A STRUCTURAL MODEL OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARKETING EFFORTS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRAND EQUITY AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY WITH AIRLINE SOCIAL MEDIA BRANDS IN THAILAND

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to investigate the relationship between marketing efforts on social media, brand equity and customer brand loyalty in the airline business in Thailand. The study used a questionnaire developed after reviewing the literature and testing the reliability using coefficient alpha. The questionnaire was distributed to 231 samples who had experience using social media managed by airlines, selected through convenience sampling. The data were analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) by using the Partial Least Square approach with SmartPLS software. The results showed that perceived risk was the most important marketing effort in the social media component, and airline marketing efforts on social media had direct effect DE=0.653 on brand awareness and direct effect DE=0.724 on brand image. In addition, the results demonstrated that brand awareness had direct effect DE=0.275 on electronics-word of mouth and that brand image had direct effect DE=0.562 on electronics word-of-mouth, and direct effect DE=0.707 on commitment, while brand commitment and electronics word-of-mouth had indirect effect IE=0.586 on marketing efforts on social media, which corresponded to the hypothesis at statistical significance of 0.05 level. It is expected that the results of this study may be used as a source of fundamental data for development in the planning of airline marketing efforts using social media strategies, particularly due to understanding the relative importance of each marketing effort on social media components, and analysis of the effects of marketing efforts on social media.

Keywords: Marketing efforts; brand equity; brand loyalty; airline social media brands

Introduction

The use of the internet and other information communication technologies has led to a new era of "tourism economy", especially through social media. Social media is defined as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). It includes social network sites, blogs, microblogs, consumer review sites, content community sites, wikis, internet forums and location-based applications. Social media has emerged as a new way in which people connect socially, by integrating information and communication technology such as mobile and web-based technologies, social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. It is actually more than a new way to communicate, and refers to an entire online environment built on people's contributions and interactions.

Social media plays an increasingly important role in many aspects of tourism, especially in information search and decision-making behavior, and in tourism promotion (Fotis, 2012; Bradbury, 2011) focusing on best practices for interacting with consumers via social media channels such as social sharing of holiday experiences. Social media has had an enormous impact on the tourism industry. Consumers engage with social network sites in order to make informed decisions about their travel and also to share their personal experiences, such as those they had at a particular hotel, restaurant or airline. As a customer service channel, social media is impossible to ignore. People are using social media before, during and after their travel to share experiences, both bad and good. Social media has facilitated and expanded people's ability to share travel experiences with a larger and wider audience than ever before.

Social media and its growing role in tourism comprise an emerging research topic. From information search to decision making behavior, social media plays a significant role in many aspects of tourism. Social media also plays a significant role in tourism promotion and helps tourism service providers to focus on best practices through the feedback they get from the traveling public through social media. Intelligent utilization of social media is considered to be an important strategy for marketing tourism products (Zeng and Gerritsen,

2014). In the airline industry social media has altered the landscape of marketing. Today most tourists determine their travel plans based on social media shares and reviews, thus making online customer service a crucial part of building a positive brand reputation. Emergence of social media has disrupted the traditional customer service models for hotels and travel agencies alike.

Nowadays, social media has come to be positioned as a separate marketing tool from more traditional internet websites featuring supplier-generated content. Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2004) stated that social media is consumer-generated, and that various online information sources are created and employed by users to educate one another on other brands, services and various issues. The emergence of user-generated content via social media is influencing the trade environment and is enabling travelers to form communities around a brand or an airline. Furthermore, social media is transforming how airlines establish and adapt their customer relationship strategies. Social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM) is engaging customers proactively by empowering them, with improved customer experience as the main objective (Vivek et al., 2012). Social media channels represent a huge opportunity for airlines in terms of word-of-mouth referrals. With nearly 46% of social media users posting online reviews (Mintel, 2010), the impact of these reviews on the opinions of potential travelers searching for their next travel deals is significant. As quality service at low cost becomes increasing commonplace, all airlines are seeking new and innovative ways to enhance the overall customer experience throughout the passenger travel cycle. According to one study conducted by Barnes and Lescault (2014), "Social media is most effective in customer empowerment and connecting brands to the travelers." Airlines are looking to improve customer service, lead generation, and increase web traffic through this kind of empowerment and brand connection (Barnes and Lescault, 2014).

The proliferation of social media has created a whole new era for companies and brands, forcing them to seek new interactive ways of reaching and engaging with their customers (Gallaugher and Ransbotham, 2010; Kozinets et al., 2010). This quickly expanding marketing channel, which already reaches more than two thirds of all internet users, provides unparalleled opportunities for brand and reputation building (Correa et al., 2010; Spillecke

and Perrey, 2012). Despite these advantages and the growing scholarly interest, one persistent challenge exists; that is, the difficulty of measuring the impact of social media marketing activities on key brand success (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Schultz and Block, 2012; Schultz and Peltier, 2013).

Despite the emerging importance of marketing efforts on social media or social media marketing in various fields, and the large number of studies on marketing efforts via social media or social media marketing activities, most studies have primarily focused on the effects of social media marketing activities on customer satisfaction or behavioral intention (Sano, 2015). Research that examines social media marketing effects from the perspective of branding is still mainly exploratory and lacks empirical research (Hollebeek et al., 2014). To date, brand equity has received only limited attention in the context of marketing efforts via social media or social media marketing and its effectiveness, despite a few notable exceptions (Kim and Ko, 2012). That said, the importance of brand equity has been one of the main focal points in recent studies on marketing efforts via social media or social media marketing activities; however, few studies have explored the role of brand equity when investigating the impact of social media marketing on customers (Kim, 2012; Kim and Ko, 2012; Bruno et al., 2016). The purpose of this study, therefore, was to identify the components of airline marketing efforts on social media and investigate the relationship of these elements to customer brand loyalty through brand equity for airline companies in Thailand.

