

# The Role of Online Brand Community Experience in Driving Brand Evangelism for Car Brands in Thailand

บทบาทของประสบการณ์เกี่ยวกับแบรนด์ในชุมชนออนไลน์ในการขับเคลื่อนการเป็นสาวกของแบรนด์รถยนต์ในประเทศไทย

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## Abstract

The purposes of this research were to examine: 1) the influence of brand experiences from online brand community towards online brand community commitment and brand evangelism; 2) the influence of online brand community commitment towards brand trust and brand commitment; 3) the influence of brand trust and brand commitment towards brand evangelism; and 4) the influence of brand experiences from online brand community towards brand evangelism through the creation of online brand community commitment, brand trust and brand commitment. The online questionnaire set was used as a tool as well as the purposive sampling technique was used to collect the data. The samples were the members of five Facebook groups for car brands in Thailand and own that particular brand of car. The total of 398 respondents were valid to be used for analysis. The Path Analysis was used through Structural Equation Model (SEM) in order to prove the hypotheses. The results revealed that: 1) members' brand experiences obtained from online community positively influenced on online brand community commitment and brand evangelism; 2) online brand community commitment had influence on brand trust and brand commitment, which then led to brand commitment; 3) brand trust and brand commitment had direct influence on brand evangelism; and 4) brand trust had indirect influence on brand evangelism through the creation of brand commitment. This study can be proposed as an integrative model explaining how brand evangelism was influenced by overall online brand community experiences through enhancing customer's commitment towards the brand community in social media, brand trust and brand commitment. In addition, this study will be benefits for the management of automotive industry of Thailand in order to understand the online brand community's behaviors and attitude as well.

**Keywords:** brand evangelism; brand community experiences; online brand community commitment

## บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อตรวจสอบ 1) อิทธิพลของประสบการณ์เกี่ยวกับแบรนด์จากชุมชนออนไลน์ต่อความผูกพันกับชุมชนแบรนด์และการเป็นสาวกของแบรนด์ 2) อิทธิพลของความผูกพันกับชุมชนแบรนด์ออนไลน์ต่อความเชื่อมั่นในแบรนด์และความผูกพันกับแบรนด์ 3) อิทธิพลของความเชื่อมั่นในแบรนด์และความผูกพันกับแบรนด์ต่อการเป็นสาวกของแบรนด์ และ 4) อิทธิพลของประสบการณ์เกี่ยวกับแบรนด์จากชุมชนแบรนด์ออนไลน์ที่มีต่อการเป็นสาวกของแบรนด์ ผ่านการสร้าง ความผูกพันกับชุมชน ความเชื่อมั่นในแบรนด์ และ ความผูกพันกับแบรนด์ แบบสอบถามออนไลน์ถูกนำมาใช้การเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลด้วยการคัดเลือกตัวอย่างแบบเฉพาะเจาะจงจากสมาชิกใน 5 กลุ่ม Facebook เกี่ยวกับแบรนด์รถยนต์ในประเทศไทย และเป็นเจ้าของรถยนต์นั้น ผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามจำนวนทั้งหมด 398 คน ให้ข้อมูลครบถ้วนสำหรับการวิเคราะห์ และวิเคราะห์ ด้วยเส้นทาง ผ่านสมการโครงสร้าง เพื่อทดสอบสมมติฐานการวิจัย ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1) ประสบการณ์เกี่ยวกับแบรนด์ที่จากชุมชนในสังคมออนไลน์มีผลกระทบต่อความผูกพันกับชุมชนและความเป็นสาวกต่อแบรนด์ 2) ความผูกพันกับชุมชนมีผลกระทบต่อความเชื่อมั่นในแบรนด์ซึ่งก่อให้เกิดความผูกพันกับแบรนด์ 3) ความผูกพันกับแบรนด์มีผลโดยตรงต่อพฤติกรรมการเป็นสาวกต่อแบรนด์ และ 4) ความเชื่อมั่นในแบรนด์มีผลทางอ้อมต่อการเป็นสาวกต่อแบรนด์ผ่านการสร้างความผูกพันกับแบรนด์ การศึกษานี้สามารถนำเสนอโครงสร้างเชิงบูรณาการที่อธิบายถึงอิทธิพลของประสบการณ์ของแบรนด์จากชุมชนออนไลน์ต่อการเป็นสาวกของแบรนด์ผ่านการพัฒนาความผูกพันกับชุมชนแบรนด์ออนไลน์ ความเชื่อมั่นในแบรนด์ และความผูกพันกับแบรนด์ รวมถึงการศึกษาครั้งนี้จะเป็นประโยชน์กับผู้บริหารของอุตสาหกรรมรถยนต์ที่จะมีความเข้าใจพฤติกรรมและทัศนคติของชุมชนออนไลน์ได้เป็นอย่างดี

