

Role Of Online Brand Community In Making Marketing Decisions

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A Thesis

in

John Molson School of Business

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Science (Administration) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

January 2011

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: **ROLE OF ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITY IN MAKING
STRATEGIC MARKETING DECISIONS**

and submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ADMINISTRATION
(Marketing)**

complies with the regulations of this University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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ABSTRACT

Role of Online Brand Communities in Making Marketing Decisions

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For decades, marketers have searched for the Holy Grail, those which relate to brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, customer advocacy and brand trust among other marketing ideals to help their companies move up in the ladder of stiff market competition and to gain an edge. Marketers attribute to brand loyalty and its complementary icon, customer retention, to the promise of long term profitability and market share (Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn 1995).

As a result the businesses are in constant look out for avenues to venture in order to find a better solution to their business needs. In the recent years new avenues have sprung up such as brand community and social media. Even though the media has several inherent potential advantages there are several aspects which are unclear such as its applicability on how to use this media to their benefit

This research is an attempt to understand how these concepts work together and measures its impacts on marketing parameter – Loyalty and Brand Trust. It tries to identify if the brand communities could be used in an online structure through social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter etc. The results show that the online brand communities are capable of positive influence on Loyalty and Brand Trust. Further, it tries to understand the attributes of online communities and also shows that in the process, brand communities are also responsible in contributing towards certain practices that create value.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to sincerely acknowledge and give credit to all those who helped me throughout the process of completing my thesis.

I would first like to thank Dr. Michel Laroche for having given me an opportunity to do a thesis research on a topic of my interest and for guiding me throughout the thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Michele Paulin and Dr. Jordan LeBel for their valuable insights and guidance whenever I sought. It was because of their continued support and encouragement that I was able to conduct the research and write on a topic with my complete dedication and best of my knowledge.

I am also grateful to my friends especially Siva, Kshitij & Murali and family who have supported me along the way.

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
EVOLUTION OF THE MARKETING	3
EVOLUTION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY.....	5
EVOLUTION OF CUSTOMER VIEW POINT	8
GROWTH OF WEB 2.0.....	9
FRAME OF REFERENCE	11
SOCIAL MEDIA	11
BRAND COMMUNITY	15
ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITY	20
RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT	22
PRIOR RESEARCH	22
BRAND COMMUNITY	22
Shared Consciousness of kind	23
Rituals and Traditions	24
Moral Responsibilities / Obligations to the society	25
VALUE CREATION THROUGH ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES.....	27
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	29
IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT.....	31
BRAND USE PRACTICES.	33
CUSTOMER CENTRIC MODEL	34
BRAND LOYALTY	38
BRAND TRUST	41

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	44
MODEL	44
MEASURES.....	45
DATA COLLECTION.....	49
RESULTS	50
Internal Consistency	50
Uni-dimensionality	52
Discriminant Validity.....	54
Measurement of Model	56
Structural Model Estimation	56
Confirmatory Factor Analysis	56
Convergent Validity:	57
Reliability:.....	57
Path Analysis	58
DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS	62
LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH	68
APPENDIX.....	71
Exploratory Factor Analysis.....	71
Bartlett’s test of Sphericity and KMO Stats.....	71
Communalities Explained.....	71
Total Variance Explained.....	73
Rotated Component Matrix	74
Component Score Coefficient	75
Confirmatory factor Analysis.....	78
Model Fit Summary.....	78

Scalar Estimates - Maximum Likelihood Estimates	79
Path Analysis	93
Estimates.....	94
QUESTIONNAIRE.....	102
REFERENCES:	109

INTRODUCTION

Marketing over the past few decades has undergone three major changes. The first of it was led by manufacturers back in the 70's and 80's which pursued aggressive marketing with aggressive promotional strategies. This underlies the period which was known as the "producer is the king" phase. This was followed by the marketing revolution in the 80's, led by the retailers who exploited their potential advantage of their closeness to the customers and modified the marketing mantra to "customer is the king" (Schultz and Schultz, 1998). The most recent and the one pertinent to our times is led by the aggressive growth of Information Technology (IT) which has reinforced the fact that customer really does have the upper hand in deciding the dynamics of the market through their sheer dominance in the market (Blythe, 2006). So the motto has nothing but changed to "customer is really the king" (Rob, 2009)

For decades, marketers have searched for the Holy Grail, those which relate to brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, customer advocacy and brand trust among other marketing ideals to help their companies move up in the ladder of stiff market competition and to gain an edge (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002). Marketers attribute to brand loyalty and its complementary icon, customer retention, to the promise of long term profitability and market share (Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn 1995). However, not being aware of how this grail looks like, they have devised various strategies and programs to improve loyalty with limited success and consequences (Dowling and Uncles, 1997). It is clear that the basic and fundamentals and ideals for doing business has still not changed and the mantras of profit maximization and sales revenue improvement still dominate as the goals for most

of the businesses. Yet the tools that are being progressively used by these businesses to achieve these goals have changed efficaciously. One of the pronounced changes that can be seen is the forms of the media and the extent to which their roles have become immersed with the day to day affairs of the business. The availability of vast number of media alternatives, with their expansive reaches, has brought in revolutions in the way businesses make use of them and the most recent one of these media sources is the Social Media. Its inherent advantages of vast reach and low cost of that reach has made it an instant hit. Aided by the ability it provides its user to generate its own content has allowed it gain rapid popularity among those who value other people's opinion.

The rapid in surge of Social Media has made contributions to the concept of Brand Communities which is a collection of members sharing their opinions and views with the help of textual blogs, photos and videos. Based on these ideas, the purpose of this research is threefold.

- First, to contribute to the literature on brand communities, with a conceptualization and measurement of the “brand trust” and “brand loyalty” concepts.
- Second, analyzing the attributes of Brand community and its effect on the various practices which add value to social media, which in turn affects the relationships of a customer with product, brand, company and other customers.
- Third, studying its determinants, how it is generated and in which context it is more appropriate to present a model of “Brand Trust” and “Brand Loyalty”.

To accomplish these objectives, this article is composed of several sections. First, we briefly present a historical aspect of the evolution of Marketing and follow it with a brief

discussion on the existing literature on Social Media and Brand Communities, which forms the theoretical framework. After identifying the lack of studies about Brand Communities in an online context, the second section examines the attributes of Online Brand Community concept and its meaning in the brand domain. The theoretical model is presented in the third section with a review of the literature about the sources and results of brand trust. The research methodology and the results obtained constitute the next two sections. The article concludes with a discussion of the results, its academic and managerial implications and the future research issues that the present research opens.

EVOLUTION OF THE MARKETING

In a short span covering 60 years, marketing has undergone several transitions, from being a seller of firms output to a critical success player in shaping the products, technology marketing strategies and policies direction (Achrol and Kotler, 1999). The traditional media used in the early 50's to the late 70's involved the newspapers, television, radio and the magazines covering the print media and the broadcast media. These were all used as medium to broadcast information from the company to the customers and their prospect buyers through advertisements or interviews to promote their products. It involved aggressive marketing through advertising and made use of push strategies. This conventional media was company-generated and information flowed primarily in one direction i.e., messages were broadcast from company to the target audience (one to many). The companies invested billions and billions of dollars on these mediums year after year and advertised to the customers to make them purchase the products. These were centered on marketing mix strategies, those of 4P's. General awareness of existence of such products and brands, in itself was sufficient to instigate purchases from the customers.

These media sources however, suffered from deficiencies such as finite reach, fixed or un-updateable media and poor archivability. This was the period in which the marketers sold *what they produced* or in other words, customers bought what was produced by these companies. But by the 80's, the scenario changed. Companies began to realize that the customer market which they served, had their own needs and requirements. They therefore began to collect data / information regarding such needs for their customers and relationship with their customers began to form. These relationships were nurtured by the companies to yield greater profits by giving *what the customers wanted*. The need of the customers therefore became a driving force. By the early 90's, technology started to emerge as a critical criterion to be reckoned with the emanation of the internet as a potent weapon in the arsenal of marketers. Web 1.0, as it is known today, brought a change so potent, that the ones who refuse to accept the diffusion of the technology in to their strategy, planning and policy making decisions of the organization incurred heavy losses and perished eventually. This was the era of information technology, germane to the current times.

Web 1.0 provided a base for the businesses to launch marketing strategies which catered to newer avenues. The businesses and customers were able to sell or buy products with the help of internet and hence e-business became an indispensable part of many businesses. It cut down costs across various departments of organizations and eliminated various shortcomings of conventional media such as those of reach and archivability. However, like every technology, as internet technology improved, a newer "version", known as Web 2.0 which is pertinent to the current times allows the users to generate content and initiate

discussions with other consumers. This “phenomenon” is discussed in detail in the next section.

EVOLUTION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Information Technology has gone through a remarkable journey. In its nascent stage of web and cyberspace, there were opposing arguments about how business should address the new concept called “online business” and its introduction has changed the landscape of business (). The acceptance and the spread of the technology among the consumers and the business are exponential and it has entered into every aspect of business. It has also been helped by the fact that the customers have embraced the technology with open hands. The table below illustrates the rate at which the internet is being acknowledged.

Table 1.1 U.S. & Worldwide Internet User Growth								
	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2009	2010	2015
U.S. Internet Users (#M)	0.019	1.80	28.1	135	198	245	254	288
U.S. Internet User share (%)	89.6	84.5	62.3	31.3	18.1	13.4	12.5	10.0
U.S. Internet Users/1,000 People (#)	0.08	7.2	105	477	668	797	820	885
Worldwide Internet Users (#M)	0.021	2.13	45.1	430	1,094	1,825	2,030	2,890
WW Internet Users/1,000 People (#)	0.004	0.40	7.94	70.8	170	270	297	399

Source: Internet User trend (2010)

The rate of growth of internet is forecasted to reach dizzying heights and the table below shows the forecasted levels in various regions across the world.

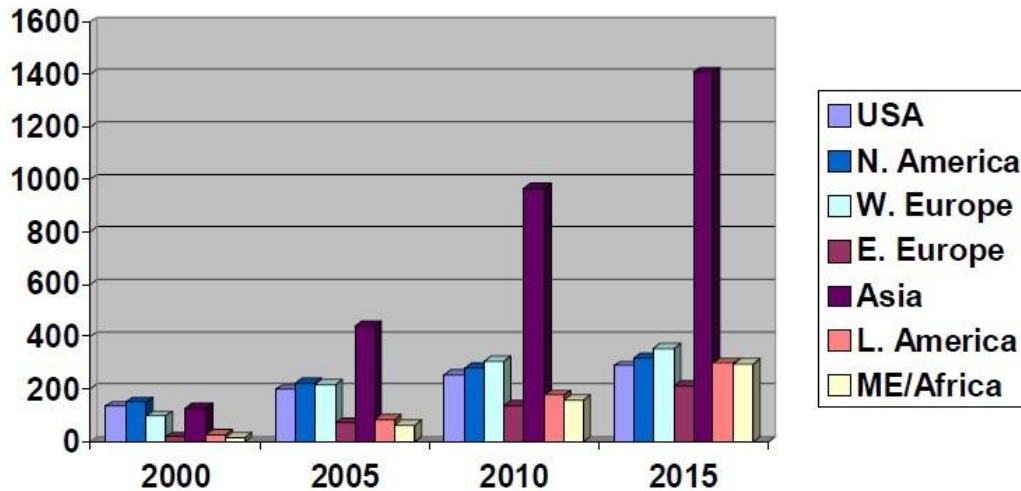


Figure 1.1 Internet Users by Regions

Source: Internet User Trend, 2010

Internet has brought about a revolution and improved several aspects of the business. It has spread its tentacles in all the domains and improved it by leaps and bound.

- The speed of transactions, reach of transactions and the size of the marketplace that we are today capable of buying and selling to have exponentially risen.
- It has also led to avenues to set up companies such as e-bay and Amazon which are basically context driven organizations. They themselves do not sell anything but the service of setting up transactions between the customers and various companies.
- The companies today, are more concerned about creating and maintaining the platform that facilitates the transactions among the customers. This can be explained with the help of the newspaper industry. The major contributors of revenue for the newspaper industry are advertisements, subscriptions and classified ads, whereas the major sources of cost incurred are the distribution, materials, press & ink, and the staff incomes. With the use of internet, the costs from two of the sources have reduced to almost zero, since there are no distribution costs and no cost for the materials. As a result, the companies in the industry

which have accepted internet into their business model were able to sustain higher profits and revenue. This led to an opportunity for companies to realize that the entire package offered by newspapers i.e., sports, business, international news, employment opportunities etc could in some ways be unbundled. This led to creation of companies such as monster.com which focused on employment opportunities alone. Therefore they launched a web site called monster.com, which basically catered to the customers who needed employment, by providing better services through a single website allowing them to search for employment related information by region or salary or department and so on. As a result, the customers who subscribed/registered monster.com grew, leading to increase in advertisements and classified ads for the website. Thus a company was established, based on one of the specialized sectors of the newspaper which did not have anything to offer other than a platform which brought together information from different sources and made it available to customers.

- The overall cost of reaching people i.e., cost of making the information reach people has almost come down to zero. This is helped by the fact that the number of this extent for such media sources is gigantic leading to a lower cost per person at the same overall cost.
- The customers have more knowledge since there are numerous sources to get information from. As a result of their superior knowledge, they have become more powerful.
- The pricing policies of the companies have become more transparent because the customers have more information that they did earlier and they demand a greater transparency into the business before they delve into it.

- The companies are more ready now than they were ever before to serve the tech savvy customer according to their desired tastes. They have adopted the policy of catering to customized product solutions in order to excel in the competitive market.
- The cost and time needed to search for information has come down dramatically. The fantastic search engines available today has made it literally a child's play for anyone to get the desired information in minutes at no cost.
- Above all, the companies have understood that the customers are the ones who drive their business. As a result they have adopted and molded themselves into accepting the concepts of relationship management rather than transaction management policies. The recent concepts of Customer Relationship Management and Life-Time Value of Customer have gained popularity.