Research Objective

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between marketing efforts via social media on brand equity and customer brand loyalty in the airline business in Thailand.

Research Model and Hypothesis Development

The research was quantitative and focused on the relationship between marketing efforts on social media, brand equity and customer brand loyalty in the airline business in Thailand. The subjects in this study were 231 samples who had experience using social media sites managed by airlines in Thailand.

Research Model

This empirical analytical study, using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), investigated the relationship of marketing efforts via social media on two types of brand loyalty: electronic-word-of-mouth (WOM), and brand commitment, as mediated by two types of brand equity; that is, brand awareness and brand image, as shown in Figure 1.

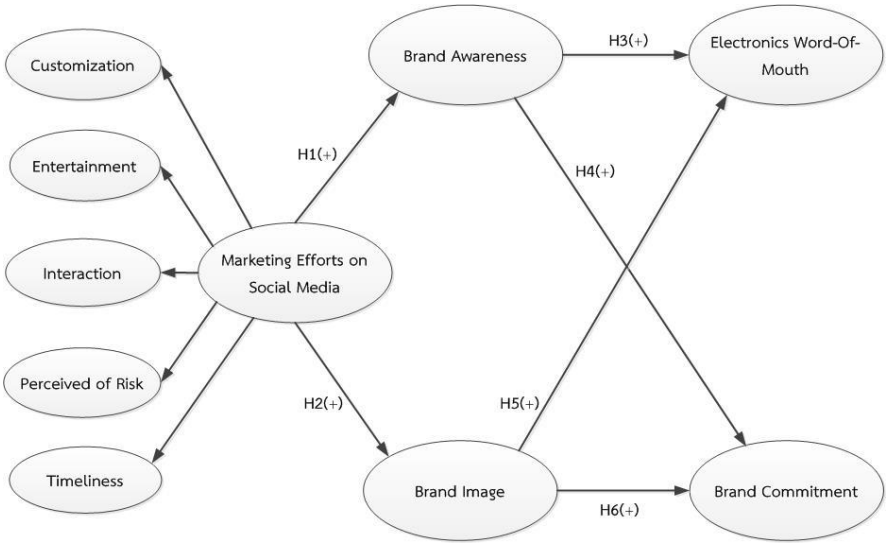

Figure 1: Research Model

Hypotheses

The literature review was done by reviewing each variable in order to explain the connections and consistencies among the variables based on related literature as follows:

A. *The relationship between the effects of social media marketing efforts on brand awareness, and the effects of social media marketing on brand image.*

The main characteristics of social media are production and consumption of desired content without the constraints of time or location. This indicates that social media, through the active and aggressive participation of consumers, has a greater impact on the way consumers behave or think

regarding brands than one-sided communication led by a company. Kim and Ko (2012) studied the effects of social media marketing activities by luxury brands on customer equity and found that those activities significantly affected equity value, relationship value, and brand value. Chae et al. (2015) reported that when consumers were motivated to use social media site hashtags, those hashtags were more likely to have a positive effect on customer participation and brand equity. This was consistent with the results from Song (2012), who determined that social network site advertisement in the food service industry significantly affects brand equity. Bruno et al. (2016) studied the social media marketing efforts carried out by luxury brands and demonstrated that these efforts significantly affect brand awareness and brand image. This literature review, thus, led to the creation of the following two hypotheses:

H1 (+): Marketing efforts on social media are positively associated with brand awareness.

H2 (+): Marketing efforts on social media are positively associated with brand image.

B. *The relationships between brand awareness and electronic-word of mouth, and between brand image and electronic-word of mouth.*

Social media allows companies to communicate with consumers easily and quickly. From the company perspective, their mere presence on social media generates positive effects to the same extent as traditional advertisements. Interactions with both potential and existing customers enable companies to communicate positive brand images. Additionally, product and marketing efforts on social media can trigger genuine WOM marketing and an inflow of new customers, meaning that social media is a strong tool for communication (Bae, 2002). Seo and Kim (2003) demonstrated significant effects of brand equity on the consequences of WOM. Park (2013) investigated the effects of brand equity of a franchise company on customer behavior and suggested that brand equity increased positive WOM, leading to more positive brand behavior.

C. *The relationships between brand awareness and brand commitment, and between brand image and brand commitment.*

Commitment is an essential component in the relationship between companies and consumers, and consumers have a long-standing tendency to avoid participation in activities that are perceived as worthless (Dwyer et al., 1987; Moorman et al., 1992). Consumers establish personal relationships with the brands that they purchase in the same way that people form relationships with other people in daily life (Forunier et al., 1998). Commitment is an interaction between a consumer and brand as equivalent entities. Kim et al. (2008) argued that brand equity can be formed through customer satisfaction, trust, and relationship commitment, and that such brand equity had a positive effect on improving the image of hospitals in their study. Zhang et al. (2015) studied brand community and found that brand equity significantly affects commitment and value creation. The literature review thus led to the creation of the following four hypotheses:

H3 (+): Brand awareness is positively associated with electronic-word of mouth on airline social media sites.