**คำสำคัญ:** ความเป็นสาวกต่อแบรนด์ ประสบการณ์จากชุมชนของแบรนด์ ความผูกพันชุมชนของแบรนด์

## Introduction

In all purchase situations, customers typically experience some sorts of perceived risks before a purchase and certain level of psychological discomfort after a purchase (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). After purchasing a product, customers may not be certain if they have made the right decision, which may result in psychological discomfort. Such psychological discomfort after the purchase due to the inconsistency between their beliefs and purchase action is known as post-purchase cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). In recent marketing milieu, one of the ways in which customers reduce these risks and cognitive dissonance is by obtaining positive brand experiences and information within an online brand community (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). With over 1.8 billion people using Facebook group, and over 10 million groups on Facebook (Newberry, 2021), it is a rapidly growing form of brand community in social media comprising of brand admirers who join the community because they share common interest in the brand. Participants in an online brand community share their experiences and stories regarding the brand to the community and support one another in upholding and promoting the brand (Cestare & Ray, 2019). This membership triggers the so-called brand evangelistic behavior (Riivits-Arkonsuo et al., 2015), which is the practice of positive WOM communication and other behaviors to promote and defend the brand activated by the emotional attachment he/she has with the brand (Harrigan et al., 2020). The reduction of the consumers' post-purchase cognitive dissonance as initiated by this membership in a brand community and the development of brand evangelism consequently enhance their self-esteem through the expression of their social identity (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019; Trepte & Loy, 2017). The social identity theory stresses that a person's self-concept is magnified when they know that they belong to a group that represents who they are and projects their interests (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Shi et al (2019) encapsulated that a person's commitment to a brand community is built upon their cognitive beliefs in the values obtained from the community and the affective attachment of consumers towards it. This relationship a customer has towards a brand community usually generates stronger relationship he/she has with the respective brand (Wang et al, 2019). This then leads to the development of brand evangelistic behaviors and actions as brand evangelism is largely formed through consumers' brand commitment and brand trust (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). However, scant research about how brand experience obtained from an online brand community drives brand evangelistic behaviors could be found from past studies.

This present paper provides significant theoretical contribution to the social and behavioral science in the scope of social-media-based brand community. It aims at investigating the influence of brand experience a person obtains from a brand community in social media in driving brand evangelistic behaviors through the creation of customer-community relationship and customer-brand relationship. In addition, the managerial contribution is the improvement in the understanding of the role of consumers in brand promotion and advocacy in the social media communities context that would promote the long-term success of brands.

## Objectives of the Study

This purpose of this research is to examine 1) how brand experience from online brand community influences the commitment to the online brand community and brand evangelism; 2) how online brand community commitment influences brand trust and brand commitment; 3) how brand evangelism is influenced by brand trust and brand commitment; and 4) the influence of online brand community experience on brand evangelism via the creation of online brand community commitment, brand trust and brand commitment.

## Concepts, theories and literature reviews

### Online Brand Community

Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) defines brand community as a community of brand admirers regardless of geographic location, both in online and offline channels. A very common form of brand community found nowadays is the ones established in social network sites such as Facebook groups. It was identified that members of a brand community have the feeling of connectedness and belongingness with other community members as they share brand stories and experiences and feel obligated to assist others in the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). However, with the large number of Facebook group and fan pages available for a particular brand, the values and experiences a customer obtains from each brand community may vary to the extent that it affects their relationship with the community (Kaur et al., 2018). Despite these differences, the core focus of the interaction centers around the brand as it is evidently the main reason why they are in the community in the first place. Consumers consume the experiences with the brand and share common cultural meanings with the other members, which essentially shape their experiences, identity, and relationship within the community (Andreini et al, 2018).

### Online brand community experience

Online brand community experience indicates the total experience that members obtain from their interactions with the online brand community that they belong (Wang et al., 2019; Qiao et al, 2019). This concept of online brand community experience stems from the experiential marketing theory, which posits that consumers focus on obtaining unique and memorable holistic customer experience through their interaction with a brand. These experiences provide the consumers not only the functional values from brand features and benefits but also sensory, cognitive, emotional, behavioral and relational values (Schmitt, 1999). Brand experience is how customers form their internal response towards the brand stimuli through various sensations, which can occur in both online and offline contexts (Brakus et al, 2009). Past research suggests that the interactive functions of online community platforms should be integrated with brand experience to create emotional engagement and co-creation (Merrilees, 2016). In this present study however, online brand community experience is defined according to the six dimension as presented by Qiao et al (2019), which include affective, sensory, intellectual, entertainment, interactive, and relational experience of generated in the community.