EVOLUTION OF CUSTOMER VIEW POINT

The customers have also shifted on the aspect of “who they trust”. Earlier, the customers of a company trusted on the big companies to provide them with good quality product or service. They purchased *what was sold* by the companies and the customers placed a trust on these companies to deliver products of good quality at a fair price. But the empowerment of the customers has changed their perspective. Now, it seems like this trust has begun to shift more towards themselves and their circle of friends and groups, who they are well acquainted with. The evolution of technology has empowered the customers to gain and collect information at a finger's snap. They prefer to search for information themselves or discuss it with their friends to get their opinions and recommendations before the purchase of the product. As a result, a new domain of “*user generated content sites*” is

gaining popularity at rapid rate. These sites provide a platform for information sharing with the help of video sharing, photo sharing and blogging options. According to Bausch & Han (2006), these user generated content sites constitute 5 out of top 10 fastest growing web brands. From basic bulletin boards to today's recent forms of social media such as Face Book, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr etc, these user content generated sites come in many forms which provide at least some form of means which allows the users to connect, communicate and share information. This has enabled websites like Face Book and MySpace to enjoy a huge popularity among the consumers exemplified by the number of visits made to these pages. To give some quantitative figure to understand the gravity of the case, by 2007 there were more than 109 million visitors per month for MySpace, which was over taken by 124 million visitors of Face Book by May 2008 (Casteleyn et al. 2008)

Web 2.0 is a business revolution in the computer industry which allows internet to be used as a platform to launch applications that harness network effects that get better as more people use them. The web 2.0 allows users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as consumers of user generated content in a virtual community. This comes as a contrast to websites where users are limited to the active viewing of content.

GROWTH OF WEB 2.0

As digital environments have become more pervasive, both with the number of people using it and the different activities they are used for. There is a growing realization of their social functions (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998; Walters 1996), their potent influence in bringing together far-flung like minded individuals (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997; Wellman & Gulia, 1999) and their role in influencing consumer opinions, knowledge and behaviors (Williams and Cothrell, 2000). The exponential rise in popularity of social networking sites

and other social media outlets such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn etc, is on a large part due to their viral nature. Social Networking sites are essentially self promoting in that the users spread the word within the sites. The viral quality of the social media makes it an appealing way for the businesses to market products and services, and marketers have started to recognize this and are slowly but surely starting to tap into the potential of social media (Steinman & Hawkins, 2010). This makes it evident that over the last decade, the rapid acceptance of Social Media sites has become a major factor for the businesses to think about and take action. Also it means that undoubtedly, any market researcher who wants to feel the heartbeat of today's society must realize that the 124 million visits per month can provide a wealth of information to be taken advantage of. Among the various such reasons for its importance, the fact that establishes its cardinal importance is that like every other technology, Social Media has started finding various new avenues to establish a firm footing and grow in its applications in numerous domains in such a short time.

This recent shift towards the more user driven blogs, social networking sites and sharing websites has in more than one ways created opportunities for every market sector to benefit from. To name a few, journalism (Staasen, 2010), health industry (Payton, M.B., 2009; Hawn, 2009) and even the traditional market research industries have grown from strength to strength on realizing the potential benefits (Casteleyn, Mottard and Rutten, 2009; Cooke and Buckley, 2008). The social media can be used by the organizations to develop strategy, accept their roles in managing others strategy or to follow the directions of others (Williams & Williams, 2008). It is also being increasing used by companies to identify and recruit new graduates into their organization, and what's more, the candidates are also

found to be the right one suitable for the company and the job. This is currently being utilized as the unique selling proposition by social media site called LinkedIn.com.

Before going any further on this, it is necessary to understand what Social media is all about.

FRAME OF REFERENCE

SOCIAL MEDIA

It is a group of internet based application that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allows creation and exchange of user-generated content. It is therefore defined as the online technologies and practices which people use to share knowledge and opinions. This definition is also supported by Howard Rheingold (1993) where he postulates social media to be “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feelings, to form webs of personal relationships in Cyberspace”. Other definitions stress upon other relevant aspects for the emerging of the virtual communities, such as communicative interactions and the spacial dimensions (Fernback & Thompson 1995; Baym 1998; Kollock & Smith 1999)

These types of media promote a shift from the broadcast model of communication to a many to many model that is rooted in conversations. One of the major characteristics of social media is the high level of interactivity and the ability to initiate and sustain meaningful conversation with and between users. Social Media does so by providing an opportunity for the users to express themselves in an unrestricted manner, thereby allowing them to connect with like-minded people (Picard, 2009). Clodius (1997) states that shared

interests and self-identification of belonging to a group are possible ways that define the concept of community. It is observed to be a more fun way of communicating and the interactivity provides a sense of community that transcends anything offered by mainstream media (Beckett, 2008). Apart from the above mentioned aspects, the other features of social media include:

- Informal, discursive and irreverent, and invites disagreement.
- Interactive, conversation-based and personalized, inviting dialogue with visitors and staff
- Provides a listening post for customer and stakeholder insights.
- Makes us a publisher of news, changing the dynamic with journalists.
- Decreases the distance to customers, share-holders, consumers and staff

Social media sites also called as social networking sites by some provide a variety of services, such as a “unique user ID” which gives the user a “unique space” enabling them to share videos, photos and maintain blogging. It also enables them to not just stay in touch like email but also chat rooms and instant messaging (IM). Some networking sites go a step beyond and offer dating services and matchmaking services. These sites have become the recent hubs for advertising since it allows target based advertising (Murchu, Breslin, and Decker 2004). These advertising contribute a major source of income to these social networking sites. In 2007, this amount increased by more than 100% with a figure of over \$865 million as compared to 2006 (Verna, 2007). It is predicted to increase to \$1.8 billion by 2010 and to \$2.1 billion by 2011 (Verna, 2007). Face Book owner Mark Zuckerberg recently introduced a campaign called as social ad, allowing the advertisers to come up with creative and more eye catching ads to be advertised on Face Book (Klaasen, 2007).

Various advertisers including Blockbuster, entered into partnerships with Face book which allows the users to display their rented or purchased items on these ads, thereby implicitly recommending the products to others. The best part about these advertisements are the fact that these ads are received by users from their friends, who they trust. These ads allows the users to create and engage in conversations which are on an all together different platform from the passive one sided advertisements.

These sites provide the user with a sense of freedom and allow them to converse in various languages, topics and issues, which foster an environment that allows for the free flow of information. People join Face book, Orkut and other such sites to stay in touch with their friends, make new friends, to make plans with them, to have fun and to flirt with them (Lenhart and Madden, 2007). In the same context, it has also enabled certain new areas to take advantage of the environment. LinkedIn for example is known to be used to identify the right candidate for recruitment into companies through repeated interactions by allowing companies to post job availability on the site and members to apply for those jobs through the site. This also allows the companies to scrutinize the candidates on the types of groups they are linked to and the people they converse with. This is aided by the fact that the current generation is extremely comfortable and share an affinity towards dealing with such technologies. The recent trend in the online news is not merely having a website on internet which helps in providing a common place for the users to come and browse for the latest news, but to seek out and reach the audience by delivering them the news updates through various channels available through internet (Gordon, 2009). In the same context the uptake of the social networking sites such as Face book, Twitter, MySpace and YouTube etc in the news organizations is growing and today's journalists are "romancing

the new communities by blogging and posting updates and stories on Twitter, YouTube and Face Book”(Emmett, 2008). Through threads, fans share their ideas and thoughts on broad based topics such as philosophy, politics and spirituality encouraging feelings of empathy within the community members and differentiating from others.

These sites are also characterized by features such as a shared communication environment, online interactions that build and foster interpersonal relationship issuing a sense of belongingness to a group and better understanding of the internal structure of the group. In short, it is a symbolic common space representing shared norms, values and interests (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). This is also supported by other studies such as Gangadharbatla (2008) who through his research posits that the social networking sites fulfill the need to belonging and need for cognition of the users which leads to an increased affinity and willingness to join these sites among the college students. Other researches establish that “being socially connected is a central element in one’s psychological sense of community” (Sarason S B, 1974) and constitutes the flip side of social isolation and alienation (Gottlieb, 1983). These are the terms which have been historically figured prominently in psychosocial theories of psychological disorder (Rook, 1984a, and Thoits, 1982). There are also researches that suggest that the constructs of need to belonging (as relevant to the online communities) is characterized by the nature of social relationships and of the communication flows among the members. These feelings of belonging therefore are weak in nature owing to the absence of physical co-presence and lack of proximity (Granovetter, 1973; Constant et al., 1997). However, these weak ties have been found to be capable of bridging people (Wellman, 1997) and encourage member’s engagement in the communities to reach deep and intimate levels (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005).

There are loads of research which have studied the reasons for why people contribute to online communities (Preece and Krichmar, 2003; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003; Wasco & Faraj, 2005). The theory of self concept adds to the motivation debate by supporting the views that people contribute further towards the online media for reasons of status and prestige, those which are linked to reputation based rewards (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003; Wasco & Faraj, 2005) along with simple desires for entertainment and enjoyment. All the features described above are also found to be adherent to another marketing construct described by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) as Brand Community. In fact, the features of both these terms seem very congruent and therefore it is possible that these are congenial topics that need to be studied and understood. It is important to understand the nature of Brand Communities and Online Communities in order to comprehend the compatibility of the two communities. This study attempts to understand this complementary nature of the attributes of brand community and social media. This is of paramount importance so as to realize whether the benefits of brand communities can be extracted through the use of social media. Before going any further, it is necessary to fathom what Brand Communities represent and the following paragraphs explain this concept in detail.

BRAND COMMUNITY

Companies in their quest of finding solution to improve loyalty and retention have settled on relationship marketing as a possible crack (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Price and Arnould, 1999). Research on this domain, in its early stages, found that customers and marketers were reinforcing and forging their mutual relationships through jointly built communities. These led to better understanding of concepts of loyalty and customer retention. These communities were termed as "Brand Communities". Brand community as

defined by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) is understood as a "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" and represent a form of association situated within the consumption context positioned around one good or service.

These communities are composed of its member entities and their relationships and are identified by their commonalities which help people share essential resources which could be cognitive, emotional or material in nature. However, the most important entity shared among the members in such a community happens to be "creation and negotiation of meaning" (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002). Many scholars have confronted this topic conceptually and empirically to understand the dimensions and the shaping factors of such communities (Arnould and Price, 1993; Granitz and Ward, 1996; Holt, 1995; Muniz and O'Guinn, 1996, 2001). The findings of such studies are profound and wide in both detail and variety.

Brands fulfill important psychological and social needs by expressing who a person is and what group the person aligns him with (Elliott and Wattanusuwan, 1998). It is also believed that consumers join the communities of such brands to identify themselves to such brands so that his social needs of being identified as a person with appropriate self identity are met. In their own ways, the consumers search for the symbols or signs in the communities which help him decipher who they want to be and who they really want to be identified as by others. Pierce's semiotic elements constitute as iconic interrelationship where the sign resembles the objects (Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Daledalle, 2000). Schembri, Merrilees and Kristiansen (2010) through their research show that identification of this type of interrelationship is aspiration because the consumer wants self association with the signs of

objects which are desirable to him. In consuming brands such as Ferrari and BMW, the interpretant assumes the symbolic meaning as a part of self.

Brand Communities have a potential advantage in that they bring the customers together and back into conversations, which enables them to obtain information about the brand from various sources. They no longer need to wait for representatives of the suppliers and have an agency to embark on conversations that are of value to all involved, buyers, suppliers and other interested parties in that community (Levine et al. 2000). It also benefits from the fact that these communities hold the potential to foster not only business to consumer interaction but also consumer to business interactions which can help reinforce the bonding between the consumers and the brand and thus developing “real conversations” among “all stakeholders” within the community.

McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) show that through participation in the brand-fests, companies have been able to manage and increase the feelings of integration into the Jeep brand community and positive feelings about the brand and product category. It has also been shown that through such endeavors the participants derive social and hedonic values which they cherish as an additional benefit of their efforts.

Another theory proposed by Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009) is that if the customers are given a chance they would love to construct brand communities and modify or suggest appropriate changes to the product. Von Hippel (2005) also shares such ideas by positing that the already existing customers can be a rich source of innovative ideas and thereby could lead to a chain of actions that might produce the right product or right modifications on the product. Companies like Dell and Cisco Systems have transformed suppliers and

customers into members of their corporate communities, thereby enabling exchanges of information and knowledge with them. More and more firms are realizing the advantages of online brand communities, which include the opportunity for effective communications with the customers and of obtaining valuable information. These communities not just provide an additional communication channel, but also provide a possibility of establishing linkages to devoted users (Anderson 2005). A brand community starts based on its core assets, the brand itself, and slowly grows by building relationships among members interested in the brand (Jang et al. 2008).

A competitive spirit underlies much of the brand community practices which present opportunities for the individual differentiation through adroit performance (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001, Bourdieu, 1984, Holt, 1995). This leads to a person achieve social identity through self awareness of one's stand in a community and evaluate his significance in the membership (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). This is evident in the practices followed by the *Twilight Saga*, a set of books by *Stephenie Meyer* which illustrates the collaborative value creation by setting up sub-communities such a Twilight Mothers thereby encouraging staking and social differentiation among the fan base.

The initial concepts of brand communities which involve offline communities, however, had a geographical constraint, in that they needed the customers to be physically present at a place which were the major back bone of previous research such as those by McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) or Muniz and O'Guinn (2001). But as it stands today, technology has made the constraint of geography almost irrelevant. The use of mobile phones, internet, television etc. has made people closer than ever before. The role of social media therefore holds the key for the brands to get its existing customers and the

potential customers together in order to create an environment which nourishes the bonding between the customer and brand to find new ways to foster the relationship, all without the constraint of geography. The Brand Community enables interactive communication which in turn facilitates a positive attitude among the members towards the community operator as well as the community, and this, in turn enhances the level of commitment to the community (Kang et al., 2007). It is therefore imperative for the businesses to find a way to make use of the concept of online community.

Industry players need to find new and innovative ways to interact with their customers and be more flexible in their ways of doing business with both customers and trading partners. Internet is a peculiar tool with abundant sources of information for both industries and customers with a wide variety of offerings and dependence on rich information sources. One such concept that is emerging in the marketing world based on the existence of abundant number of sources is “community marketing”, where the promotion of brands, business, product or service is done through creation, support and the fostering of social ties among the persons interested in the product / brand i.e. through creation of community of clients. This marketing is suitable through online communities which bring the qualities of both brand communities and social networking websites to the forefront. For instance, Harley Davidson and Ferrari have developed community sites, devoted to the Customer Relationship Management (CRM), through which it seeks a strong tie with their active and potential customers (see http://www.harley-davidson.com/en_US/Content/Pages/HOG/join_now.html and http://www.ferrari.com/English/Community/OwnersClubs/Pages/FOC_Presentation.aspx).