H4 (+): Brand awareness is positively associated with brand commitment.

H5 (+): Brand image is positively associated with electronic-word of mouth on airline social media sites.

H6 (+): Brand image is positively associated with brand commitment.

Research Method

This quantitative study was conducted by distributing a questionnaire to the samples; however, it was preceded by a pilot test for the purpose of improving the quality of the questionnaire. Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the hypotheses because the model is quiet complex. The real objective of this study was to determine the result, not to test or compare which technique to apply. Moreover, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is widely used to examine complex research models in marketing, information systems and strategic management (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

Population

The population in this research was internet users with experience of using social media sites managed by airlines in Thailand.

Samples

This research used the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling for hypotheses testing. Past research suggested a suitable sample size for the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) of 100-200 samples (Ringle et al., 2015; Hair et al. 2011; Sarstedt et al., 2017). Furtermore, a 5:1 to 10:1 subject-to-index ratio as a rule of thumb is suggested for structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2010). As the study had 23 items, a 10:1 ratio was initially used to determine the sample size of 230, using 5 percent level of precision and 95 percent confidence level. Thus this research used convenience sampling to select the 230 samples for this survey.

Research Instruments

The current study employed a questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of two groups of questions. The first group comprised questions on general information, and the second group comprised questions on the relationships between marketing efforts on social media, brand equity and customer brand loyalty, making up a total of 23 items. The questions relied on a 5-point Likert scale for the responses, ranging from strongly agree, 5 points, to strongly disagree, 1 point.

Validity and Reliability of Measurement Instruments Used in Research

To ensures that the questions covered all the variables and contents, the questionnaire quality was checked with regard to the following details:

1) To find validity data, this research content was presented to 3 professionals in order to get Index of Consistency data. This method is called Content Validity, which means that, after the review process, the questionnaire will be considered to be highly valid when the IOC rate is not lower than 0.5. The IOC index of each item was between 0.67-1.00.

2) To find reliability data, the revised questionnaire was presented to 40 people for trial under conditions similar to those of real users of social media

managed by airlines (Pilot Test). The study made use of Cronbach's alpha to evaluate the initial questionnaire samples, which used 5-point Likert rating scale. The result should be more than 0.7 to be proven highly valid (Hair et al., 2010).

Data Collection

The data was collected from Thais who had experience using airlines from the period comprising December, 2017 to January, 2018. The survey was carried out with convenience sampling method at Suvarnabhumi International Airport and Don Mueang International Airport. Surveyors distributed questionnaires directly to research participants, and then collected them after the forms were completed. From 300 questionnaires distributed, 265 were returned. However, 34 questionnaires were incomplete, leaving 231 questionnaires for analysis.

Data Analysis and Statistics

Given our research model and aim, SEM has several advantages over other analysis techniques such as multiple linear regression, e.g. the ability to examine proposed causal paths among constructs (Gefen et al., 2011). To this end, we had the option of employing covariance based structural equation modeling (CBSEM) or partial least squares (PLS) path modeling. We considered the extant methods literature, our data characteristics, and study objectives to determine which technique to apply. For instance, scholars suggest that CBSEM is preferred when the study is confirmatory in nature (Gefen et al., 2011) and the parameter estimates obtained from CBSEM are purported to be less biased than the estimates obtained via PLS (Chin, 2010). Considering the decision criteria presented in the extant literature (Gefen et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2011; Reinartz et al., 2009), we determined that a CBSEM approach would be most appropriate for our study. We analyzed the data using SmartPLS 3.0.

The developed conceptual model was drawn in SmartPLS software (Ringle et al., 2015) for simulation work in assessing the relationship between marketing efforts on social media, brand equity and customer brand loyalty in the airline business in Thailand. The PLS simulation of the model was carried out by calculating and assessing various parameters, which included item loading, reliability, and validity tests. It involved a 2-step process as suggested by Henseler et al. (2009) which included calculating PLS model parameters separately by solving out the blocks of the measurement model and then

estimating the path coefficients of a structural model (Vinzi et al., 2010). Finally, overall model was validated using a power analysis test.

1) Measurement Model Evaluation

Measurement model evaluation is aimed at evaluating the consistency and validity of the manifested variables. Consistency evaluations are done through individual manifest and construct reliability tests. While validity of the variables is tested based on convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2012), individual manifest reliability explains the variance of individual manifest relative to latent variable by calculating standardized outer loadings of the manifest variables (Gotz et al., 2010). Manifest variables with outer loading of 0.7 or higher are considered highly satisfactory (Henseler et al., 2009; Gotz et al., 2010). While a loading value of 0.5 is regarded as acceptable, the manifest variables with loading value of less than 0.5 should be dropped (Chin, 2010; Hair et al., 2010). Hulland (1999) argued that 0.4 should be an acceptable loading value, where Henseler et al. (2009) suggested that a manifest variable with loading values between 0.4 and 0.7 should be reviewed before elimination. Generally speaking, if elimination of these indicators increases the composite reliability then they should be discarded; otherwise the factors should remain. Even though for this study the cut-off value taken for outer loading was 0.5, an iterative process was adopted for elimination of the manifest variables by considering the suggestion from Henseler et al. (2009).