Customer experience with a brand in online community was found to affect customers commitment to the brand community (Wang et al., 2019), community identification (Qiao et al., 2019) and their loyalty to the Facebook page (Chen et al., 2014), and willingness to participate in value co-creation behaviors (Zhao et al., 2018)

### Online brand community commitment

Online brand community commitment presents the emotional bond and strong attachment a consumer has towards brand pages (Wang et al., 2019). While a number of scholars treated brand community commitment as one dimension, which is basically attitudinal or affective (Liao et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019), alternative approaches are also available and adopted by others. This present study adheres to the definition that it comprises of both affective and cognitive attitudes that members have to prolong their relationship within the online brand community as recommended in the study of Shi et al. (2019).

Once online brand community commitment has been built, customer relationship towards the brand will be enhanced (Wang et al., 2019). Past literature also suggested that relationship among customers in the particular social media community enhance their trust in the brand as cognitive belief in the community can be transferred to the trust in the brand (Liu et al., 2018). Besides, customer's brand commitment is likely to be enhanced if he/she is committed with the respective brand community (Islam et al, 2018; Mousavi et al, 2017; Liao et al., 2019). Consumers build stronger bond with a brand if they see themselves a part of the brand community in social media (Clark et al., 2017).

### **Brand trust**

It is defined as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002, p. 37). Brand trust, in this paper, is viewed as the result of brand experience in online community and commitment to that brand community, and not merely based on actual product performance. Through continuous experiences derived from the community, consumers' confidence in the brand is enhanced by the information and experiences shared by other members in the community. With brand trust, customers are convinced that the brand would be sincere, honest and dependable in delivering its claims satisfactorily (Yu & Yuan, 2019).

Brand trust allows customers to alleviate uncertainty and risks related to the purchase due to their confidence in the brand (Jain et al., 2018). Consequently, it encourages customers to engage more in such supportive behaviors as purchase, brand advocacy and/or brand defense (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Jain et al., 2018). Besides, customers are likely to become committed with the brand only if they find it trustworthy (Brown et al., 2019).

### **Brand commitment**

Brand commitment encompasses the emotional attachment a consumer has towards a brand, which motivates him to use the brand over time despite changes incorporated into it (Osuna Ramirez et al., 2017). Brand commitment usually simplifies customer decision making process as it implies repeat purchase behavior and leads to several desired outcomes for a brand (Osuna Ramirez et al., 2017). But only trustworthy brands are valuable enough for a customer to invest tremendous efforts in being committed with the relationship (Brown et al, 2019) which leads to positive word-of-mouth (Sallam, 2015), brand loyalty (Alkhawaldeh et al, 2017) and brand evangelism (Riorini & Widayati, 2016). According to Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2002), if consumer's brand interaction is satisfactory, he will become emotionally committed to maintain enduring bonds with the brand and become resistant to other brands' offerings (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002). Brand commitment, in this paper, is conceptualized as the emotional attachment customers have with a brand due to their previous satisfactory interaction with it, leading them to maintain their consensual relationship.

### **Brand evangelism**

Brand evangelism, first introduced by Matzler et al. (2007), refers to an active attempt of a customer to spread positive opinions in order to fervently convince others to pursue the same brand. It highlights the brand advocacy aspects of brand evangelists as the result of their strong passion with the brand. Collins et al. (2015) added the essence of consumer collectives into the definition and posited that brand evangelists are members of any brand communities who are authentically connected with the brand. This definition highlights the presence of brand evangelism in the brand community.

Recently, due to the growth of online brand community, Cestare and Ray (2019) included “online conversation” in the definition of brand evangelism. They explained that consumers who have strong bond with a brand are prone towards engaging in online conversation with others to convince them to prefer the brand. This highlights the significance of online platforms as the channel to evangelize the brand. Besides, Harrigan et al. (2020) conceptualized brand evangelism as the act of brand advocacy and brand defense. They postulated that brand defense is the utmost form of positive WOM as the consumer who loves a brand will defend on its behalf against any negative criticism. This present study, hence, defines brand evangelism as active behaviors from an emotionally attached customer to promote the brand and defend it from any negative messages aiming to convince other people to prefer the brand over others.