These allow companies to interact with their clients and make their clients interact with each other and there-by allowing them to share information, experiences and so on.

ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITY

The combination of both Brand Community and Social media leads to a concept of “Virtual Communities” or online brand communities which have seen a fair share of research in it. Online brand communities may be of many different types. Some are tightly bound, densely knit groups of individuals who know one another well, and use the digital environment primarily as a way of augmenting their existing social relationships (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). In contrast, others are far-flung, sparsely connected networks of individuals who come together only in the mediated digital environment and have little chance of ever meeting physically. Some exist for social reasons, such as to enable likeminded individuals to meet; others exist primarily for commercial reasons (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997 call these “communities of transaction”). Irrespective of type, one characteristic that all virtual communities share is that *text-based communication in the digital environment is the primary formative and shaping force for their evolution, growth, and sustenance* (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). People in these communities use words as screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchanging knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends, play games, flirt, create a little high talk and a lot of idle talk (Rheingold, 1991) along with some pictures, videos and avatars to augment the conversation. Given the objectives, the interests of this study are in the communities which are formed for social purposes of sharing information rather than commercial or other purposes which lie outside the scope of this research. It is to be noted that these

communities exert greatest influence on the other members of the community in regards to their opinions and purchase intentions through normative or informational mechanisms or both (Algeismer, Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005).

Unlike many traditional media where individuals consume content passively, content is created by community members through active participation. This content creation acts as an important shaping force of the community's character, and determines not only its influence on participants, but also the status and influence of individual members (Werry, 1999). Moreover, since digital environments facilitate the archiving of past content inexpensively, these communities come to represent an aggregation of collective expertise on individual topics, difficult to match elsewhere, and create a capital of knowledge, increasing its value for all members. Such member-generated content also provides the opportunity for integration into digital media advertising programs to raise their credibility and effectiveness (Werry, 1999). There has been considerable interest among researchers in the communication domain in trying to understand the sustained allure of virtual communities. The paradigm of social network analysis has been frequently used to examine this member attraction (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). This paradigm has uncovered valuable insights: from the breadth of communication topics found in these communities (Wellman & Gulia, 1999), to the strength of weak ties (Constant et al., 1996), and group dynamics (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 2000). A second research approach has focused on obtaining a better understanding of the unique characteristics of the digital environment, and how they are used by members to construct community. For instance, Danet and her colleagues (1998) find incidence of play and performance in virtual chat rooms facilitated by the creative use of text, and by the ephemerality, speed, and interactivity of the medium.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

This study builds on two basic construct, those of Brand Community and Social Media the tenets of which are briefly reviewed.

PRIOR RESEARCH

BRAND COMMUNITY

Community has been a core construct in social thought and has attracted numerous scholars which is evident in its lengthy intellectual history. It has been a prominent concern for a long time, dating back to philosophers and great social theorists of nineteenth and early twentieth century (Dewey, 1927; Durkheim, 1993; Royce, 1969; Weber, 1978) and has continued to be so among the modern scholars (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; find out more). Research has identified that these communities are essentially social entities that reflect the situated embeddedness of brands or products/services in the day-to-day lives of consumers and the way in which the brands connect to the consumers and more importantly the consumer to consumer (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Earlier studies identify few core community commonalities as the critical notion of the communities. These were identified as shared consciousness of kind, presence of shared rituals and traditions and a sense of moral responsibilities as in obligations to society.

Shared Consciousness of kind

Gusfield (1978) in his study posits that one of the important elements in the communities is the “consciousness of kind” which is the shared intrinsic connection felt among the community members. It is a way of thinking that is greater than the shared attitudes or perceptions and relates a collective sense of difference from other members not in the same community. This is also supported by Weber (1978) who describes it as a shared knowing of belonging. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) through their research found out that the member of the community felt a strong connection with one other and they termed it as “they sort of know each other” even if they have never met. This is the central facet of Brand Community. Such group affiliation not only colors the individual’s opinions, ideas, and positions on specific issues, but also provides the impetus to return to the community in the future. Not only that, the interpersonal ties shared by community members have also been shown to increase the willingness to share information and resources with other members to provide support and to commit to goals identified by the group (Walther, 1996; Wellman, 1999). The members also felt a sense of difference from the users of another brand. During their study they also found several instances of websites that echoed the feeling of such shared consciousness of kind such as “made by Saaber for another Saaber.... to enjoy” and “Saab Spirit” or the “The cult of Macintosh”. This demonstrates that the members are able to identify the significant social category of Saab or Macintosh.

These feelings of oneness also were found to exceed geographical boundaries which show that the members feel a part of a large imagined community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Most of the communities are generally open social organizations in that they do not deny memberships, but most of them do have status hierarchies. Englis and Solomon (1997) and

Hogg and Savolainen (1997) posit that there is another way which is used to foster the consciousness of a kind and termed it “Oppositional brand Loyalty”. Through this a sense of integrity is encouraged by reporting the customer’s choice for brand to both inclusion and exclusion from various lifestyles. This is supported by Wilk (1996) who found out that customers defined themselves more by the brands and product they don’t associate themselves with rather than the ones they associate with. It is also consistent with the findings in Urban Sociology in which neighborhoods are defined by their opposition to one another (Hunter and Suttles, 1972; Keller 1968). It is also deemed to significant community formation and maintenance (Maffesoli 1996). This is also evident in the research done by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) where the members of community supported each other in defending their community members when they refuted the other brands or supported their own brands.

Rituals and Traditions

Rituals and Traditions are one of the factors which unite the members of the community and represent vital social processes that bring them together and keep them like that. This helps in the meaning of the community to be transmitted within and beyond the community. most virtual communities create and use shared conventions and language (such as jargon, emoticons, or acronyms), maintain social roles, establish boundaries, enact rituals, show commitment to communal goals, and follow norms of interaction (such as “netiquette”). Through these functions, virtual communities are able to provide many of the same benefits to members as traditional communities, in spite of their physical dispersion and mediated environment.

Ritual itself is admittedly an elusive concept, on the one hand transparent and conspicuous in its enactment, on the other, subtle and mysterious in its boundaries and effects on participants. These rituals and traditions are a symbolic form of communication that, owing to the satisfaction that members of the community experience through its repetition, is acted out in a systematic fashion over time. Through their special meaning and their repetitive nature, rituals contribute significantly to the establishment and preservation of a community's collective sense of itself, which plays a fair share in building "community identity. Rituals stabilize this identity by clarifying expected roles, delineating boundaries within and without community, and defining rules so that all members know that "this is the way our community is."(Bennett & Wolin, 1984). The inculcation of history keeps communities vital and keeps their culture alive. Appreciation of the history of the brand community often differentiates a true believer from the opportunistic ones. Knowing these things is a form of cultural capital within the community. It demonstrates one's expertise, secure membership status and commitment to a larger community (Bourdieu 1984; Holt 1984).

Moral Responsibilities / Obligations to the society

Another core communality that the research by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) found was that of Moral Responsibility. They state that these responsibilities are helpful in bringing the people together within the community. This sense of obligation towards the other members or new members creates a "kind of cohesion within the community and produces collective action". It contributes towards the integration of the community members. When a new member joins the community, a small gesture of help from other community member goes far for the new member to feel liked or being a part of the community. It helps him

appreciate the invisible bond among the members and links him to the bond. It also serves in helping the members being more likely to understand the characteristics or traditions of the community and makes him more open towards accepting them. The process also helps him in clearing off his personal goals regarding seeking social support or information about his requirements. The assistance is therefore an important component for the community.

In most of the communities there is a formal or in formal sense of recognition for what is right and what is wrong. While there is variability, there is also some sense among community members that such social consciousness and contract exist. Sometimes reasons for staying in the community are publicly reinforced which centres on personal experiences of the people using the brand as opposed to the competition.

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) through their research proved that the above communalities are applicable to a brand community in general. But through this thesis, we seek to identify if these are commonalities are also shared by the online brand communities. Hence we propose the following hypotheses regarding the proposed relationship between them

Hypothesis 1: The online brand communities positively influence

- a) *Feelings of consciousness of kind among the members of the community.*
- b) *Rituals and traditions*
- c) *Sense of moral responsibility in terms of their obligations to society.*

VALUE CREATION THROUGH ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES

Various disparate streams of management have enticed several researches in the recent decade to decipher the actual process of value creation. From streams such as consumer research, new product development and service management, the studies have shown that consumers are a main source of value creation. The new and emerging modes of communication and advertising such as word-of-mouth have enthralled one and all to discover cheap and more effective ways of marketing goods or services. Even some of the recent arrivals in the field – “social media” is also stepping into similar fields of identifying how value is created and spread.

Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009), in their study compiled an exhaustive list of practices which are common to brand communities and organized them into four categories:

1. Social Networking
2. Impression Management
3. Community Engagement
4. Brand Use

This research tries to establish a relationship between the commonalities mentioned earlier and these value creation practices. It is proposed that these commonalities are the major causes for practices such as Social Networking, Impression Management, Community Engagement and Brand use to create any form of value to the customers. It is however to be noted that the notion of the research to examine these practices does not in any way suggest that these are exhaustive in nature. There could be several other factors such as cultural bridge or geographical bridge which might also be reasons for the success of Brand

Communities. For the reasons of the limited scope of the master's thesis, other areas are not examined here. These categories of practices are investigated in detail.

SOCIAL NETWORKING.

Social networking practices are those that focus on creating, enhancing, and sustaining ties among the online brand community members (Schau, Muniz and Arnould, 2009). The brand communities across various social networking sites are a common feature nowadays. The utilization of these sites by numerous people for personal and commercial necessities, communication, new business developments and contacts is increasing at a very rate. These communities help people be better informed and more quickly and has become more involved and engaged with one another in an era when social capital is on the decline. This has therefore helped several people in attaining their personal goals and has in turn motivated them to join these sites.

These communities have nil to low overheads and aggregate large amount of valuable information through the user profiles and the comments of the members ranging from their favorite book to movies, and such information can be targeted by the business to reap benefits out of nothing literally in terms of cost involved. It can also help in making business contacts and is a very effective way to maintain these contacts. The value of the members increases as the network expands. The business model for social networking sites however is still unclear as to how to make profits from these sites.

The community members are able to set up discussion forums which allow them to communicate with other members on a relatively free setup, encouraging them to admonish or appreciate openly. The members are thus provided with a platform to air their views

without any fear and with knowledge that their views and comments are being heard. The fact that other members communicate back on the forums allows them to befriend new people and connect with them on a social and intellectual level. Hence we propose a hypothesis:

***H2 a.** Social Networking is positively influenced by the shared consciousness of the members of a community.*

***H2 b.** Social Networking is positively influenced by the rituals and traditions shared by the members of the community.*

***H2 c.** Social Networking is positively influenced by the sense of moral obligations of the members of the community.*

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There is no standard definition of a community. The term “community” has been used to describe interactions among people in primarily geographic terms (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). But it is now accepted that people who live in close proximity to one another do not necessarily constitute a community, since they may differ with respect to value systems and other cultural characteristics that are more relevant to the social concept of community. Some have argued that the defining feature of a community is the common identity shared by its members (Campbell and Jovchelovitch, 2000). Thus, a single individual may belong simultaneously to different religious, vocational, or ethnic communities, or communities with distinct values and aspirations may inhabit a single geographic area.

In our view, the concept of engagement in research goes beyond community participation; it is the process of working collaboratively with relevant partners who share common goals and interests. This involves “building authentic partnerships, including mutual respect and active, inclusive participation; power sharing and equity; mutual benefit or finding the ‘win-win’ possibility” in the collaborative initiative (Zakus and Lysack (1998). The terms “community participation” and “community involvement” both connote manifestations of CE, particularly in the social science literature, and have been influential in CE approaches.

Although some argue that Internet use may erode involvement in public life, the most common internet behaviors, social communication and information searching may actually foster social and civic participation (Shah et al., 2002). Other technologists and social critics surmise that Internet users become increasingly detached from meaningful social relationships and less likely to engage the community as they spend more time online (Davis 1999; Gackenbach, 1998; Stroll, 1995; Turkle 1996). Field research, the little there is, provides some support to such pessimistic view; frequent Internet usage is related to withdrawal from family and community ties (Patterson and Kraut, 1998). However, Shah et al. (2002) reject this owing to certain facts in the methodology of the research by stating that the subjects in the research felt compelled to take advantage of the services provided. They also posit that the time spent on internet positively influence community engagement for the users. This statement is also supported by other independent scholarly research which surmises that “being wired” which they refer to being connected online has the potential to foster and build social associations and encouraging community building (Dertouros 1997). In particular the individuals who use internet communities to explore interests and gather data are found to be more, rather than less, socially engaged (Shah,

Holbert and Kwak, 2000). Thus it is argued that the internet communities which as mentioned earlier are a group of like-minded people could be used to promote and reinforce social bonds, gain knowledge and coordinate their actions to address joint concerns. This fact is also supported by research conducted by Shah, McLeod and Yoon (2001)

Hypothesis H3:

- a. *The community engagement intentions of the members would be improved by the feelings of shared consciousness of the members in that community*
- b. *The Community Engagement of the members would also be positively influenced by the rituals and traditions of the community.*
- c. *The community engagement of the members would be positively influenced by the sense of moral obligations shared by the members of the community.*

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Impression Management as defined by Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009) are “those activities that have an external, outward focus on creating favorable impressions of the brand, brand enthusiasts and brand community in the social university beyond the brand community”. The online communities foster impressionable facts about the brand through word-of-mouth communications and by sharing personal experiences. The word of mouth communication is of great interest to marketers since it is a market based message and its associated meanings and its intended audience are of grave importance. Four factors which affect the communication are the Character narratives, the forum, communal norms and rules and finally the message and meaning (Kozinets, et al. 2010). These four factors alter

the expression and the impression created to the readers and work in unison to create a impression as desired by the members of the community. Consumers were believed to engage in these activities for altruistic nature or to attain higher status (Dichter 1966; Gatignon and Robertson 1986) but the research by Kozinets et al. (2010) reveals that these intentions are far more complicated and complex. They posit that “motivations to participate in the new network are shaped by communal interests and communicative orientations and charged with moral obligatory intentions. Along with other factors such as personality and general communal involvement (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2003) and economic incentives (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004), they highlight that the members demonstrate a need to balance inherent commercial –communal tensions. This in turn points towards the mutual interests of both the consumer and company to maintain and co-create positive value for other member’s notions about the brand. The previous statements also point towards the fact that the members engage in such activities for the reasons to satisfy their need to be morally responsible.

