities based on social media can enhance feelings of community and value creation practices. Regarding my goals, I mainly concentrated on general notions and concepts in the brand community and social media literatures. However, in the future researchers may consider more variables and factors to produce deeper insights. For example, potential moderators and mediators such as brand type, culture, structure and type of communities as well as the differences in social media platforms functionality and features (Kietzmann et al., 2011) could be investigated.

However, it should be noted that brand communities based on social media might not be easy to manage. In this environment, customers are more powerful than before. They easily can interact, speak and broadcast their ideas to each other while companies would have increasingly less ability to manage the information available about them in the new space (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In addition, consumers may get involved in online complaints with forming protest websites or weblogs if they are dissatisfied, or upset with the brand (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Thus, as businesses decide to establish or enhance online social media based communities, they should be cautious about their potential consequences. Accordingly, more research is needed to study and analyze those consequences and introduce effective techniques to manage communities in such environments. An interesting avenue for research is to investigate the dynamics of brand communities based on social media. For example, I mentioned that the effects of value creation practices evolve over time (Schau et al., 2009); however, I do not know how these effects act over time and how they develop.

So I suggest longitudinal studies to enable researchers to follow the changes in the community and compare the results at different times.

This study used impression management as one of the value creation practices which is not related to the components of brand community but instead related to the brand so further research may use variables related to the brand community components.

This research was conducted in brand community generally where the respondents are to assume any best brand of their choices they have followed in brand community, further research could single out one specific brand for better results.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Two filter questions will be at the beginning of the survey to make sure respondents qualify for the research.

1. Do you use your social media account at least once a week?

Yes No

2. Do you follow at least one brand on social media?

Yes No

(Following these two filter questions, the survey would proceed as follows)

3. Do you feel an intrinsic connection with members of the community?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

4. Do there exist difference in a general sense of shared consciousness of kind between members and non members of the community?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

5. Do you feel a sense of belongings with other members of the community?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

6. Do membership of a brand community increases their consciousness of kind?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

7. Does brand community develop the shared rituals and traditions among its members?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

8. Are the shared rituals and traditions vital social processes which unify community members and bring individuals together?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

9. Do they circulate shared rituals and traditions concept among the community?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

10. Do members of the community assist/advise other members of the same community about the proper use of the brand?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

Does the community make efforts in integrating and retaining members?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

11. Do you feel responsible for the community members and other members?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

12. Does the community collect your opinion about the service/products?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

13. Do you greet other members of the community often?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

14. Does the community recognizes special occasions and sends members greetings?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

15. Does the community provide you with information regarding products, members, etc?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

16. Have you benefited from participating in the community activities?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

17. Do you feel good and motivated after participating in the activities of the communities?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

18. Do you feel able to reach your personal goals after participating in the activities of the community?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

19. Do you feel able and motivated to support other members after participating in the community?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

20. Do members share the brand “good news”?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

21. Do members actively defend/refute the actions of the company’s brand management?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

22. Do members actively defend the brand reputation?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

23. Does the community make you feel aroused?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

24. Does the community make you feel entertained?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

25. Do you feel relief after you purchase a brand from this community?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

26. Do you think the community makes you feel at peace?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

27. Are you confident of the brands reliability and intentions?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

28. Do you rely on your brand?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

29. Have you been disappointed with your brand?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

30. Is this an honest brand?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

31. Do you consider yourself to be loyal to the brand?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

32. If the brand is not available at the store would you buy the same brand from some other store?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

33. Are you willing to pay more for your brand?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

34. Do you intend to keep on purchasing the products of this brand in the future?

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

Demographic questions:

35. What is your age?

1. Under 18 years
2. 18 to 24 years
3. 25 to 34 years
4. 35 to 45 years
5. Over 45 years

36. What is your gender?

1. Male
2. Female

37. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

1. High school
2. Associate's Degree
3. Bachelor's Degree
4. Master's Degree
5. Doctoral Degree

38. What is your employment status?

1. Student
2. Employed for wages
3. Self-employed
4. Unemployed
5. Retired