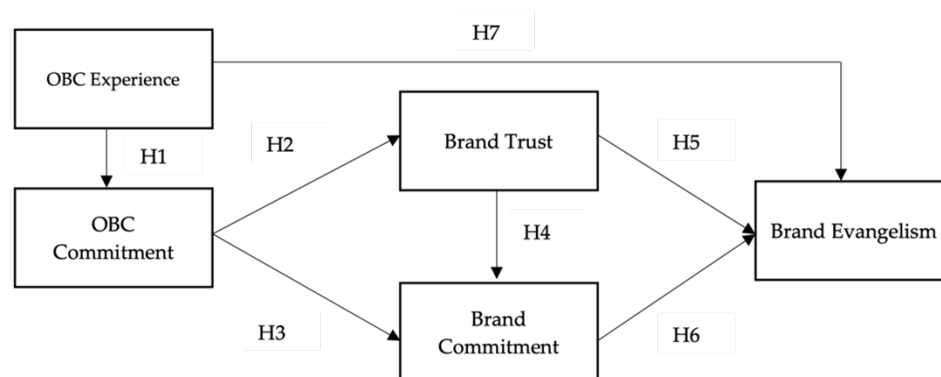
Past studies suggested that consumers are prone to evangelize the brand if high level of brand trust is perceived (Shaari & Ahmad, 2016) and feel strongly committed to the brand (Riorini & Widayati, 2016). Besides, it was demonstrated that experiential stimuli are the key drivers for customers to evangelize (Harrigan et al., 2020). Past brand experience on social media influences how customers perceive a brand as well as supplements customers’ social identity (Hsu, 2019). This then leads for the customers to behave in a way to support the brand and its community (Hsu, 2019). Meaningful experiences trigger consumer evangelizing behaviors as consumers have the desire to share those experiences to convince others to acquire them (Riivits-Arkonsuo et al., 2015, Anggraini, 2018). Through memorable brand experiences, consumers will be able to find a connection or similarity between themselves and the brand, leading to strong brand evangelism (Kang et al., 2020).

## Theoretical Framework

This present study is anchored on theory of social identity, which posits that consumers identify themselves with a particular brand that shares the same identity with them (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This means that consumers would feel so attached with the brand such that they will behave in the way to support the brand because what they do with the brand is the same as what they do to themselves (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Consumers usually classify themselves into diverse social categories and behave in the manners that create their identity in the society (Hogg & Terry, 2000). The theory describes a person’s self-concept through his relationship or socialization with other members in the society or community. A person’s self-esteem can be enhanced by enhancing his social identity (Hsu, 2019). This explains the brand evangelists’ behaviors when they convey the message to convince others towards their favorite brand. As a form of socialization, they evangelize in order to convey their social identity and create the sense of collectedness. Brand community participation enables consumers to strengthen their brand identity and customer-brand relationships (Khamwon & Pornsrimate, 2018). Social identity theory suggests that consumers will support the community and the brand that is perceived to have strong level of oneness and reflects their identity (Khamwon & Pornsrimate, 2018).

## Conceptual Framework

From all literatures reviewed and presented above, the conceptual framework shown below illustrates the direct impact of online brand community experience towards brand evangelism and online brand community commitment. In addition, the framework also depicts how online brand community commitment affects brand trust and brand commitment, which ultimately stimulate a customer to evangelize.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework

The following hypotheses were developed in this present study:

- Hypothesis 1: Online brand community experience affects online brand community commitment positively.*
- Hypothesis 2: Online brand community commitment significantly enhances brand trust.*
- Hypothesis 3a: Online brand community commitment positively affects brand commitment.*
- Hypothesis 3b: Online brand community commitment positively affects brand commitment through brand trust.*
- Hypothesis 4: Brand trust significantly enhances brand commitment.*
- Hypothesis 5: Brand trust significantly stimulates brand evangelism.*
- Hypothesis 6: Brand commitment significantly stimulates brand evangelism.*
- Hypothesis 7a: Online brand community experience positively affects brand evangelism.*
- Hypothesis 7b: Online brand community experience positively affects brand evangelism through online brand community commitment, brand trust, and brand commitment.*

## Research Methodology

### Context of study

Online brand community is an essential context for this study because members of brand communities are more likely to purchase and recommend the brands to others than the non-members (Sharri & Ahmad, 2016a). As the most popular platform for online brand community, social media offer a channel for customers to display their brand-evangelistic behaviors (Harrigan et al., 2020). Among all popular social media platforms, Facebook has the highest number of active users and serves as the base for brand community for largest variety of brands and products (Touni et al., 2020). Past research has examined the difference between Facebook fan page and Facebook group. While both are considered forms of brand community on social media, Facebook group was found to better represent brand community due to its stronger level of social identification (Clark et al., 2017). It allows more direct interactions among members-and-members, not only between members-and-brand in Facebook group.

Car was used as the context of several studies regarding brand evangelism and brand community because car, as a material object, reflects and extend the self-concept of an individual (Algesheimer, et al, 2005; Igwe & Nwamou, 2017). It conveys the personal meaning and passion that express who they are, which may eventually trigger their desire to spread positive word-of-mouth and engage in brand evangelism behavior (Matzler et al., 2007; Igwe & Nwamou, 2017; Choudhury et al., 2019). Since buying a car involves high perceived risks, many customers usually seek information from various sources, including brand community, to reduce the perceived risks and potential cognitive dissonance. Some members may join the brand community even before buying the car to observe others' experiences. From continuous consumption of experience and interaction in the community, they tend to build stronger relationship with the brand and participate in the experience sharing behaviors (Algesheimer et al, 2005; Igwe & Nwamou, 2017). Besides, brand evangelism is likely to be found in the purchase situation when there are several differentiated brands and consumers' needs are heterogenous (Igwe & Nwamou, 2017). In Thailand, there are over 40 brands with over a hundred varieties available (ThaiWebsites.com, 2016). Thus, Facebook groups for different brands of cars will be used for the context of this study.