Hypothesis H4:

a) *The shared consciousness of kind of the community members would positively influence the impression management of the members.*

b) *The sense of moral obligation of the members contributes towards the impression management.*

c) *The community rules and traditions also contribute towards the positively influencing Impression Management.*

BRAND USE PRACTICES.

Brand Use practices is a construct which relates to the member's tendency to help other members with newer improved and enhanced ways to use the focal brand. These basically include the information given by one member to another with regards to the customizing the product for better applicability to the needs. These also relate to the feeling of one member towards helping or assisting other members who are relatively newer to the community. The messages and their attuned meanings are in such a manner that they are attuned to a range of different individual and communal factors. When it comes to digital environments, the interactivity pertains as much to "consumer and consumer" as with "marketer and consumer". The very sustenance of these online communities is largely governed by the ongoing communication processes (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). These communication processes are centered on symbiotic exchange of useful information regarding products or brand, or it could be co-creation and consumption of a positive, confluent experience through interactions.

Membership, frequency and the extent of participation is something completely in control of individuals in most cases. In spite of it, researchers find that these communities are playing increasing roles in each individual's life from forming friendships and romantic relationships (Park & Floyd, 1996; Walter, 1996), to learning (Constant et al., 1996), to forming opinions and purchase intentions (Kozinets, 1999, Hagel & Armstrong 1997).

Hypothesis H5:

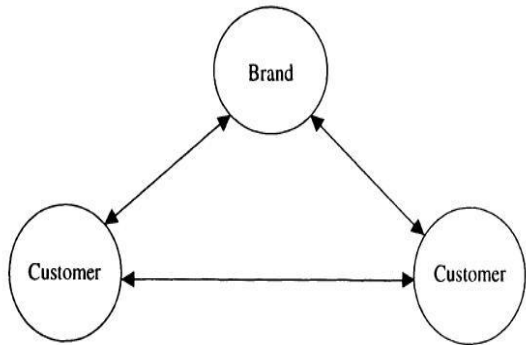
- a. *Shared Consciousness of kind of the members would positively influence the tendency to suggest other members with better brand use practices.*

- b. *The rituals and traditions of the online brand community would contribute towards positively influencing the tendency of the members to suggest brand use practices.*
- c. *The moral sense of obligation would be driving factor in instigating the tendency of the members to suggest better brand use practices.*

CUSTOMER CENTRIC MODEL

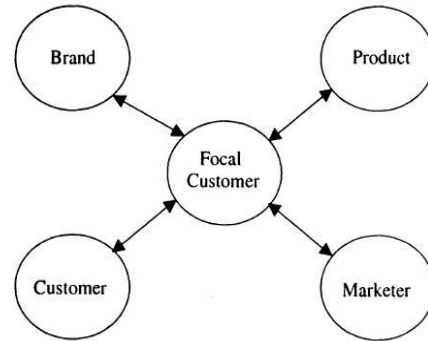
A brand community is envisioned as a group of members who share experiences and their relationships on the basis of commonalities and identifications among them, whether an occupation or other factors such as devotion to a certain brand and result in sharing certain essential resources those which border along cognitive, emotional or material nature. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) in their research established a triad comprising of customer-customer-brand. Their research established that the customer is interested in joining or continue to remain as a member of a community because of their inherent advantages such as information, social recognition or status appeal. The research by Mc Alexander, Schouten & Koenig (2002) however, posited that there are other factors which also constitute to the factors in the triad. The authors surmise that the relationships also include company and products. This is depicted in the figures below.

Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) Brand Community Triad



Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) Brand Community Triad

Customer-Centric Model of Brand Community



McAlexander et Al. (2002) Customer Centric Model

The totality of all the customer experiences with the product, brand, company /marketer and other customers are important ingredient which determines the integrity of the brand community. The concept of generalized reciprocity holds that the recipient of a gift or favor feels obligated to return some measure of consideration to the giver, even if the consideration is not immediate or economic (Purkayastha 2004). The value of the gift differs from person to person. The ones who seek social recognition are the ones who value the possibility or opportunity the community provides to meet newer people who are like minded and willing to share their experiences. This is supported by Self identity Theory which also states that people seek social status and rewards in every relationship they foster and build. The possibility of a person achieving the social status in terms of the person being regarded as knowledgeable in any particular field is often enough for the person to engage himself/herself in the activities of brand communities.

The more meaningful the gift, the greater is the obligation. Gifts are more meaningful when they convey higher levels of caring and understanding by the giver for the recipient (Sherry 1983). The marketing firm that facilitates such sharing through a brand-fest or other such

interaction gives a valuable gift. The firm communicates to its customers that it understands them and cares about their well-being. In so doing the firm may be revered beyond what we would expect from normal customer–company relationships (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2007). Previous research (McAlexander et al. 2002) showed that by proactively creating contexts for customer interaction, marketers can cultivate customer relationships in ways that strengthen brand community. Such integrated ties between customers and brands constitute a potent form of brand loyalty, with all the implied benefits to marketers. The research showed that the “diverse jeep owners, notwithstanding their mutual differences, from other more experienced jeep owners, formed sub communities within the broad brand community”. This in terms contributes towards the concepts of shared consciousness, rituals and traditions and those of moral obligations as inferred by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001). However, the same research also found instances of symbiotic relationships between some of the more and less experienced owners where the lesser experienced ones benefited from the expertise and social approval of the “veterans” and the “veterans” benefited from the status accorded to them in their assumed leadership roles.

This is also supported in the research of Sahlins (1972), which postulated that the exchange of information between different parties cement their relationship through reciprocal exchange of value. The ones seeking more information about their recent purchase of a product or to justify their earlier decision of buying the product are able to extract their desired information from such relationships. The ones in the communities feel free to chip in with information to help fellow members or to guide them with the knowledge of the best way to use the product. It is therefore proved that the Brand Communities serve all the

members in attaining their desired relationship and fosters customer-customer relationships, customer-brand relationship, customer-product relationships and customer-marketer/company relationships.

The practices of social networking, community engagement, impression management and brand use also relate to the concepts of sharing information between the customers and relating the products or brands or the company. Therefore this research hypothesizes that these relationships are fostered and stimulated by the practices of social networking, community engagement, impression management and brand use.

Hypotheses:

H6: Social Networking aspect of the social media websites strengthens the relationship of a customer with

- a. Product.*
- b. Brand.*
- c. Company.*
- d. Other customers.*

H7: Impression Management practices of the social media positively influences the relationship of a customer with

- a. Product.*
- b. Brand.*

c. *Company.*

d. *Other customers*

H8: Community Engagement practices lead to a positive influence on the relationships of a customer with

a. *Product.*

b. *Brand.*

c. *Company.*

d. *Other customers*

H9: Brand Use practices positive relate the relationship of a customer with

a. *Product.*

b. *Brand.*

c. *Company.*

d. *Other customers*

BRAND LOYALTY

Building and maintaining loyalty has been a central theme for almost all the companies and they seek to maintain the strategic competitive leverage of loyal customers as it provides them with various advantages such as premium pricing, greater bargaining powers with the distribution channels, reduced selling costs, stronger entry barriers to potential start ups

into the product/service category along with strategic line and category extensions (Reichfeld, 1996). This has also been termed as the “holy grail” which most marketers seek by McAlexander et al. (2002). Oliver (1999) defines the concept of Loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause such switching behavior”.

Marketers devise various short term activities such as promotional tools in order to boost up and shape the brand image (Knox, 1996). However, these need to be balanced along with the long-term activities such as product development to sustain the created favorable brand image. The internet allows a company to do both of these in a unique way. It removes the passivity of the one sided communications of traditional marketing activities and allows a more active participation of the customers. In many cases these interactive communications lead to a far improved long term solutions such as customization of products, larger sets of choices, quality assurance of the products, information about brand history, and transparent pricing. This provides a better value proposition. Along with the above mentioned advantages, internet makes it possible to faster responses to the customer enquiries, easier payment methods, faster delivery options, greater privacy, reliability and trust with third party approvals.

Information technology's recent advances have led to development of social media which allows self-expression and information sharing. This allows the consumers to gain useful information from internet rather than off-line. Customers also enjoy far greater access to information about the products or brands. It helps people to approach and evaluate products

without any time limits. It also facilitates discarding unwanted alternatives. The information empowers them to compare products from various companies and evaluate them in terms of pricing, quality, features and other value propositions. The customer-customer interaction in the recent social media enables the customer to share first hand information and experiences with others. Hence, it is far more suitable to spread the positive information about the product or the company at a faster rate owing to the wide reach of the medium.

Loyalty is a key requirement in establishing any kind of relationship marketing with plays an important role in the expansion of the commerce. As a result it has enticed numerous researches to study and analyze the factors affecting loyalty such as service quality (Ruyter et. al., 1998; 1999; Kelley, Gilbert and Manicom, 2003) , information quality (Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000; Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998), product quality (Oliver, 1999; Selnes, 1993; Bruning, 1997), corporate image (Andreassen & Lindestad, 2010), price (Martín-Consuegra et al., 2007; Krishnamurthi & Pal, 1991; Grabowski & Vernon, 1992; Grewal et. Al., 2003), commitment (Jauch, Glueck & Osborn, 1978; Evanschitzky et Al. 2006; Dimitriades, 2006) and price transparency (Soh, Markus & Goh, 2006). However, little research has been done in analyzing its relationship with online brand community. The research in the lines of loyalty and brand community, the very little there is, has proven that the commitment of the members towards the community positively influences the loyalty (Jang et al., 2008). McAlexander et al. (2002) posit that the brand loyalty in terms of brand community depends on the level of community integration and is moderated by customer satisfaction. This study extends the available literature in this field by analyzing whether loyalty is influenced by

H10: Strengthening the relationship between a customer and the product would lead to a positive influence on the Loyalty of the customer.

H11: Strengthening the relationship between the customer and the brand would improve his/her loyalty.

H12: Improving the relationship between the customer and the company would lead to an improvement in the loyalty intentions of the customer.

H13: Improving the inter customer relationships would redirect itself as a positive influence on the Loyalty of the customer.

BRAND TRUST

Marketers seek to achieve profit maximizations stemming from the loyalty of the customers in order to associate price premiums and increased market share (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). This concept however, depends on another construct Brand Trust, which is defined as “The confident expectations of the brand's reliability and intentions” (Delgado et Al., 2003). Like many other, marketing constructs, Trust has also received a lot of attention from scholars across various disciplines such as economics, psychology, sociology, management and marketing (Delgado et Al. 2003), but still the study of Brand Trust has not flourished in the context of Branding literature (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). This could possibly be accredited to the difficulty to integrate the various perspectives on trust and to find a consensus on its nature. However, researches have revealed that Brand Trust is an important factor to consider which connects to building strong Brands and brand loyalty (Hunt, 1997; Srivastava *et al.*, 1998, 2001).

In this study, Brand trust is proposed to be influenced by brand Loyalty positively, unlike the previous researches pointed out earlier, where in they propose the reverse relation. It is possible that the relationship goes either way, and hence an attempt is made to study if it is true by analyzing the reverse relationship i.e., Brand Loyalty influences Brand Trust. The complex model showing the relationship also tries to depict the possible relationship between the Brand Trust and Online Brand Community. It is therefore proposed that the Construct of Brand trust also positively influences the intentions of the customers to join a community or the existing members to stick to the community. To accommodate both the aspects the following hypotheses are proposed:

H14: Brand Loyalty influences the trust of the customers in the Brand positively.

H15: Increase in the Trust of a customer on a Brand leads to increased intentions to join a brand Community or to remain a member of the Community.