The second parameter for consistency evaluation is constructed reliability, where it is evaluated by two measures; that is, Cronbach's alpha, and Composite Reliability (CR). Cronbach's alpha and CR indicate how well a set of manifest variables appraises a single latent construct. However, compared to Cronbach alpha, composite reliability is considered a better measure of internal consistency because it employs the standardized loadings of the manifest variables (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Nonetheless, the interpretation of composite reliability score and Cronbach's Alpha is similar. Litwin (1995) suggested that the value of Cronbach’s alpha should be higher than 0.7, and that, for composite reliability, the value of 0.7 is “modest” (Hair et al., 2011).

For the validity of the variable, the variables are tested on convergent and discriminant validities. Convergent validity is carried out by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) test on variables (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), which determines the amount of variance captured by a latent variable from its relative manifest variables due to measurement errors. Barclay et al. (1995) and Hair et al. (2011) argued that a minimum 50% of the variance from manifest variable should be captured by latent variables. This implies that an AVE value of the construct should be greater than 0.5. Discriminant validity is carried out to confirm that the manifest variable in any construct is relevant to the designated latent variable where its cross-loading value in latent variable (LV) is higher than that in any other constructs (Chin, 2010).

2) Structural Model Assessment

Structural Model assesses the relationship between exogenous and endogenous latent variables through evaluating the R^2 value, that is, the coefficient of determination or variation (Hair et al., 2012), and also the ß value, that is, path coefficients of the model (Chin, 2010). R^2 corresponds to the degree of explained variance of endogenous latent variables (Akter et al., 2011) while ß indicates the strength of an effect from variables to endogenous latent variables (Lleras, 2005). According to Cohen (1998) and Cohen et al. (2003), for a good model, the value of R^2 of endogenous latent variable should be more than 0.26.

The next step involves assessing the path coefficient of all latent variables (paths) by comparing ß values among all the paths. The highest ß value symbolizes the strongest effect of predictor (exogenous) latent variable towards the dependent (endogenous) latent variable (Aibinu and Al-Lawati, 2010). However, ß value has to be tested for its significance level through t-value test. The test is done by performing nonparametric bootstrapping technique (Chin, 2010; Davison and Hinkley, 1997; Efron and Tibshirani, 1993). Bootstrapping technique computes t-value by creating a prespecified number of samples. Hair et al. (2011) suggested that acceptable t-values for a two-tailed test are 1.65 (significance level=10 percent), 1.96 (significance level=5 percent), and 2.58 (significance level=1 percent).

Research Results

Demographics

Table 1 reports the distribution of the respondents based on some demographic variables such as gender, age, purpose of airline use, airline social media sites used, and frequency of airline use. The results showed that 81.82 percent of the respondents were female, while 18.18 percent were male. In terms of age, 87.45 percent were between 21 and 25 years old, while the rest were under 20 years old. The purposes of airline use of the majority of the participants were tour and vacation (82.68 percent) followed by education and meetings (9.09 percent), visiting friends or relatives (4.33 percent), work or business (3.46 percent), and other purposes (0.43 percent). Most of the participants used Thai Airways International social media sites (34.63 percent), followed by Thai Air Asia (34.20 percent), Nok Air (15.15 percent), Thai Smile (8.66 percent), Thai Lion Air (3.03 percent), Bangkok Airways (1.73 percent), Nok Scoot (1.30 percent), Other Airline social media sites (0.87 percent), and Jet Asia (0.43 percent). Finally, 61.90 percent of the respondent reported using airline services one time or less, followed by 2 to 3 times (26.84 percent), 4 to 5 times (6.93 percent), 6 to 7 times (2.16 percent), 10 or more times (1.73 percent), and 8 to 9 times (0.43 percent).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N=231)

Demographic	Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	42	18.18
	Female	189	81.82
Age	Younger than 20 years old	29	12.55
	21 to 25 years old	202	87.45
	26 to 30 years old	0	0.00
	31 to 35 years old	0	0.00
	Older than 35 years old	0	0.00
Purpose of airline use	Work or business	8	3.46
	Tour and vacation	191	82.68
	Education or meeting	21	9.09
	Visiting friends or relatives	10	4.33
	Other	1	0.43

Table 1: Continued

Demographic	Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Airline social media sites used	Thai Airways International	80	34.63
	Thai Smile	20	8.66
	Kan Air	0	0.00
	Jet Asia	1	0.43
	Thai Air Asia	79	34.20
	Thai Lion Air	7	3.03
	Nok Scoot	3	1.30
	Nok Air	35	15.15
	Bangkok Airways	4	1.73
	Orient Thai Airways	0	0.00
	Other	2	0.87
Frequency of airline use	1 or less	143	61.90
	2 to 3	62	26.84
	4 to 5	16	6.93
	6 to 7	5	2.16
	8 to 9	1	0.43
	10 or more	4	1.73
Total responses		**231**	**100%**

Primary Data Analysis

Data were screened for missing values and outliers. Missing values first were checked to make sure that they were missing completely at random and then imputed by expectation maximization method. In addition, the data were checked for normality. Based on visual check of histograms each variable showed normal distribution, with skewness and kurtosis values in the acceptable range of -2 and +2 (George and Mallery, 2010).

Before analyzing the relationships between the constructs and identifying the main drivers of customer brand loyalty to airline social media brands, the model's quality was evaluated. The assessment followed the sequence and the criteria suggested by Chin (2010) and Hair et al. (2017). More specifically, before analyzing the structural model, the evaluation focused on the composites' measurement.