### **Sampling procedure and Data collection**

The respondents of this present study were Facebook group's members who must also be current users of the brand of car that the Facebook group is particularly built as the brand community. Two steps were involved in the sampling process. Firstly, the Facebook groups for car brand were selected based on purposive sampling as many Facebook groups are private group. Permission from the group administrator was required for data collection. The Facebook groups selected must be active groups of car brands with at least 2,000 members and are not commercially oriented in order to examine the brand experience shared among the members without being affected by the difference among car categories. Secondly, purposive sampling was also adopted to select members of each group. Respondents must have been the active members of the group for at least 2 weeks, visited the group at least once a week, and owned that respective brand of car to ensure that they have obtained adequate brand experience in the group and control the effect of user status in the study. In total, 398 responses were collected through online survey using Google Doc from five Facebook groups (five brands) for statistical analysis.

### **Measurements**

The measurement items for each construct were carefully selected from past studies and properly adapted to fit the study context to ensure consistency with their conceptualization in this present study. All items for the constructs are measured using 7-points Likert scale. The measurement items for online brand community experience, which consisted of 21 items grouped into 6 dimensions (intellectual, entertainment, interactive, sensory, affective and relational experience) were originated from the study of Qiao et al. (2019) while the indicators for brand community commitment were derived from Bateman et al. (2011) and Shi et al. (2019). The indicators for brand trust were adapted from the study of Yu & Yuan (2019), three items measuring brand commitment from Iglesias et al. (2011) and five indicators assessing brand evangelism from Matzler et al. (2007). The questionnaire was then pretested for reliability and content validity check before its actual launch. Back translation process was implemented to ensure the content validity of translated scales. Besides, item-objective-congruence (IOC) was executed to ensure contents of the measurement items were appropriate to represent the designated constructs

### Statistical analysis

After collecting the data, descriptive statistics were performed to reveal respondents' profile. Then data were checked with validity and reliability test to ensure internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity. The confirmatory factor analysis was then run to assess the fit of the measurement model, followed by path analysis based on structural equation modeling (SEM) (Ho, 2013).

### Results

Descriptive analysis shown in Table 1 reveals that the percentages of male and female respondents do not greatly vary, accounting for 55.5% and 45.50% respectively. Majority of samples are married (61.30%) and aged between 31-40 (36.9%) with monthly income between 30,001 – 50,000 Thai Baht (30.7%). Most respondents have at least a bachelor degree. All respondents are active members of the Facebook group as they visit and view the content in the group at least once a week. Most of them (75.90%) viewed the group contents every day. 66.30% of samples became the members and participated in the group more than 3 months at the time data were collected. It is confirmed that all respondents are current customers of the car brand and active members of their respective Facebook groups.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Variables	Items	Frequency (%)
Facebook Group Membership Duration	2-4 weeks	5.50
	A month	9.50
	2-3 months	18.60
	Longer than 3 months	66.30
Facebook Group Visit Frequency (days per week)	7	75.90
	4-6	16.10
	2-3	7.30
	1	0.80
Gender	Female	44.50
	Male	55.50
Marital status	Married	61.30
	Single	38.70
Age	18-20	0.50
	21-30	18.30
	31-40	36.90
	41-50	30.20
	Over 50 years	14.10

Table 1: Sample Characteristics (Cont)

Variables	Items	Frequency (%)
Monthly Income (THB)	Not specified	5.80
	Below 30,000	28.90
	30,001-50,000	30.70
	50,001-80,000	20.40
	80,000-100,000	6.80
	Over 100,000	7.50
Occupation	Student	1.00
	Employee	45.20
	Government officials	30.20
	Business owner	8.80
	Freelancer	7.00
	Unemployed	1.30
	Others	6.50

Table 2: Measurement Items Reliability

Construct and Items	1 <sup>st</sup> Order Loading	2 <sup>nd</sup> order loading	Cronbach's alpha	
Construct 1: OBCE			0.880	0.943
Intellectual Experience		0.762		
OBCE1	0.801			
OBCE2	0.876			
OBCE3	0.857			
OBCE4	0.630			
Entertainment Experience		0.877	0.804	
OBCE5	0.659			
OBCE6	0.876			
OBCE7	0.782			
Sensory Experience		0.870	0.901	
OBCE11	0.850			
OBCE12	0.843			
OBCE13	0.838			
OBCE14	0.810			

Table 2: Measurement Items Reliability (Cont)