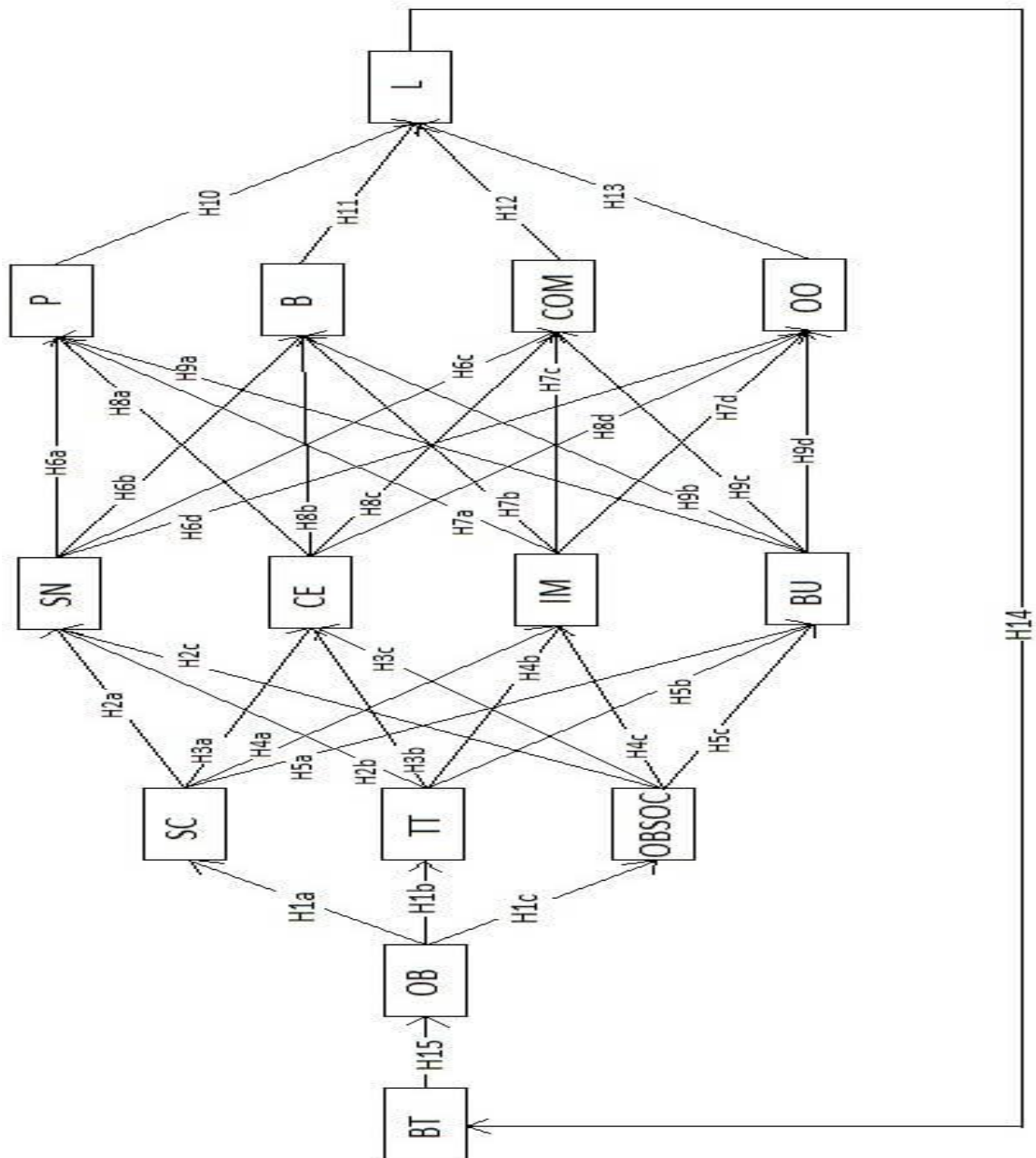
Hypothesis Index	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Proposed Sign	Hypothesis Index	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Proposed Sign
1 a	Shared Consciousness	Online Brand Community	+	7 a	Product	Impression Management	+
1 b	Rituals and Traditions	Online Brand Community	+	7 b	Brand	Impression Management	+
1 c	Obligations to Society	Online Brand Community	+	7 c	Company	Impression Management	+
2 a	Social Networking	Shared Consciousness	+	7 d	Other Customers	Impression Management	+
3 a	Community Engagement	Shared Consciousness	+	8 a	Product	Community Engagement	+
4 a	Impression	Shared	+	8 b	Brand	Community	+

	Management	Consciousness				Engagement	
5 a	Brand Use Practices	Shared Consciousness	+	8 c	Company	Community Engagement	+
2 b	Social Networking	Obligations to Society	+	8 d	Other Customers	Community Engagement	+
3 b	Community Engagement	Obligations to Society	+	9 a	Product	Brand Use Practices	+
4 b	Impression Management	Obligations to Society	+	9 b	Brand	Brand Use Practices	+
5 b	Brand Use Practices	Obligations to Society	+	9 c	Company	Brand Use Practices	+
2 c	Social Networking	Rituals and Traditions	+	9 d	Other Customers	Brand Use Practices	+
3 c	Community Engagement	Rituals and Traditions	+	10	Loyalty	Product	+
4 c	Impression Management	Rituals and Traditions	+	11	Loyalty	Brand	+
5 c	Brand Use Practices	Rituals and Traditions	+	12	Loyalty	Company	+
6 a	Product	Social Networking	+	13	Loyalty	Other Customers	+
6 b	Brand	Social Networking	+	14	Brand Trust	Loyalty	+
6 c	Company	Social Networking	+	15	Online Brand Community	Brand Trust	+
6 d	Other Customers	Social Networking	+				

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To address the research issues identified, a model is proposed and analyzed. The model constitutes of all the constructs and their proposed relationship with each other. The direction of this relationship is marked.

MODEL



MEASURES

All the constructs under investigation were measured using multiple-item scales. The items are collected from a number of studies and put together in a questionnaire. Some of these are modified to suit the context of the current study.

The construct of *online brand community* uses a six items each on a 5 point Likert Scale. The scale was developed by Srinivasan, Anderson, and Ponnnavolu (2002) as part of a larger set of scales that the authors developed after in-depth interviews to help identify eight factors that seemed to identify themselves with online brand community. Following that, more in-depth interviews were conducted to help generate scale items. They were evaluated by a group of academics and then pretested with a small sample. An alpha of .723 was reported for the scale used. Beyond this regarding the Origin of the scale, Srinivasan, Anderson and Ponnnavolu (2002) divided the main study's sample into three parts. One part was for an exploratory factor analysis (n=180) and one was for a confirmatory factor analysis (n=180). These analyses led to the scales being purified for model estimation using the largest portion of the main study's sample (n=851). Having said this, specific evidence in support of this scale's validity is not provided.

The scales for *Shared Consciousness of kind, Rituals and Traditions and Obligations to Society* were derived out of definitions for the respective terms as defined by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) in his study and consisted of two items each. The items were tested in a three factor confirmatory model and an acceptable fit was obtained, with Cronbach alphas of 0.72, 0.73 and 0.745 respectively. The items were also tested positively for discriminant validity. The average variance Extracted for the scales were 0.78, 0.787 and 0.647 respectively.

The scale for *Social networking* has eight, five-point Likert-type statements that are intended to measure a person's belief that a certain community offers the opportunity for interpersonal interaction and friendship between the business and the customer as well as customer-to-customer. The scale was developed for use with an online store. However, since the scale measures the same parameter as in the original study, they are used after slight modifications for this study. The final versions of the scales appear to be original to Hsieh, Chiu, and Chiang (2005) and have a reliability of 0.85. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported the expected three dimensional structures of the data. Further, analyses provided evidence of convergent and discriminant validity for the three scales. The average variance extracted for the scale was .65.

The scale for *Brand Community Engagement* has four, five-point Likert-type statements that are intended to measure the degree to which a person is involved with a community of brand users due to intrinsic benefits of the activity. The scale was constructed by Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann (2005). An initial set of items were developed for several scales using qualitative research followed by a quantitative pretest. The composite reliability reported for the scale by Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann (2005) was 0.88. Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann (2005) used CFA with twelve latent constructs and twenty measures. The measurement model fit the data well and two tests were used to provide evidence of each scale's discriminant validity. The average variance extracted for this scale was 0.64.

The scale for *brand use practices* has three, five point Likert-type statements which are aimed to measure the degree to which a member of a community believes he/she gets useful information about the brand's use. The items are constructed out of the definition of

brand use practices as explained by Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009) in their research. The average variance extracted for this scale was 0.61. The items are tested for their reliability and discriminant validity which are confirmed. The Cronbach's alpha (α) reported is 0.7. An Exploratory factor analysis revealed these items to load on a single scale which is termed as Brand Use Practices in the thesis.

The scale for *Impression Management* is also derived out of the definition proposed by Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009), in their research. The scale consist of three, 5 point Likert scale, all loading on a single component termed Impression management in this study. The average variance extracted for the scale is 0.633 and the Cronbach Alpha (α) reported is 0.71. The scale is also tested for reliability and discriminant validity.

The scales for a customer's relationship with *Product, Brand, Company and Other Customers* are derived out of the research work done by McAlexander et Al. (2002). The items were tested in a four factor confirmatory model and an acceptable fit was achieved. The reliability for the scale of customer-product was reported as 0.90 with an AVE of 0.74. Similarly those of Customer-Brand were reported as 0.88 with AVE = 0.58, Customer-Company was reported to have a reliability index of 0.88 and AVE of 0.79 whereas those of Customer-other Customer had a reliability of 0.70 with AVE of 0.61.

Brand trust was measured as a three-item index based on the four item index originally developed by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) using a five-point ratings of agreement with the following three statements: "I trust my brand to give me everything I expect out of it," "I rely on this brand," "My Brand never Disappoints me,". Cronbach alpha for this

three-item index of brand trust was 0.817. The scale was also tested positive for discriminant validity.

The scale for Brand Loyalty was derived out of the study by Elena Delgado-Ballester et Al. (2003). The three items measured on a 5 point Likert scale is characterized by a reliability of 0.84 and average variance extracted of 0.57. The scales are also checked for discriminant validity.

Dimension	Cited Study	Number of items used
Online Brand Community	Muniz and O’Guinn (2001)	6
Shared Consciousness	Muniz and O’Guinn (2001)	2
Rituals and Traditions	Muniz and O’Guinn (2001)	2
Obligations to Society	Muniz and O’Guinn (2001)	2
Social Networking	Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009),	8
Community Engagement	Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009),	4
Impression Management	Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009),	3
Brand Use Practices	Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009),	3
Product	Mc Alexander, Schouten & Koenig (2002)	4
Brand	Mc Alexander, Schouten & Koenig (2002)	3
Company	Mc Alexander, Schouten & Koenig (2002)	2
Other Customers	Mc Alexander, Schouten & Koenig (2002)	3
Loyalty	Delgado et. Al. (2003)	3
Brand Trust	Chaudhuri and Holbrook, (2001)	3

DATA COLLECTION

The collection of data with regards to website community requires that some specific decisions regarding the method of collection be taken. In this research, the emphasis of data collection is given more towards the members who are in one or more of such communities. These people are the right target since these have an exposure to both the brand community concept and those of social networking sites.

To guide the categories of meaning, a range of questions in the form of 48 items was used to collect data. These questions were drawn from the literature regarding the key characteristics of social media and brand community (Shown in the Appendix Section). Participants were collected using snow-ball procedure and varied in age from 18 to 55 years. The study was introduced as an “opinion survey” and the participants were first asked to list the name of the community they associate themselves with or are a member of, as a screening question. It is important to note that the respondents were allowed to choose the virtual community of their choice to analyze, since the objective of the thesis was to understand the behavior of the virtual community members, regardless of the product or brand around which the community was created. This also serves the purpose of making the respondents think in the lines of communities. The questionnaire was distributed through the social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. Several posts were included in these heavy traffic websites along with email distribution lists. This method of data collection, which is consistent with previous research in online contexts (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Steenkamp and Geyskens, 2006) helped generate a total of 441 valid responses (58.9% male and 41.1% female). The questionnaire also included a

personal details section seeking the country of residence in order to make it possible to do a cross country comparison later on.

RESULTS

A pre-test was conducted by 30 respondents and the questions were evaluated in the contexts of face validity and content validity. The scale development was based on the review of literature on the relevant topics and the recent advances in them. From the literature review, an initial set of items was proposed but due to lack of valid scales, some of the scales were adapted from the initial set of scales. This adaptation had the objective of guaranteeing the face validity of the measurement instruments. Face Validity is defined as the degree that the respondents judge that the items are appropriate to the targeted construct and is habitually confused with the content validity. Nevertheless, content validity is the degree to which the items correctly represent the theoretical contents of the constructs and is guaranteed by the in-depth literature review undertaken.

Internal Consistency

The internal consistency of the scales is measured by their reliability. This reliability was tested using Cronbach Alpha indicators considering a minimum value of 0.7 (Cronbach, 1970; Nunnally, 1978). The table below indicates the Cronbach alphas for all the constructs.

CONSTRUCTS	NO OF MEASURES	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	CRONBACH'S α
Online Brand Community	6	10.83	2.758	0.723
Social Networking	8	15.82	4.081	0.78
Community Engagement	4	7.91	2.244	0.711
Impression management	3	5.91	1.746	0.710
Brand use Practices	3	5.95	1.715	0.700
Shared Consciousness	2	3.96	1.341	0.720
Obligations to Society	2	3.84	1.161	0.745
Rituals and Traditions	2	3.95	1.553	0.730
Product	4	6.43	2.107	0.731
Brand	3	5.60	1.763	0.728
Company	2	3.83	1.253	0.727
Other Customers	3	6.02	2.045	0.719
Loyalty	3	6.732	2.715	0.856
Brand Trust	3	5.34	1.696	0.709

Uni-dimensionality

The next step involved the evaluation of uni-dimensionality of the proposed scales by performing Exploratory Factor Analysis using Principal Component method for extraction. Factors were extracted based on the existence of eigenvalues greater than 1. In addition they were required to have a significant factor loading of greater than 0.5 and a high total variance explained component. Based on the results only one factor was extracted from each component of Brand Trust, Shared Consciousness, Rituals and Traditions, Obligations to Society, Impression Management, Community Engagement, Brand Use, Product, Company, Brand, Other Customers, Loyalty and Customer Advocacy, Social Networking and Online Brand Communities constructs.

Contrary to regression analysis, factor analysis does not lead to the categorization into dependent and independent variables. For EFA, the only important criterion is the strength of association between the variables. A total of 14 constructs were formed based on their eigenvalues and the items were grouped into these 14 constructs. Factor analysis is significant since the variables involved are sufficiently correlated to one another. Bartlett's test of Sphericity and 'Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin' measure of sampling adequacy provide insight into the degree of correlation.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.851
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3790.687
	df	1128
	Sig.	.000

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity attempts to determine whether there is a high enough degree of correlation between the variables. The table above shows that the test has a significant result ($p < 0.001$). Another criterion that can be used to determine the degree of correlation is the KMO Stat (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin). The KMO stat as indicated in the table is 0.851 (> 0.50) which is greater than the minimum of 0.5 which indicates a good degree of correlation. Hence it can be concluded that the analysis reveals a meaningful factor analysis and that the principal component analysis can be carried on.