The quality constructs in the PLS path model (marketing efforts on social media, brand awareness and brand image) were built on composite indicator models, whereby composite indicators were independent drivers of the construct that should not correlate highly with one another. The tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) indicates whether multicollinearity is a problematic issue. In this model, the highest VIF value of 1.775 was clearly below the critical threshold of 5 and the lowest tolerance value of 0.570 is clearly higher than the critical threshold of 0.20 (Hair et al., 2011). Hence, multicollinearity was not a critical issue in this study, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The Result of Multicollinearity Testing

Construct	Tolerance	VIF
Marketing efforts on social media (MESM)	1.000	1.000
Brand Awareness (BRA)	0.570	1.755
Brand Image (BRI)	0.570	1.755

Measurement Model Evaluation

Descriptive statistics, reliability and validity

Based on the above criteria, the measurement model was evaluated through iterative process in order to discard the weak manifest variables from the developed model. Table 3 summarizes the final iterations only.

Tables 3 and 4 present the means, standard deviations, factor loading, t-Statistics, Cronbach's alphas, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and the construct correlations. All the values for Cronbach's alpha were greater than the threshold value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). CRs ranged from 0.843 to 0.917, which were greater than the commonly accepted cut-off value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017), which indicates a satisfactory degree of internal consistency reliability for the measures. And all items had a loading above the threshold of 0.7, confirming satisfactory convergent validity. Moreover, testing was performed to determine whether each item's load was higher on its intended construct than on other constructs, and whether each construct's square root of average variance extracted (AVE) was greater than its correlations with other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results in Table 3 indicate acceptable discriminant validity.

Table 3: Summary of Psychometric Properties of Constructs and Items

Construct	Items	Mean	Standard deviation	Factor loading	t-Statistics	Cronbach'α	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Marketing efforts on social media	CUS	2.20	1.121	0.818	32.890	0.887	0.917	0.688
	ENT	2.24	1.031	0.825	27.260			
	INT	2.43	1.216	0.840	28.177			
	PER	2.65	1.262	0.859	49.016			
	TRE	2.53	1.340	0.805	30.987			
Brand Awareness	BRA1	4.17	2.122	0.832	32.587	0.721	0.843	0.642
	BRA2	3.94	2.219	0.805	24.510			
	BRA3	4.39	3.082	0.766	22.617			
Brand Image	BRI1	3.96	1.579	0.856	36.712	0.774	0.869	0.689
	BRI2	3.99	1.662	0.801	25.367			
	BRI3	4.13	1.925	0.832	28.472			
Brand Commitment	COM1	3.97	2.141	0.844	35.847	0.790	0.877	0.705
	COM2	3.68	2.019	0.802	20.538			
	COM3	4.27	2.097	0.870	41.021			
Electronic-Word of Mouth	WOM1	3.87	1.561	0.879	41.823	0.853	0.911	0.773
	WOM2	3.70	1.058	0.886	49.540			
	WOM3	3.81	1.603	0.872	48.033			

Table 4: Correlation Matrix and AVE

Construct	Correlation Matrix				
	BRA	**BRI**	**COM**	**MESM**	**e-WOM**
Brand Awareness (BRA)	**0.801**				
Brand Image (BRI)	0.656	**0.830**			
Brand Commitment (COM)	0.577	0.782	**0.839**		
Marketing efforts on social media (MESM)	0.653	0.724	0.699	**0.830**	
Electronics-Word of Mouth (e-WOM)	0.644	0.742	0.713	0.712	**0.879**

Coefficient Determinant

Structural Model assesses the relationship between exogenous and endogenous latent variables through evaluating R^2 value, that is, coefficient of determination (variation), and also ß value, that is, path coefficients of the model. R^2 corresponds to the degree of explained variance of endogenous latent variables while ß indicates the strength of an effect from variables to endogenous latent variables. According to Cohen (1998) and Cohen et al. (2003), for a good model, the value of R^2 of endogenous latent variable should be more than 0.26. As the results showed, the R^2 value for the brand awareness in this study was 0.426, brand image was 0.524, electronic-word of mouth was 0.594 and brand commitment was 0.618. Since the R^2 value for the developed model was higher than the suggested value, the model was considered to have a substantial degree of explained variance of the relationship between marketing efforts on social media, brand equity and customer brand loyalty at a moderate level, as shown in Figure 2.

Based on the analysis result of structural equation modeling in Figure 2, it was found that marketing efforts on social media explained 42.60% of the variation in brand awareness (R^2=0.426) and 42.40% of the adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2_{adj}) which was a moderate level, and explained 52.40% of the variation in brand image (R^2=0.524) and 52.20% of the adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2_{adj}=0.522), which

was a moderate level. Brand awareness and brand image explained 59.30% of the variation in electronic-word of mouth (R^2=0.593) and 59.10% of the adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2_{adj}=0.591), which was a moderate level. Moreover, brand awareness and brand image explained 61.80% of the variation in brand commitment (R^2=0.618) and 61.50% of the adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2_{adj}=0.615), which was a moderate level.