Construct and Items	1 <sup>st</sup> Order Loading	2 <sup>nd</sup> order loading	Cronbach's alpha	
Affective Experience		0.970	0.886	
OBCE15	0.890			
OBCE16	0.866			
OBCE17	0.810			
Construct 2: OBCC				0.930
Cognitive OBCC		0.742	0.810	
OBCC3	0.900			
OBCC4	0.821			
OBCC5	0.611			
Affective OBCC		0.983	0.947	
OBCC6	0.837			
OBCC7	0.922			
OBCC8	0.905			
OBCC9	0.859			
OBCC10	0.857			
Construct 3: Brand Trust				0.881
BT1	0.825			
BT2	0.786			
BT3	0.854			
Construct 4: Brand Commitment				0.879
BC1	0.920			
BC2	0.841			
BC3	0.841			
Construct 5: Brand Evangelism				0.924
BE1	0.832			
BE2	0.844			
BE3	0.866			
BE4	0.882			
BE5	0.781			

In Table 2, Cronbach's alphas of first-order factors under online brand community experience range from 0.804 to 0.901, while those of online brand community commitment range from 0.810 to 0.947. The Cronbach's alphas of the second-order constructs of online brand community experience and online brand community commitment are 0.943 and 0.983, while those of brand trust is 0.881, brand commitment is 0.879, and brand evangelism is 0.924. They are all above 0.7 which suggests that the internal consistency within the construct is confirmed (Hair et al., 2006).

The CFA suggests that all measurement items are well represented by the latent constructs. A  $\chi^2$  of 1,264.837 (n = 398, df = 473, p < 0.05) was produced. The statistical findings suggest that the measurement model has reasonable fit as indicated by various indices.  $\chi^2/df = 2.674$  with RMSEA of 0.065 are acceptable as they exceed the values recommended by Hair et al. (1998). IFI of 0.933, TLI of 0.925, and CFI of 0.933 indicate reasonable fit of the model as they were above 0.90 (Hair et al., 1998; Gefen et al., 2000). Included in Table 3 is the composite reliability (CR) values of 0.860, 0.901, 0.924, 0.927, and 0.860 which exceed the cutoff number of 0.70 recommended by Hair et al. (2006). Besides, to confirm the convergent validity of all constructs, average variance extracted (AVE) was computed and falls within the range of 0.676 and 0.759, which exceed the suggested value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2006). In Table 3, discriminant validity was measured and suggests that all other constructs except brand trust and brand commitment have no concerns with discriminant validity. Despite discriminant validity concern between brand commitment and brand trust, the constructs have been tested for content validity by experts in the field of branding and marketing research and were accepted for further analysis.

**Table 3: Construct Reliability and Validity**

	CR	AVE	BT	BC	BE	OBCE	OBCC
BT	0.862	0.676	0.822				
BC	0.901	0.753	0.943***	0.868			
BE	0.924	0.709	0.776***	0.802***	0.842		
OBCE	0.927	0.762	0.639***	0.577***	0.562***	0.873	
OBCC	0.860	0.759	0.588***	0.514***	0.563***	0.839***	0.871

Note: \* p < 0.050, \*\* p < 0.010, \*\*\* p < 0.00

After verifying the construct reliability and their validity, all hypothesized path relationships were tested using SEM. The results suggest reasonable fit of the relationship model by several indices. A  $\chi^2$  of 1,305.003 (n = 398, df = 475, p < 0.05) was produced for the path model.  $\chi^2/df$  was reasonable at 2.747 with RMSEA of 0.066 (Hair et al., 1998). Moreover, CFI of 0.929, TLI of 0.921, IFI of 0.930 are all higher than the suggested values of 0.90 (Hair et al., 1998; Gefen et al., 2000). Table 4 below shows that H1, H2, H4, H6 and H7 are supported, while H3 and H5 are not supported. For research objective 1, the positive direct influence of online brand community experience in enhancing online brand community commitment (0.882) and brand evangelism (0.143) is found significant at 99 percent confidence level; thus H1 and H7a are supported. For objective 2, the direct positive influence of online brand community commitment towards brand trust (H2) is significant at 99 percent confidence level (0.649). The result fails to support H3a as online brand community commitment does not significantly lead to brand commitment (direct path). However, H3b online brand community commitment has significant indirect influence on brand commitment (0.639) through brand trust (indirect path) (0.639). H4 is also supported, suggesting that customer's brand trust positively influences his/her brand commitment at 99 percent confidence level (0.985). For objective 3, H6 is supported, suggesting that brand evangelism is directly driven by customer's brand commitment at 95 percent confidence level (0.562). However, brand evangelism is not directly affected by brand trust

