

# Enhancing Consumers' Stickiness to Online Brand Communities as an Innovative Relationship Marketing Strategy

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## ABSTRACT

With the popularity of social networking sites, enterprises start to establish their own brand communities to manage and maintain customer relationships. Consumer stickiness is regarded as one of the critical determinants for the success of a brand community. Enhancing consumers' stickiness to online communities can lead to repurchase behavior and positive word-of-mouth and thereby increase sales volume and customer recruitment. This study endeavors to explore the antecedents of consumers' stickiness to a SNS-based online brand community from the aspects of enterprises and consumers. Data were collected through online questionnaires conducted on Do-Survey website with a hyperlink posted on the PTT, the largest BBS website of Taiwan. After excluding non-usable data, the final sample size was 516. The results indicated that information quality, perceived value, and community identification have positive effects on consumers' stickiness to online brand communities. Moreover, stickiness to online brand communities has positive impacts on customer loyalty.

## KEYWORDS

Customer Loyalty, Online Brand Community, Social Networking Site, Stickiness

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social networking site (SNS), e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, has become a popular communication tool for enterprises due to the advantages of synchronous interaction and communication with multiple parties and without geographical constraints (Kaur, Dhir, & Rajala, 2016). Specifically, for small and medium sized enterprises (SME), the use of SNS can bring them a lot of benefits, such as increasing exposure, enhancing brand attractiveness, improving sales, reducing marketing expenses, and developing loyal fans (Icha & Edwin, 2016; Kaur et al., 2016). SNS, hence, is adopted by various enterprises as an important practice for relationship marketing in both business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) contexts (Icha & Edwin, 2016). Nowadays, more and more companies present themselves on SNSs by establishing brand communities to maintain continuous interaction with existing and potential customers to influence their brand choices (Banerjee & Banerjee, 2015) and cultivate brand loyalty (Kaur et al., 2016; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) defined a brand community as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (p.412). Through the computer-mediated communication pattern of a brand community, enterprises can collect customers' information (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) to facilitate innovation of their products and

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services (Kaur et al., 2016; Schau, Muñoz, & Arnould, 2014). Brand community can be regarded as a kind of open innovation with knowledge from external sources. For example, LEGO has quested and adopted open innovation from consumers to improve its successful LEGO robotic kit Mindstorms, and skinnyCorp's Threadless has employed user innovation to manufacture consumer-designed and critiqued T-shirts (Schau et al., 2014). Within a brand community, consumers can interact with the brand, with company employees, and with other consumers (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), and thereby their needs, wants and opinions can be heard and be satisfied. Consequently, a brand community is crucial for developing new product or service and managing consumer-brand, consumer-consumer, and consumer-marketer relationships as well (Banerjee & Banerjee, 2015; Kelley & Alden, 2015; Simon, Brexendorf, & Fassnacht, 2016).

Due to the critical role of brand community in the firm's innovation process and on relationship marketing, the issues of online brand community have received much attention from both researchers and practitioners (Banerjee & Banerjee, 2015; Kang, Shin, & Gong, 2016; Schau et al., 2014; Zheng, Cheung, Lee, & Liang, 2015). Previous studies into online brand community are mostly concentrated on consumer engagement (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Hammedi, Kandampully, Zhang, & Bouquiaux, 2015; Kang et al., 2016; Simon et al., 2016; Zheng et al., 2015), brand website interactivity (Kelley & Alden, 2015), knowledge sharing (Sloan, Bodey, & Gyrd-Jones, 2015), and loyalty to online brand community (Zheng et al., 2015). However, the research focuses are mainly centered on the brand community utilizing the platforms of websites but relatively neglects that using social media platforms, e.g. Facebook (Sloan et al., 2015). As Facebook is the most popular SNS for enterprises to build their online brand communities (Zheng et al., 2015), it calls for more studies to investigate consumer engagement behavior in a SNS-based brand community.

For most enterprises, the primary objectives for building online brand communities are to advertise products or services, communicate with customers, enhance brand loyalty, and achieve competitive advantages (Kang et al., 2016; Zheng et al., 2015). Therefore, they have to develop appropriate marketing strategies to attract potential customers and to cultivate existing customers' loyalty to their brand communities. "Stickiness" is indicated to have impacts on enterprises' profits (Lin, Hu, Sheng, & Lee, 2010) and website loyalty (Roy, Lassar, & Butaney, 2014), and thus, how to induce and increase consumer's stickiness to a SNS-based brand community will determine the survival and success of an enterprise. Nevertheless, scant studies have attempted to explore the factors associated with consumer's stickiness to online brand communities in the SNS-based context. Furthermore, females and males are often different in the ways of assessing information (Liu, Li, Zhang, & Huang, 2017), and females tend to be affected in their decision making by the information achieved from the internet (Husain, Ghufuran, & Chaubey, 2016). Accordingly, researchers should pay attention to females' engagement in online brand communities to provide valuable insights for the researchers and practitioners, whose interests are on luxury cosmetic domain or beauty, which is with a recent market growth but with limited academic attention (Gannon & Prothero, 2016).

Given the aforementioned research gaps, this study endeavors to explore the factors associated with female consumers' stickiness to an SNS-based online brand community by integrating both enterprise- and consumer-related dimensions. The antecedents of consumers' stickiness can be transformed as innovative practices where businesses can operate to embed in their marketing strategy to enhance the relationship with female consumers. In the dimension of consumers, what factors drive them to engage in an online brand community and the reasons why they would like to stick to it are crucial to enterprises. Discovering consumers' motivations to engage in a brand community can help practitioners to adopt more useful means to interact with their potential and existing customers and thereby cultivate customer loyalty. In the dimension of enterprises, building a brand community facilitates them to manage relationships with customers and acquire a precious source of innovation to their companies (Simon et al., 2016). Banerjee and Banerjee (2015) claimed that marketers have to keep the consumer base of their brand community intact and maintain their interest as well as develop new offerings of the brand. Consequently, enterprises need to understand consumers well and employ proper marketing practices accordingly to enhance consumers' stickiness to their brand community.

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