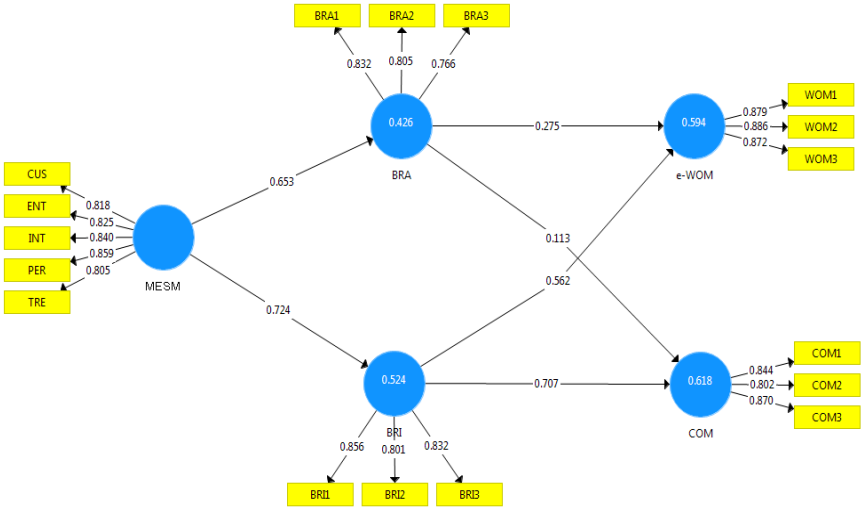

Figure 2: Findings of Structural Model with Path Coefficients.

When considering the path coefficient, it was found that marketing efforts on social media had a direct effect on brand awareness (ß=0.653, t=17.123, p=0.000) and brand image (ß=0.724, t=13.722, p=0.000). Brand image had direct effect on electronic-word of mouth (ß=0.562, t=7.298, p=0.000) and brand commitment (ß=0.707, t=9.571, p=0.000), and brand awareness had direct effect on electronic-word of mouth (ß=0.275, t=3.725, p=0.000), respectively.

Meanwhile, brand commitment and electronic-word of mouth had indirect effect on marketing efforts on social media, respectively. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Direct (DE), Indirect (IE), and Total (TE) Effects of the Independent Variables

Latent variable	(R^2)	Effect	Antecedents				
			BRA	**BRI**	**COM**	**MESM**	**e-WOM**
Brand Awareness (BRA)	0.426	Direct	N/A	N/A	0.113	N/A	0.275
		Indirect	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
		Total	N/A	N/A	0.113	N/A	0.275
Brand Image (BRI)	0.524	Direct	N/A	N/A	0.707	N/A	0.562
		Indirect	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
		Total	N/A	N/A	0.707	N/A	0.562
Brand Commitment (COM)	0.618	Direct	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
		Indirect	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.586	N/A
		Total	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.586	N/A
Electronic-Word of Mouth (e-WOM)	0.594	Direct	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
		Indirect	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.586	N/A
		Total	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.586	N/A

A Bootstrap model in the case of significant coefficients is absolute (t-value). In fact, this model tests all the measurement equations (loading factors) and the structural equations using the statistic. According to this model, Path coefficient and loading factors are significant at a confidence level of 95% if the value of the t-statistic is higher than 1.96. Figure 3, which follows the hypotheses marketing efforts on social media, shows that they are positively associated with airline brand awareness and image, and that brand image is positively associated with airline brand commitment and electronic-word of mouth. Moreover, airline brand awareness is positively associated with brand commitment at a confidence level of 95%, while airline brand awareness is not positively associated with brand commitment.

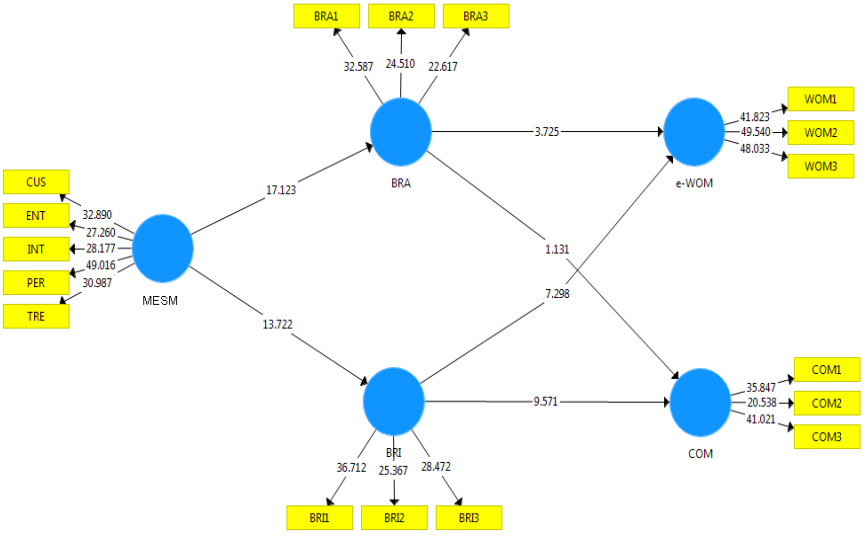

Figure 3: Bootstrap Model in the Case of Significant Coefficients Absolute (t-value)

Path Coefficients and Significance Levels

This step assessed the path coefficient of all latent variables (paths) by comparing ß values among all the paths. The highest ß value symbolizes

the strongest effect of predictor (exogenous) latent variable towards the dependent (endogenous) latent variable. However, ß value has to be tested for its significance level through t-value test. The test is achieved by performing nonparametric bootstrapping technique. Bootstrapping technique computes t-value by creating a prespecified number of samples. Hair et al. (2011) suggest that acceptable t-values for a two-tailed test are 1.96 where the significance level is equal to 5 percent.

H1 (+): Marketing efforts on social media are positively associated with brand awareness.