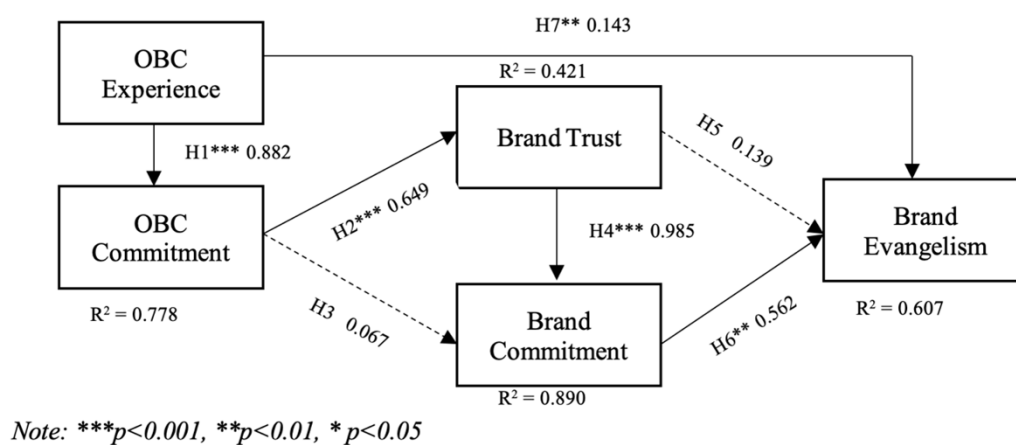
as H5 is not significantly supported. Lastly, for objective 4, H7b is also found to be significant (0.363). It suggests the indirect influence of online brand community experience on brand evangelism through online brand community commitment, brand trust and brand commitment.

**Table 4: Structural Relationship Hypotheses Results**

DV	OBCCOM			BT			BC			BE		
IV	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
BC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.562**	-	0.562**
BT		-	-	-	-	-	0.985**	-	0.985**	0.139 <sup>ns</sup>	0.554**	0.693**
OBC-COM	-	-	-	0.649**	-	0.649**	-0.067 <sup>ns</sup>	0.639**	0.572**	-	0.412**	0.412**
OBCEXP	0.882**	-	0.882**	-	0.572**	0.572**	-	0.505**	0.505**	0.143**	0.363**	0.506**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.778			0.421			0.890			0.607		

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , ns = not significant; DE = Direct effect, IE = Indirect effect, TE = Total effect

Next is the Path Analysis Results



**Figure 2: Path Analysis Results**

## Discussion

This present study's findings suggest that the overall brand experience a customer obtains from their interaction with other people in a social-media-based brand community plays a vital role in driving consumer's brand evangelistic behaviors. Overall brand contents and stories that trigger customers' sensory, intellectual, affective, entertainment responses stimulate their commitment to the community, as driven by both cognitive belief in the values of the community and emotional attachment. This means that the holistic positive brand experience obtained from an online brand community makes customers think that the online brand community is dependable, and they concurrently feel emotionally attached to it. As the consequence of their commitment to the community, the level of trust that customers have towards the brand is enhanced since they continuously consume positive brand-related experiences in the online brand community. The findings may be supported by post-purchase cognitive dissonance theory suggesting that customers are prone to seek positive information about the brand after the purchase to verify their decisions and to reduce their psychological discomfort (Bolia et al, 2016). This, in turn, escalates customer's trust in the brand. Once they trust the brand, their brand commitment will be enhanced and drives them to participate in brand evangelistic actions.

Different from the proposed hypotheses, the present study suggests that online brand community commitment do not exert a significant direct influence in cultivating customers' commitment. This may be due to the fact that online brand community commitment in this present research is conceptualized as a second-order construct of cognitive and affective online brand community commitment. Though past studies found that brand commitment was directly affected by online brand community commitment, they treated online brand community commitment as a unidimensional affective construct (Mousavi et al., 2017; Liao et al., 2019; Jeong et al, 2021). Similarly, Zhang et al. (2013) only found direct impact of affective online brand community commitment on brand commitment but could not find the direct influence of continuance (cognitive) commitment to the brand community on brand commitment. Since online brand community commitment in this present study is treated as a second-order construct encompassing both cognitive and affective online brand community commitment, it does not holistically exert a significant influence on brand commitment. This means that customers who believe in the dependability of the online brand community and feel emotionally attached to it may not spontaneously become emotionally committed to the brand. However, their commitment to the online brand community allows them to absorb more positive brand experiences and gradually enhance their trust in the brand, which then directly create brand commitment. Besides, unlike previous studies, the findings suggest that direct influence of brand trust in driving brand evangelism is insignificant (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Previous study by Cestare and Ray (2019) found that brand evangelistic actions are not merely triggered by their trust in the brand (Cestare & Ray, 2019). Rather, their trust in the brand encourages them to become more committed towards the brand, which ultimately drive them to evangelize for it. This connotes that the role of the affective brand commitment in stimulating brand evangelism. Though the findings suggests that brand trust does not directly stimulate brand evangelism, its indirect influence through brand commitment is found in this present study. Specifically, customers who possess a strong trust in a brand are more prone to engage in brand evangelistic actions to support the brand only if brand trust, as a cognitive aspect of customer relationship to the brand, results in brand commitment. In other words, without the presence of brand commitment, which is the emotional attachment a customer has towards a brand, brand evangelism will not be directly triggered by brand trust.