Communalities: The values in the communalities show the part of the variance explained by each component. These tables are available in the appendix section. The total variance explained by the 14 components is 70.354% which means that together the 14 components explain 70.35 % of the total variance.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	12.605	26.261	26.261	12.605	26.261	26.261
2	3.215	6.699	32.960	3.215	6.699	32.960
3	2.680	5.582	38.543	2.680	5.582	38.543
4	2.262	4.712	43.254	2.262	4.712	43.254
5	1.883	3.924	47.178	1.883	3.924	47.178
6	1.654	3.447	50.625	1.654	3.447	50.625
7	1.455	3.031	53.655	1.455	3.031	53.655
8	1.385	2.885	56.541	1.385	2.885	56.541
9	1.322	2.754	59.295	1.322	2.754	59.295
10	1.210	2.520	61.815	1.210	2.520	61.815
11	1.121	2.336	64.151	1.121	2.336	64.151
12	1.081	2.252	66.403	1.081	2.252	66.403
13	1.063	2.062	68.466	1.063	2.062	68.466
14	1.007	1.889	70.354	1.007	1.889	70.354

The Rotated component matrix indicated the actual component on which each variable loads on and by how much. Based on the results we can conclude that the 14 components are exhaustive in themselves to explain all the variables. The loading pattern explains that the 14 components can be named as the 14 constructs Brand Trust (BT), Online Brand Community (OB), Shared Consciousness of Kind (SC), Obligations to Society (OBSOC), Rituals and Traditions (TT), Social Networking (SN), Community Engagement (CE), Impression Management (IM), Brand Use Practices (BU), Product (P), Brand (B), Company (COM), Other Customers (OO), Loyalty (L) and Advocacy (advocacy).

In the process of the exploratory factor analysis, it was found that the items “The community allows direct user input or posting to site” (ob1), “The Brand Community keeps in touch with me with notifications” (sn1), “The community provides with me product information” (sn4), “I share my opinions on the community” (sn8) and “I benefit from following the community's rules” (ce1) did not have high enough loading on their respective factors. Hence they were eliminated from the further analysis steps. This was suitable since they did not change any major results.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity describes the degree to which the measures is not similar to (diverges from) other measures that it theoretically should not be similar to (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discriminant_validity). Discriminant Validity is achieved when the correlations between the constructs differs significantly from 1 or when Chi-square difference tests indicates that two constructs are not perfectly correlated. As a test of discriminant validity, the correlations among the latent variables were checked for whether they are significantly different from 1. According to Campbell and Fiske (1959), the

$$\frac{r_{xy}}{\sqrt{r_{xx} \cdot r_{yy}}}$$

constructs have poor discriminant validity if the ratio of $\frac{r_{xy}}{\sqrt{r_{xx} \cdot r_{yy}}}$ is greater than 0.85, where r_{xy} is correlation between x and y, r_{xx} is the reliability of x, and r_{yy} is the reliability of y. For our study, these values were significantly lower than 0.85. Similar measures of check for discriminant validity were also replicated by Bagozzi and Yi (1988).

	SC	OBSOC	TT	OB	SN	CE	BU	IM	P	B	COM	BT	LL	OO
SC														
OBSOC	.419**													
TT	.388**	.430**												
OB	.465**	.481**	.454**											
SN	.538**	.640**	.589**	.635**										
CE	.488**	.584**	.540**	.554**	.644**									
BU	.424**	.499**	.430**	.501**	.564**	.554**								
IM	.377**	.484**	.473**	.456**	.540**	.540**	.530**							
P	.286**	.416**	.291**	.410**	.357**	.330**	.364**	.396**						
B	.407**	.425**	.414**	.521**	.424**	.459**	.445**	.473**	.528**					
COM	.290**	.436**	.455**	.474**	.456**	.438**	.424**	.381**	.397**	.422**				
BT	.393*	.471**	.453**	.456**	.463**	.468**	.471**	.485**	.512**	.567**	.470**			
LL	.339**	.273**	.424**	.266**	.317**	.299**	.412**	.378**	.371**	.391**	.356**	.467**		
OO	.475**	.475**	.622**	.522**	.628**	.546**	.451**	.452**	.341**	.497**	.454**	.546**	.457**	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The test shows that all the constructs are significantly different from each other at a significant level of 0.01. Hence the findings indicate the discriminant validity for all the constructs that were formed.

Measurement of Model

Structural Model Estimation

With respect to the fit statistics for the full model ($\chi^2 [649] = 1077.449$, $p = 0.000$, RMSEA = 0.039 and CFI = 0.926), the chi-square is significant ($p < 0.05$), which usually is the case for large sample sizes. All other statistics are within acceptable ranges, which indicate a good model fit.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is used to estimate a set of regression equations simultaneously and is therefore a suitable technique for the estimation of traditional models as well as complex relationships (e.g. confirmatory factor analysis). The analysis for the study involves a confirmatory factor analysis followed by path analysis to estimate the β values for the relationships hypothesized. The initial questionnaire had 49 items relating to different constructs and is therefore essential to perform an exploratory factor analysis to decrease the size of the data set. This is to reduce the large number of variables to a smaller number of dimensions.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis is a multivariate statistical procedure which tries to identify the extent to which the measured variables represent the number of constructs (in this case 14). The difference between the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis lies in the fact

that the former tries to simply explore and provide information about the numbers of factors required to represent the data, whereas, the latter, is more concerned about how the selected number of factors are related to the latent variables. Therefore CFA is a tool used to confirm or reject a model.

For this study, CFA is done using AMOS Graphics statistical software. The initial testing suggests that the items ob2, ob3, b1 and l3 have below acceptable level of standardized regression weights and have non-significant loadings. Hence, they are eliminated from the further testing process. Another round of testing after removing the above mentioned items gives significant results for all the items and a CFI of 0.944 is obtained. The goodness of fit statistics is as follows: $\chi^2(611) = 939.921$, $p = 0.000$, $RMSEA = 0.029$.

Convergent Validity:

Convergent validity is used to indicate the degree to which different indicators are able to confirm one another. The Critical Ratio indicated in the tables in the appendix section and the loadings on each indicators of above 0.5 are proof for convergent validity for the measures.

Reliability:

Reliability refers to the extent to which the scales produces consistent results when the measures are repeated multiple numbers of times. To measure the reliability of the constructs we need to calculate the composite reliability calculated manually. Composite reliability thus corresponds to the conventional notion of reliability in terms of classical test theory (Lord & Novick, 1968). The table below shows the reliability stats for two such constructs. The complete table is available in the appendix section.

Construct	Items	Standardized Regression Weights	Squared Multiple Correlation	1-Square Multiple Correlation	Construct Reliability
BT	bt1	0.539	0.427	0.573	0.609330335
	bt2	0.56	0.314	0.686	
	bt3	0.653	0.291	0.709	
	sum	1.752	sum	1.958	
	sum2	3.069504			
OB	ob4	0.487	0.237	0.763	0.659680432
	ob5	0.652	0.425	0.575	
	ob6	0.731	0.534	0.466	
	sum	1.87	sum	1.804	
	sum2	3.4969			

Since all the constructs have a reliability of greater than 0.6, it is safe to assume that all the individual indicators have been measured correctly.

Path Analysis

Path analysis revealed a model fit statistics confirming a positive fit for the model (χ^2 (665) = 1172.936, CFI = 0.913, RMSEA = 0.34 and $p = 0.000$). The results indicate the following:

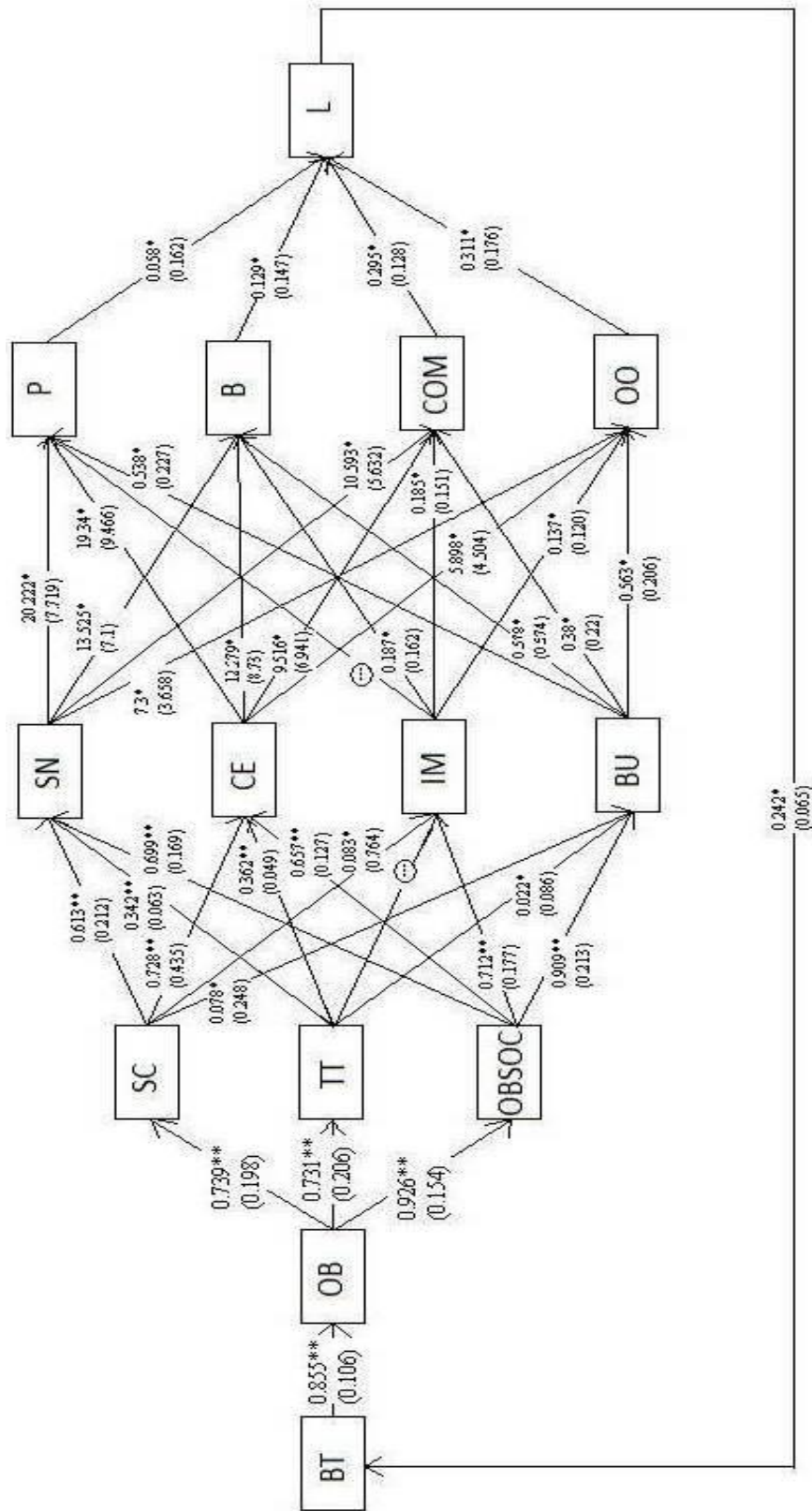
1. The construct online Brand Community (OB) was also seen to have significant positive influence on Shared Consciousness of kind (SC), Rituals and Traditions (TT) and Obligations to Society (OBSOC) with β values of 0.739, 0.731 and 0.926 respectively, in support of H1 a, b and c.
2. Shared Consciousness of Kind (SC) was observed to have significant positive relationship with Social Networking ($p < 0.00$) and Community Engagement ($p < 0.00$), with β values of 0.613 and 0.782 respectively. However, the relationship with Brand Use Practices (BU) and Impression Management (IM) were marginally significant ($p < 0.05$) with β value of

0.075 and 0.083 respectively giving support to all four hypotheses H2 a, 3a, 4a and 5a as expected.

3. Rituals and Traditions (TT) was found to have significant positive impact on Social networking (SN) and Community Engagement (CE) with significance levels of $p = 0.00$ and β values of 0.342 and 0.362 respectively in support of H 2b and 3b. H 4b was rejected (TT \rightarrow IM) and H 5b (TT \rightarrow BU) was found marginally significant at 90% significance level.
4. Obligations to Society (OBSOC) was found to have significant positive influence on all four constructs (Social Networking, Community Engagement, Brand Use Practices and Impression Management) in support of H 2c, 3c, 4c and 5c with significance levels of $p = 0.000$ and β values of 0.699, 0.657, 0.909 and 0.712 respectively.
5. Similarly all four hypotheses involving relationships of Social Networking with Product (P), Brand (B), Company (COM) and Other Customers (OO) were found to be marginally significant at 90% confidence levels. Hence H6 (a, b, c and d) were accepted.
6. Impression Management, Community Engagement and Brand Use Practices were observed to show similar results with all their hypotheses. For Impression Management, hypotheses 7b, 7c and 7d were found marginally significant at 90% significance level, where as the hypothesis **7a** was found **insignificant**. For Community Engagement all four hypotheses 8a, 8b, 8c and 8d were found marginally significant (significant at 90%). For Brand Use Practices, also all four hypotheses 9a, 9b, 9c and 9d were found to be marginally accepted at significance levels $p < 0.1$

7. The hypothesis H10 was also found to gain some support to be marginally significant ($p < 0.1$) which implies that strengthening the relationship of a customer with the product leads to a positive influence on Loyalty.
8. Similarly, H11, H12 and H13 also found support with significant β values of 0.129, 0.295 and 0.311 respectively. This implies that the customer's relationship with the Brand, Company and other Customers also has a positive influence on his/her Loyalty.
9. It was also confirmed that there is enough evidence to support H14 implying that Brand Trust is positively influenced by Loyalty ($\beta = 0.242$, $p < 0.1$).
10. The impact of brand trust (BT) on the online brand community (OB) is strong and positive ($\beta = 0.855$ and $\text{see} = 0.106$ with $p < 0.000$), in support of H15.

The final model is shown in the figure below along with the respective β values and their significance levels.



DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

In today's marketplace, product differentiation alone is not sufficient for it to sustain the hold on the market and it calls for adoption of newer trends in to their marketing plans. The only way a company survive in exhaustive race and to touch base with constantly changing finish line, is by redefining the terms of competitive edge. To sustain in this competitive market, companies realize that the customer needs are of primordial importance and therefore set up various customer acquisition and retention strategies. However, it is also necessary to comprehend that the brands and products have a social nature affiliated to it. This social nature allows the company to nurture interactive communications between the customers and company.

Brand Community literature indicates that the concepts of online brand community which combine the characteristics of both brand communities and social media are becoming popular and the marketers are beginning to realize its potential value and plan to include them in their marketing plans to extract benefits to gain competitive advantage over the other players in the market. It is therefore important for us to gain insight into these concepts to unravel the ways to harness into its full potential.