The value of the path coefficient is 0.653, the t-statistic is 17.123, which is higher than 1.96, and P-value is 0.000, which shows marketing efforts on social media are positively associated with brand awareness at statistical significance level of 0.05. So, H1 can't be rejected; marketing efforts on social media are positively associated with brand awareness at a statistical significance level of 0.05.

H2 (+): Marketing efforts on social media is positively associated with brand image.

The value of the path coefficient is 0.724, the t-statistic is 13.772, which is higher than 1.96, and P-value is 0.000 which shows marketing efforts on social media are positively associated with brand image at a statistical significance level of 0.05. So, H2 can't be rejected; marketing efforts on social media are positively associated with brand image at a statistical significance level of 0.05.

H3 (+): Brand awareness is positively associated with electronics-word of mouth on airline social media sites.

The value of the path coefficient is 0.275, the t-statistic is 3.725, which is higher than 1.96, and P-value is 0.000, which shows brand awareness is positively associated with electronic-word of mouth on airline social media sites at statistical significance level of 0.05. So, H3 can't be rejected; brand

awareness is positively associated with electronic-word of mouth on airline social media sites at a statistical significance level of 0.05.

H4 (+): Brand awareness is positively associated with brand commitment.

The value of the path coefficient is 0.113, the t-statistic is 1.131, which is lower than 1.96, and P-value is 0.259, which shows brand awareness is not positively associated with brand commitment. So, H4 cannot be accepted. Instead, it is rejected; brand awareness is not positively associated with brand commitment.

H5 (+): Brand image is positively associated with electronic-word of mouth on airline social media sites.

The value of the path coefficient is 0.562, the t-statistic is 7.298, which is higher than 1.96, and P-value is 0.000, which shows brand image is positively associated with electronics-word of mouth on airline social media sites at statistical significance level of 0.05. So, H5 can't be rejected; brand image is positively associated with electronic-word of mouth on airline social media sites at a statistical significance level of 0.05.

H6 (+): Brand image is positively associated with brand commitment.

The value of the path coefficient is 0.707, the t-statistic is 9.571, which is higher than 1.96, and P-value is 0.000, which shows brand image is positively associated with brand commitment at statistical significance level of 0.05. So, H6 can't be rejected; brand image is positively associated with brand commitment at a statistical significance level of 0.05.

According to the hypothesis testing results, the details can be summarized as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Path Coefficients and Significance Levels

Hypotheses	Path	Coefficient (ß)	t-Value	p-Value	Results
H1	Marketing efforts on social media → Brand Awareness	0.653	17.123*	0.000*	Supported
H2	Marketing efforts on social media → Brand Image	0.724	13.722*	0.000*	Supported
H3	Brand Image → Electronics-Word of Mouth	0.275	3.725*	0.000*	Supported
H4	Brand Awareness → Brand Commitment	0.113	1.131	0.259	Not Supported
H5	Brand Image → Electronics-Word of Mouth	0.562	7.298*	0.000*	Supported
H6	Brand Image → Brand Commitment	0.707	9.571*	0.000*	Supported

**|t| >= 1.96, means significance at p <= 0.001.*

Discussion

The result of the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) Analysis that tested the effect between latent variables by path coefficient with SmartPLS software, showed Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 3, Hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6 were accepted while Hypothesis 4 was rejected as the p-value was lower than 0.05. The results of this study are summarized as follows.

The relationship between marketing efforts on social media, brand awareness, and brand image

The finding was consistent with the Kim and Ko (2012) study, which indicated that marketing efforts on social media are positively associated with brand awareness and brand image. This confirmed previous results, suggesting that, when consumers are motivated to use social network site hashtags, those hashtags are more likely to have a positive effect on customer participation and brand equity. This is also consistent with the results from Song (2012), who determined that social network site advertisements in the food service industry significantly affect brand equity. The findings are also in accordance with a previous a study on social media marketing efforts carried out by luxury brands, demonstrating that these efforts significantly affected brand awareness and brand image (Bruno et al., 2016). These findings, therefore, confirm previous results that indicated marketing efforts on social media were a precedent, contributing to two types of airline brand equity that is, brand awareness and brand image.

The relationship between brand image, brand commitment and electronic-word of mouth

The findings of this study are consistent with the Seo and Kim (2003) study, which demonstrated significant effects of brand image on the consequences of word of mouth and brand commitment. The findings also support the previous results of Park (2013), who investigated the effect of the brand image of a franchise company on customer behavior and suggested that brand image increased positive word of mouth through brand behavior. This result was also in accordance with Zhang et al. (2015), who studied brand community and found that brand equity significantly affected commitment and

value creation. These findings therefore confirm previous research results which found that brand image is positively associated with electronic-word of mouth and commitment, and demonstrating that marketing efforts on social media have a positive effect on brand, thereby developing committed customers by affecting customer emotions and electronic-word of mouth.

The relationship between brand awareness, electronic-word of mouth, and brand commitment

These findings therefore confirm previous results that indicated the relationship between brand awareness and electronic-word of mouth when consumers establish personal relationships with the brands that they purchase, in the same way that people form relationships with other people in daily life (Forunier et al., 1998). This is consistent with the Seo and Kim (2003) study that demonstrated the significant effects of brand image on the consequences of word of mouth, and Park (2013), who investigated the brand awareness of a franchise company on customer behavior and suggested that brand image increased positive word of mouth through brand behavior. These findings, therefore, confirm previous results that, while brand awareness had not positively associated with brand commitment, brand awareness is positively associated with electronic-word of mouth, which suggests that airlines with low awareness might benefit by actively pursuing marketing efforts on social media in an attempt to increase awareness and develop customer emotions and electronic-word of mouth.