In conclusion, online brand community experience cultivates cognitive and affective relationship among the members of the community, which is then elevated to become customer-brand relationship in the forms of brand trust and brand commitment. Such highly committed customers who find the brand trustworthy will consequently perform brand evangelistic behaviors in support of the brand.

### Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Despite its significance in today's marketing milieu, studies on the concept of brand evangelism have been underdone in marketing and branding academic research (Kang et al, 2020). The key theoretical contribution of this present research is the findings that depict how brand experience that consumers obtain from a brand community in social media cultivates their commitment to the brand community, which then results in stronger level of customer-brand relationship. In addition, as forms of cognitive and affective customer-brand relationship, how brand trust and brand commitment are stimulated by community commitment were also addressed in the present study. Importantly, how brand evangelism, as a behavioral aspect of customer relationship with a brand, is affected directly by online brand community experience, and indirectly through the enhancement of brand trust and brand commitment provide another theoretical implication. As far as we know, this present study was among the preliminary research attempts that examined the role of brand experience obtained in an online brand community, specifically Facebook group, in driving brand evangelistic behaviors. This present study then contributes to the understanding of how brand experience in an online brand community could result in relationship between customers and the community, attitudinal bond between customer and the brand and brand evangelism which is considered as a behavioral aspect of relationship. For marketers, this new knowledge gives fresher insights into the vital contribution of consumers in the marketing process such that their experience with the brand matters in brand promotion and advocacy. This is especially true in the world of social media, where online brand communities are readily formed to discuss and evangelize a brand. Thus, marketers must recognize the positive impact social media communities have towards the creation of sustainable brand power, and initiate approaches that help the company build long term success.

For marketers, since brand community on social media grant opportunities for value co-creation by customers in the form of brand evangelism (Harrigan et al., 2020), marketers should be able to participate in an OBC such as Facebook page and Facebook group in order to create appropriate experiences to stimulate those supportive behaviors. Brand managers should motivate their customers to join and participate in OBC in order to absorb brand experiences shared by other customers. They should develop activities or program in order to generate intellectual, affective, sensory and entertainment experiences in the OBC. Specifically, brand contents on an OBC should focus on how to trigger members to think about the brand, to arouse their emotion towards the brand, to release their pressure and to allow them to enjoy the sensory pleasure of the brand. Additionally, to promote brand evangelism, "brand" should be the core focus of interactions among the members in OBCs in order to create commitment and confidence in the brand. Brand community members in Facebook group who consume those experiences and possess certain level of commitment in the community would then find the brand trustworthy and create so strong commitment in the brand that will lead to information sharing behavior in order to promote the brand as well as defend it from negative attacks.

On the part of the consumers, this research contributes to the understanding that belongingness and affiliation certainly affect the creation of social identity, which is facilitated by consumer experience and attachment to the brand. According to social identity theory, when consumers become attached to the brand, they behave in support of the brand as they think that the brand represent themselves. This amplifies the popular notion that consumers are defined by the products they consume, thus getting them to experience the brand in a positive light makes them become advocates of it, and consequentially evangelize it to others.

### Limitations

The limitation of this present research is, firstly, the generalizability of the findings to other types of product categories, other cultural background, and different usage status due to the potential existence of selection bias. Secondly, the serial mediation role of online brand community commitment, brand trust and brand commitment were not examined as this present study only aimed at exploring how OBC experience could possibly result in brand evangelism. Thirdly, this present research did not examine whether the results will be generalizable to different social media platforms as it focused only on Facebook group, which may have different characteristics from other platforms and even from Facebook page. Lastly, this present research measured all constructs based on customer perception and opinions without observing actual behaviors in the social media. In addition, it only involved quantitative research method, which may not allow the researcher to gain deep insights behind respondents' behaviors.

### Future Research Recommendations

Studies in other countries, non-consumers, other types of cars, other product categories, and other social media platform are recommended for future studies to investigate the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, comparison between closed groups and open-groups could also be made as the degree of connectedness of members in these two types may vary. Besides, all Facebook groups that participated in this present research are user-hosted, thus it would be interesting to know whether or not findings would be the same in brand-hosted groups where members realize that contents in these groups are somehow generated and controlled by marketers. Lastly, other qualitative research techniques are recommended to gain deep consumer insights behind their evangelistic behaviors. Specifically, research questions such as “What are the real motives behind their behaviors to join the Facebook group and continuously consume the brand experience even after the purchase is made?” and “Does post-purchase cognitive dissonance plays its roles as presumed in this study in stimulating brand evangelism?” should be explored further by qualitative studies.

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