This study brings together three separate studies on brand communities, to analyze and understand exactly how these concepts can be used to improve the performance parameters of loyalty. The results of this research show that this contributes towards customer's loyalty which in turn influences the brand trust. It need not be mentioned here that these are indispensable parameters that determine the overall success of all the marketing efforts. It

is however, to be noted here that Brand Community alone is not sufficient to produce positive results. There might be other factors at play such as culture and brand passion of the customers, to name a few, but yet the results suggest that the brand communities lend a helping hand towards the success of the marketing efforts.

In doing so, it contributes to the literature on brand communities and social media, exploring how and when they can be used for the benefit of the company. This study is the first to link up the three researches involving brand communities, their value creating practices and the customer centric model. Furthermore, it extends the prior knowledge by analyzing their impact on loyalty for business practices. This study has a few contributions from the managerial aspect.

It is important for us to keep in mind that the potent combination of social media and brand community has several merits such as those of low cost aspect of its reach. It is also characterized by wide diversity and huge number of customers it can reach. Hence it allows marketing to reach new levels allowing it to gain advantages of phenomenal awareness margins and communication. It is therefore possible that it could encourage greater commitment levels from the consumers towards both the company and the community.

The result shows that the construct of online brand community is positively linked to the aspects of shared consciousness of a kind of its members, the rituals and traditions specific to that community and the congruous sense of moral obligations to the society that the members share among themselves. This underlies the fact that these communities create a

platform for the like minded individuals or members to air their views, like and dislikes to an audience who, they know, think like them and believe in sharing their views. It therefore acts a place where free flow of information is conducive. The members therefore are rewarded immediately with a sense of belongingness. This therefore lends support to postulations of several previous researchers (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Rheingold, 1991) that these are ideal avenues to make friends or to possibly find their romantic partners.

The results also indicate these attributes of shared consciousness, rituals and traditions and moral obligations contribute towards the value additive or value creative practices such as social networking, community engagement, impression management and brand use practices. This implies that the members, with the knowledge of the fact that other members are similar to themselves, feel lesser inhibitions towards engaging themselves in social networking and community engagement. Their participation and interest in such activities allows both the companies and the members to create favorable impressions about the brand / product / organization or to negate the false impressions. It therefore acts a place where enthusiastic members are present to disperse information and collect immediate responses from the members. The fact that the members are allowed to communicate interactively allows for exchange of information where in new members are able to collect a lot of information. The potential advantage for the companies lies in the existence of word of mouth communication among the members leading to possibly increase in the number of customers. It is to be noted here that the companies which successfully engage the members in spreading useful information to others by managing

the member's impression about the companies or the product are at a distinct advantage here.

This also contributes to the existing literature by unraveling how it such practices create value. It is found that these activities create opportunities to capitalize on for both the marketers and the members. The study also provides taxonomy of collective group actions present in communities of diverse natures. It thus lends support to the research of Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009), where they suggest that social identity is only a fraction of the values realized by brand communities. It suggests that ceding the control over to the consumers enhances consumer engagement and builds greater brand value (Cova, Park & Pace, 2007) and that the firms can derive value by ceding this control (Varco& Lusch, 2004). It also extends possible support to the research by Fuller, Matzler and Hoppe (2008), where in posit that brand community members are possible sources of innovative ideas. This follows the line of thought that allowing the free flow of information among like minded members would give opportunity for newer ideas or newer ways to use the products to emerge from them. It could therefore act a possible source of winning ideas to sustain competitive advantage for the companies.

Consumers are known to make their purchase decisions based on the interactions with their friends. To the extent that the brand encourages such interactions is only going to foster the customer's appreciation for the brand. The concept of customer centric model as introduced by Schouten and McAlexander (2002) highlights the complex relationships between a customer with the company, brand, product and other customers in the community. The

study replicates the results and proves that the practices of social networking, community engagement, impression management and brand use influence this complex relationship positively. It is possibly explained by the reason that the customers are able to understand the product, company and brand better through these practices. Greater exposure to the insides, if favorable would therefore lead to increase in depth of the relationship of a member with these aspects and possibly would associate greater values to them. The results show that Brand Communities have the power to influence strength of relationships between the customer and the product, the brand, the company and other customers.

On one hand, customers seeking utilitarian purposes or self expressive reasons are motivated by the ability to communicate freely to company and other members. On the other hand, the ones seeking hedonic reasons are comforted by the abundance of opportunities to find friends and establish new relationship. The depths and intimacies of these relationships also project themselves as exit barriers for the customers and reduce the chances of them from leaving the communities which only lends a helping hand for the cause of the company. The results specifically indicate that social networking influences the relationship with the product maximum, suggesting that customers begin to like their product more. This is also supported by numerous examples of quotes from the customers in the research by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001).

Most importantly, the results indicate that these relationships lead to increase in loyalty of these members. This is of prime importance to the companies, since all the companies are constantly seeking for ways to improve their customer's loyalty for their brands and products.

The fact that loyalty is improved leads to questions about other marketing parameters such as customer satisfaction, their repurchase intentions, advocacy etc. It is also found that the loyalty influences their trust positively to suggest a complete circle or a closed loop of one variable affecting other till it circles back to the initial variable. It is evident from this study that communities have their distinct advantages for the companies to reap benefits out of, but further research is needed to understand how and what more can be extracted out of this potential concept. It is therefore suggested that this study be treated as preliminary findings that provoke further thought.

The analysis showed that the strength of correlations between the social networking construct and Community Engagement construct is at a level that might not suggest discriminant validity between the dimensions. It is recommended to eliminate one of the constructs to avoid possible overlap when results are estimated simultaneously as in the case of Structural Equation Modeling. However, running the results using an iterative procedure might solve the problem.

The research also had a few surprising results to reveal which need to be analyzed in much greater detail. First of them was that the construct of Obligation to society was found to be the one which had the most significant contributions to the processes which create value to brand community. It would be expected that since the community is characterized by the members who share similar likes and dislikes have a shared consciousness of a kind, it would lead to far greater influence, but was not the case. Another interesting aspect was the

validity of the direction of the arrow from Loyalty to Brand Trust. It means that there is a possibility of the reverse direction also possible i.e., brand trust influencing Loyalty as investigated by many researches. However, the significance of the relationship in the reverse direction opens up avenues to question whether the reverse could also be possible and that these construct share an interchangeable influence pattern.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study is a part of master's level thesis and therefore suffers from several limitations aligned to it. However, these limitations are sources for future research. One such limitation is that the variables included in this study are not exhaustive. It does not take into considerations factors such organizational culture or brand culture, type of community such as open or closed. It is possible that these factors have major influence on the result obtained and cause significant differences. It is essential to do look into their impacts and roles to understand how they influence those results.

It is also recommended to test the model for whether it can be applied for any specific products/brands. In other words, this framework of variables should be tested as to whether it is true for specific products or brands.

Furthermore, it is entirely possible that the roles and mechanisms of variables used in the study are different for different datasets. For example, in cases of the brand community being offline, the variables in play might be different and their impacts might *differ* from the ones *evidenced* in this study. Understanding this more broadly is an important direction for future research.

Understanding the technical, service and interactive requirements as a whole should produce better communities with greater participation levels of members. It therefore is essential to conduct further empirical research, not only to test the framework, but more importantly, to consider how the concept might develop over time and incorporate the changes in the nature of communities, structure and expectations out of these communities. A longitudinal aspect is thus needed to this research. A possible way to go about this is by establishment of an online community panels with the view to comprehend better how participants within the community are interacting with each other.

Furthermore, it is necessary to realize for the companies that social media and brand communities are not suitable for all the companies. The free flow of information that it enables the customers to benefit from also ensures that the companies lose some amount of control in what is being communicated between the customers. The carefully constructed brand image by the company which it bases all its marketing activities around are at risk of being swept under the carpet if the customers begin to create a buzz by bad publicity. Having said that it is appropriate for the companies to don an attitude which says it is all right if the customers talk good about the companies but not all right if they start negative word of mouth communication. The companies should just try to maintain a positive attitude that there are more people with positive word of mouth than the reverse. It therefore calls for a few metrics which are able to measure what exactly is being communicated and keep track of the things being associated with the companies in the talks by the customers.

The results were primarily collected from participants who were citizens of either Canada or India at a 30-70 ratio. It is possible to analyze if there is any difference with the demographics of the participants. That is, if there is any difference in the model between the two countries.

APPENDIX

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Bartlett's test of Sphericity and KMO Stats

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.851
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3790.687
	df	1128
	Sig.	.000

Communalities Explained

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
	1	n
sn2	1.000	.678
sn3	1.000	.732
sn5	1.000	.621
sn6	1.000	.636
sn7	1.000	.730
ce1	1.000	.609
ce2	1.000	.772
ce3	1.000	.692
ce4	1.000	.677
im1	1.000	.740
im2	1.000	.718
im3	1.000	.639
bu1	1.000	.800
bu2	1.000	.715
bu3	1.000	.650
sc1	1.000	.741

sc2	1.000	.794
b1	1.000	.605
b2	1.000	.813
b3	1.000	.790
com1	1.000	.771
com2	1.000	.812
l1	1.000	.713
l2	1.000	.822
l3	1.000	.801
ob1	1.000	.848
ob2	1.000	.809
ob3	1.000	.754
ob4	1.000	.660
ob5	1.000	.804
ob6	1.000	.693
obsoc1	1.000	.670
obsoc2	1.000	.702
tt1	1.000	.797
tt2	1.000	.772
p1	1.000	.723
p2	1.000	.775
p3	1.000	.769
p4	1.000	.753
oo1	1.000	.672
oo2	1.000	.727
oo3	1.000	.712
bt1	1.000	.671
bt2	1.000	.815
bt3	1.000	.642

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Total Variance Explained

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	12.605	26.261	26.261	12.605	26.261	26.261
2	3.215	6.699	32.960	3.215	6.699	32.960
3	2.680	5.582	38.543	2.680	5.582	38.543
4	2.262	4.712	43.254	2.262	4.712	43.254
5	1.883	3.924	47.178	1.883	3.924	47.178
6	1.654	3.447	50.625	1.654	3.447	50.625
7	1.455	3.031	53.655	1.455	3.031	53.655
8	1.385	2.885	56.541	1.385	2.885	56.541
9	1.322	2.754	59.295	1.322	2.754	59.295
10	1.210	2.520	61.815	1.210	2.520	61.815
11	1.121	2.336	64.151	1.121	2.336	64.151
12	1.081	2.252	66.403	1.081	2.252	66.403
13	1.063	2.062	68.466	1.063	2.062	68.466
14	1.007	1.889	70.354	1.007	1.889	70.354
15	.851	1.773	72.127			
16	.833	1.735	73.863			
17	.790	1.645	75.508			
18	.745	1.553	77.060			
19	.712	1.484	78.544			
20	.671	1.399	79.942			
21	.646	1.347	81.289			
22	.580	1.209	82.498			
23	.562	1.171	83.669			
24	.552	1.151	84.820			
25	.522	1.087	85.907			

26	.510	1.063	86.970
27	.492	1.024	87.995
28	.476	.991	88.985
29	.431	.897	89.882
30	.408	.850	90.732
31	.379	.789	91.521
32	.373	.777	92.298
33	.352	.734	93.031
34	.345	.719	93.750
35	.323	.673	94.422
36	.301	.628	95.050
37	.289	.602	95.652
38	.277	.577	96.229
39	.254	.530	96.759
40	.223	.465	97.224
41	.213	.445	97.669
42	.198	.412	98.080
43	.187	.389	98.470
44	.173	.361	98.831
45	.165	.343	99.173
46	.146	.303	99.477
47	.140	.291	99.768
48	.112	.232	100.000

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotated Component Matrix

	OO 1	P 2	L 3	IM 4	SC 5	COM 6	CE 7	BU 8	OBSOC 9	B 10	BT 11	SN 12	TT 13	OB 14
sn2	0.174	-0.02	0.23	-0.05	0.285	-0.13	0.087	0.207	0.318	0.038	-0.05	0.525	0.185	0.032
sn3	0.32	-0.01	0.289	0.026	0.278	0.115	0.271	0.073	0.337	-0.05	0	0.469	-0.16	-0.12
sn5	0.253	0.028	-0.05	0.25	0.193	0.189	0.193	0.045	0.392	0.025	0.147	0.544	0.035	-0.02
sn6	0.355	0.051	-0.02	0.289	0.069	0.017	0.274	0.113	0.332	0.048	-0.04	0.585	0.052	0.184
sn7	0.158	-0.03	0.115	0.265	0.14	0.133	0.099	0.11	0.152	0.114	0.042	0.633	-0.01	0.319
ce1	0.183	0.008	0.145	0.392	0.386	0.085	0.291	0.061	0.224	0.136	0.134	0.24	0.032	-0.1