Conclusion and Implications

This research developed a model by considering marketing efforts via social media activities and brand equity along with customer response in order to study the relationship between marketing efforts on social media, brand equity and customer brand loyalty among airline social media brands in Thailand. This included marketing efforts on social media, brand awareness, brand image, electronic-word of mouth, and brand commitment.

The sample of this research comprised people that had experience in using airline social media sites. The sample sized was calculated by rule of thumb for structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2010). As the study had 23

items, a 10:1 ratio was to determine the sample size of 230. The survey used for the empirical study was performed from the period of December, 2017 to January, 2018 on Thais who had experience using airlines. The survey was carried out using a convenience sampling method at Suvarnabhumi International Airport and Don Mueang International Airport. Surveyors distributed questionnaires directly to research subjects and then collected them after respondents responded. 300 questionnaires were distributed, 265 of which were returned. However, 34 questionnaires were incomplete, leaving 231 questionnaires for analysis. Hypotheses testing was done by Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)

The results of this study are summarized into three major findings. Firstly, it was empirically demonstrated that marketing efforts on social media are positively correlated with airline brand awareness and brand image, which indicates that, as airlines actively carry out marketing efforts on social media, customers are more likely to remember or identify the airline more accurately as compared to other airlines. In addition, memories of the marketing efforts on social media are retained by customers via the significant impact on brand image. Secondly, data indicate that airline brand image is positively correlated with brand commitment and electronic-word of mouth, which indicates that the improvement of brand image would contribute to customer online word of mouth. This is especially important in industries such as the airline business that provide intangible services. It also suggests that it is possible to establish a positive airline image through social media, utilizing strong online word of mouth as a marketing tool. The significant effect of airline brand image on brand commitment means that a better image has positive effects on a company via commitment. These results indicate that a virtuous cycle that induces airline social media users to participate in company brand marketing voluntarily and continuously may be developed. Thirdly, evidence affirms the significant impact of airline brand awareness on electronic-word of mouth, which indicates that improvement of brand image would contribute to customer online word of mouth. Furthermore, airline businesses should provide intangible personalized services through relevant and accurate airline marketing information that is easily understandable in order to increase customers' airline brand awareness. On the other hand, airline brand image was not found to be positively correlated with brand commitment. This suggested that a committed customer is not more

important than sharing the value and resources of a company and developing a relationship with that company.

Regarding the perception of risk, the study results indicate that the relative importance of airline marketing efforts on social media components is highest in perception of risk, followed by customization, timeliness, interaction, and entertainment, meaning that customers prefer social media that increases the confidence level of customers by providing various reassurances related to security and technical performance of the airline social media site. In addition, airline companies should consistently provide information about the benefits and usefulness of the airline social media site and deliver personalized service through relevant and accurate marketing information that easy to access and process.

Implication

1) Theoretical Implication

The results of the present study provide evidence that explain the relationship between marketing efforts on social media, brand equity and customer brand loyalty in Thailand. This was done by integrating the Social Media Marketing Activities and Brand Equity to Customer Response for developing the research framework, which is consistent with previous studies. Moreover, the results are directly applicable to other industries. The general nature of the findings therefore needs to be confirmed in other contexts.

2) Practical Implications

Marketing specialists, airline companies and stakeholders can apply the results for developing and planning effective social media marketing strategies. The results reveal that marketing efforts on social media are a tool for generating positive associations with brand awareness and brand image, which contribute to airline brand value. Airlines should induce customers to use social media more actively by developing more interesting and aggressive marketing efforts on social media platforms.

Communicating with airline customers by providing information about products and services that meet the needs of individual customers, creating new marketing content and using airline social media sites with low operating costs that can meet the needs of customers throughout 24 hours per day would make the marketing efforts of airlines truly responsive and would improve both

customer brand equity-brand awareness and brand image. Consequently, customers will build increased loyalty to the products and services that are represented on airline social media sites. Moreover, airlines should be able to effectively build brand loyalty through social media like Facebook and Instagram by encouraging customers who have previously used the airline to share their opinions by sharing comments, pressing "Like" for positive posts about the airline usage experience, airline services suggestions, and interactive posts. These strategies should encourage customers to participate in the brand airline and to spread electronic-word of mouth voluntarily, and to control the behavioral and emotional responses toward a brand by managing social media efficiently.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are as follows.

1) The sample for this study was restricted to Thai passengers under 25 years of age. More comprehensive studies incorporating a broader spectrum of passengers would allow for a more meaningful generalization of the results.

2) Although this study empirically demonstrated that marketing efforts on social media are positively associated with customer brand loyalty, the consequences of these relations on proficiency or the managerial achievement of companies were not addressed.

Future Research

The recommended directions for future studies are as follows.

1) Future research should maximize samples to generate broader generalization of the findings.

2) The study employed brand awareness and brand image as dimensions of brand equity. Future research could also incorporate other dimensions, such as brand quality and brand associations, and re-evaluate the brand equity creation process.

3) Equally important, socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, income, and education, might have a significant impact, or a moderating effect, on the conceptual model, and could be included in future analyses for a more thorough understanding of the studied phenomenon.

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