ce2	0.149	0.116	0.012	0.156	0.101	-0.03	0.785	-0.04	-0.078	-0.02	0.1	0.127	-0.09	0.172
ce3	0.206	-0.03	0.003	0.091	0.215	0.203	0.627	0.205	0.282	0.149	-0.07	-0.03	0.106	0.005
ce4	0.179	-0.08	-0.11	0.138	0.182	0.333	0.51	0.262	0.296	0.15	0.113	0.044	0.047	-0.07
im1	0.017	0.097	0.221	0.765	0.089	0.107	0.022	0.193	-0.01	0.007	0.122	-0.05	0.137	-0.03
im2	0.224	0.117	0.038	0.749	0.003	0.067	0.121	0.119	0.017	0.176	0.118	0.004	0.094	0.024
im3	0.131	0.111	0.086	0.682	0.068	0.033	0.078	0.132	0.27	0.081	0.061	0.124	0.097	0.009
bu1	0.064	0.116	0.023	0.124	0.04	0.006	0.051	0.824	-0.017	0.151	0.214	0.069	0.017	0.018
bu2	0.151	0.03	0.162	0.196	0.157	0.104	0.046	0.738	0.139	0.115	0.042	0.011	0.035	0.064
bu3	0.139	0.051	0.346	0.348	0.085	0.177	0.11	0.524	0.231	0.033	0.016	0.064	0.023	0.036
sc1	0.216	0.045	0.126	0.028	0.701	0.071	0.264	0.157	0.083	0.122	0.11	0.102	0.178	0.069
sc2	0.127	0.072	0.178	0.127	0.793	0.056	0.106	0.134	0.041	0.091	0.076	0.16	0.039	0.14
b1	0.105	0.454	0.078	0.146	0.212	0.181	0.082	0.008	0.027	0.502	0.026	0	-0.02	0.092
b2	0.257	0.165	0.097	0.002	0.175	0.096	0.117	0.013	0.044	0.783	0.037	0.051	0.046	0.01
b3	0.054	0.186	0.101	0.057	0.023	0.112	0.008	0.061	0.053	0.791	0.174	0.148	0.044	0
com1	0.129	0.094	0.03	0.071	0.055	0.806	0.026	0.069	0.06	0.156	0.191	0.126	0.006	0.013
com2	0.182	0.092	0.099	0.071	0.119	0.836	0.107	0.044	0.107	0.081	-0.04	0.07	-0.02	0.026
l1	0.228	0.119	0.696	0.184	0.024	0.041	0.014	0.184	-0.141	0.168	0.166	0.013	0.128	-0.01
l2	0.208	0.173	0.818	0.189	0.088	0.006	0.058	-0.07	-0.02	0.097	0.098	0.02	0.105	-0.03
l3	0.029	-0.02	0.827	0.022	0.18	0.08	-0.06	0.062	0.21	-0.01	0.092	0.033	-0.09	0.068
ob1	0.144	0.012	0.02	-0.06	0.054	0.002	0.102	0.052	0.073	-0.08	-0.08	0.025	0.091	0.884
ob2	0.013	0.056	0.028	0.065	-0.09	0.101	0.107	0.133	-0.038	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	0.18	0.843
ob3	0.056	0.108	0.057	0.103	0.074	-0.05	0.022	-0.03	0.138	0.061	0.061	-0.04	0.07	0.778
ob4	0.185	0.058	-0.02	0.057	0.423	0.197	-0.27	0.047	0.017	-0.13	0.111	0.334	0.136	0.541
ob5	0.202	-0.05	-0.01	0.066	0.175	0.139	0.027	0.123	0.028	0.153	-0.04	0.066	0.024	0.814
ob6	0.2	0.165	0.124	0.014	0.428	0.076	0.289	-0.11	0.2	0.18	0.059	0.014	0.087	0.589
obsoc1	0.127	0.185	-0.02	0.235	-0.04	0.387	0.018	0.155	0.543	0.008	0.215	-0.02	0.177	-0.03
obsoc2	0.337	0.152	0.245	-0.08	0.171	-0.06	0.387	0.229	0.534	0.065	0.017	0.069	0.167	-0.20
tt1	0.068	0.086	0.052	0.203	0.057	0.285	0.116	0.146	0.118	0.106	0.043	0.126	0.75	0.062
tt2	0.086	-0.04	0.065	0.209	-0.03	0.26	0.241	0.093	-0.079	0.172	0.05	0.173	0.708	0.082
p1	0.112	0.775	0.115	0.108	-0.11	0.004	0.054	0.035	-0.061	0.142	0.014	0.055	0.167	-0.07
p2	0.051	0.803	0.132	0.004	0.156	-0.03	-0.07	0.028	0.092	0.151	0.183	-0.03	0.106	0.014
p3	0.254	0.66	-0.01	0.098	0.234	0.126	-0.01	0.033	-0.023	0.2	0.085	-0.24	-0.01	0.046
p4	0.011	0.66	-0.09	0.187	-0.12	0.222	0.121	0.118	0.214	-0.09	0.033	0.27	-0.16	0.125
oo1	0.503	-0.03	0.28	0.036	0.206	0.092	0.163	0.039	0.25	0.14	0.064	0.285	-0.21	-0.04
oo2	0.599	0.04	0.17	0.06	0.303	0.024	0.076	-0.05	0.177	0.163	0.181	0.047	-0.16	0.022
oo3	0.752	0.062	0.24	0.1	0.161	0.068	0.05	0.105	0.065	0.057	0.078	0.034	0.069	0.104
bt1	0.017	0.331	0.196	0.019	0.253	0.171	0.256	0.214	-0.052	0.119	0.533	0.025	0.018	0.022
bt2	0.138	0.184	0.155	0.227	0.148	0.016	-0.09	0.064	0.081	0.129	0.773	-0.08	0.148	-0.02
bt3	0.188	0.061	0.167	0.269	-0.14	0.366	0.185	0.09	0.146	0.021	0.515	0.082	0.113	0.019

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varian with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 13 iterations.

Component Score Coefficient

Component Score Coefficient Matrix														
	Component													
	OO	P	L	IM	SC	COM	CE	BU	OBSOC	B	BT	SN	TT	OB
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14

sn2	0.18	0.001	0.026	-0.12	0.033	-0.15	-0.08	0.068	0.141	-0.01	-0.08	0.541	0.094	0.14
sn3	0.018	0.036	0.101	-0.07	-0.09	-0.01	0.062	-0.02	0.089	-0.11	-0.04	0.436	-0.10	0.025
sn5	0.111	0.004	-0.11	0.054	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.08	0.151	-0.05	0.05	0.548	0.012	-0.05
sn6	0.073	0.019	-0.06	0.044	-0.1	-0.10	0.062	0.151	0.107	0.008	-0.06	0.421	0.036	-0.22
sn7	-0.12	-0.04	0.027	0.064	-0.04	-0.02	-0.07	-0.05	0.097	0.12	-0.01	0.402	0	-0.14
ce1	-0.08	-0.06	-0.01	0.181	0.144	-0.04	0.074	-0.08	0.022	0.031	0.005	0.062	0	0.015
ce2	-0.04	0.044	0.014	0.053	-0.04	-0.09	0.529	-0.12	-0.217	-0.10	0.072	0.04	-0.09	0.066
ce3	-0.05	-0.05	-0.00	-0.04	0.031	0.063	0.337	0.025	0.076	0.049	-0.12	-0.18	0.093	-0.05
ce4	-0.07	-0.10	-0.09	-0.03	0.031	0.106	0.228	0.067	0.079	0.061	0.043	-0.10	0.026	0.046
im1	-0.08	-0.05	0.038	0.403	0.079	0.011	-0.03	-0.03	-0.112	-0.02	-0.05	-0.05	0.045	0.005
im2	0.038	-0.04	-0.07	0.399	-0.01	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.098	0.085	-0.04	-0.03	0.005	0.043
im3	-0.02	0.033	-0.03	0.348	0.019	-0.08	-0.05	-0.07	0.08	-0.06	-0.04	0.039	-0.11	0.021
bu1	-0.03	-0.02	-0.11	-0.09	-0.03	-0.10	-0.06	0.528	-0.111	0.087	0.142	0.085	-0.08	0.059
bu2	0.003	0.006	0.015	-0.03	0.062	0.019	-0.07	0.411	-0.038	-0.08	-0.09	-0.05	-0.02	0.004
bu3	-0.06	-0.02	0.121	0.059	-0.02	0.037	-0.02	0.226	0.04	0.007	-0.06	-0.01	-0.04	-0.04
sc1	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.03	0.371	0.019	0.059	0.035	-0.074	-0.02	-0.02	-0.1	0.084	-0.02
sc2	-0.1	-0.01	-0.02	0.074	0.486	0.022	-0.06	0.012	-0.118	-0.01	-0.04	-0.06	-0.11	0.03
b1	-0.02	0.119	-0.02	0.056	0.091	0.049	-0.02	-0.04	-0.003	0.228	-0.14	-0.08	-0.06	-0.08
b2	0.004	-0.05	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	0.025	0.475	-0.10	-0.05	0.019	-0.14
b3	-0.12	-0.09	-0.01	-0.01	-0.11	-0.06	-0.08	0.022	0.074	0.535	0.049	0.132	-0.03	0.209
com1	-0.05	-0.04	0.004	-0.06	0.011	0.448	-0.06	-0.01	-0.063	0.003	0.031	0	-0.01	0.001
com2	-0.02	0.002	0.065	-0.04	0.074	0.5	-0.02	-0.05	-0.056	-0.05	-0.17	-0.1	-0.04	0.017
l1	0.024	-0.03	0.306	0.011	-0.10	0.004	0.014	0.052	-0.169	0.031	-0.02	0.017	0.059	-0.03
l2	0	0.021	0.385	0.035	-0.07	0	0.052	-0.1	-0.067	-0.03	-0.09	-0.01	0.056	-0.03
l3	-0.13	-0.04	0.408	-0.06	0.017	0.069	-0.05	-0.03	0.126	-0.02	-0.03	-0.03	-0.08	0.014

ob1	-0.04	-0.01	0.039	-0.06	-0.01	-0.02	0.037	-0.02	0.003	0.036	0.021	-0.04	0	-0.01
ob2	-0.03	-0.03	0.01	0.004	0.005	0.012	0.031	0.011	-0.056	0.012	-0.02	0.057	0.008	0.71
ob3	-0.05	-0.05	0.009	0.017	-0.02	-0.06	0.004	-0.10	0.144	0.034	-0.02	-0.02	0.137	0.544
ob4	0.013	-0.05	-0.08	0.005	0.209	0.104	-0.22	-0.06	-0.084	-0.16	0.021	0.181	-0.08	0.292
ob5	-0.04	-0.02	-0.04	0.012	-0.07	-0.03	-0.10	0.073	-0.134	0.076	-0.03	0.035	0.021	0.611
ob6	-0.07	0.038	0.009	-0.02	0.105	-0.04	0.081	-0.14	0.031	0.026	-0.01	0.073	0.043	0.263
obsoc1	-0.04	0.028	-0.05	-0.05	-0.08	0.126	-0.10	-0.02	0.374	-0.03	0.083	-0.09	0.107	0.051
obsoc2	0.063	0.07	0.076	-0.19	-0.08	-0.08	0.17	0.07	0.245	-0.05	-0.06	-0.06	0.138	-0.03
tt1	0.02	0.04	-0.06	0.009	-0.10	0.073	-0.06	0.01	-0.083	-0.05	-0.09	-0.04	0.345	-0.15
tt2	0.029	-0.05	-0.03	0.042	-0.15	0.058	0.058	-0.02	-0.239	0.013	-0.06	0.044	0.309	-0.01
p1	-0.04	0.32	0.057	-0.02	-0.12	-0.04	0.07	-0.02	-0.016	-0.04	-0.11	0.097	0.089	-0.14
p2	0.022	0.33	-0.01	-0.07	0.054	-0.08	-0.09	-0.02	0.102	-0.05	0.009	-0.04	-0.03	0.014
p3	0.156	0.264	-0.10	0.014	0.217	0.026	-0.10	-0.05	-0.038	-0.01	-0.09	-0.27	-0.18	0.245
p4	-0.04	0.327	-0.05	0.008	-0.13	0.025	0.017	0.003	0.088	-0.16	-0.03	0.206	-0.18	0.068
oo1	0.246	-0.05	0.039	-0.08	-0.03	-0.07	-0.01	-0.04	0.071	0.016	0.065	0.13	-0.20	0.132
oo2	0.233	-0.01	-0.06	-0.03	0.09	-0.09	-0.09	-0.10	0.033	0	0.222	-0.1	-0.20	0.099
oo3	0.358	0.035	0.015	-0.03	-0.01	-0.03	-0.09	-0.08	-0.088	-0.07	-0.05	-0.10	-0.02	0
bt1	-0.11	0.052	0.019	-0.12	0.058	0.039	0.155	0.099	-0.118	-0.07	0.329	-0.02	-0.04	-0.12
bt2	-0.02	-0.05	-0.07	0.017	0.027	-0.1	-0.11	-0.03	0.06	-0.07	0.526	-0.05	0.018	0.02
bt3	-0.03	-0.07	0.038	0.001	-0.21	0.11	0.093	-0.04	0.021	-0.07	0.331	0.054	0.066	-0.03

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Confirmatory factor Analysis

Model Fit Summary

Model Fit Summary

CMIN

Model	NP	AR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	208	939.291	611	.000	1.537	
Saturated model	819	.000	0			
Independence model	39	6660.808	780	.000	8.539	

Baseline Comparisons

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	.859	.820	.946	.929	.944
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Parsimony-Adjusted Measures

Model	PRATIO	PNFI	PCFI
Default model	.783	.673	.740
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	1.000	.000	.000

NCP

Model	NCP	LO 90	HI 90
Default model	328.291	249.416	415.111
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	5880.808	5623.583	6144.574

FMIN

Model	FMIN	F0	LO 90	HI 90
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Model	FMIN	F0	LO 90	HI 90
Default model	1.430	.500	.380	.632
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	10.138	8.951	8.559	9.352

RMSEA

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	.029	.025	.032	1.000
Independence model	.107	.105	.110	.000

AIC

Model	AIC	BCC	BIC	CAIC
Default model	1355.291	1382.260		
Saturated model	1638.000	1744.191		
Independence model	6738.808	6743.865		

ECVI

Model	ECVI	LO 90	HI 90	MECVI
Default model	2.063	1.943	2.195	2.104
Saturated model	2.493	2.493	2.493	2.655
Independence model	10.257	9.865	10.658	10.265

HOELTER

Model	HOELTER .05	HOELTER .01
Default model	469	487
Independence model	84	87

Scalar Estimates - Maximum Likelihood Estimates

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
bt3 <--- BT	1.000				
bt2 <--- BT	1.080	.120	8.976	***	
bt1 <--- BT	1.243	.126	9.893	***	

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
ob6	<---	OB	1.000				
ob5	<---	OB	.877	.074	11.826	***	
ob4	<---	OB	.582	.065	9.019	***	
sc2	<---	SC	1.000				
sc1	<---	SC	1.011	.083	12.131	***	
obsoc2	<---	OBSOC	1.000				
obsoc1	<---	OBSOC	.853	.085	9.997	***	
tt1	<---	TT	1.000				
tt2	<---	TT	.917	.065	14.152	***	
sn2	<---	SN	1.101	.095	11.565	***	
sn3	<---	SN	1.239	.103	12.018	***	
sn5	<---	SN	1.000				
sn6	<---	SN	.863	.084	10.244	***	
sn7	<---	SN	1.004	.093	10.805	***	
ce2	<---	CE	1.000				
ce4	<---	CE	1.546	.161	9.591	***	
ce3	<---	CE	1.272	.139	9.120	***	
bu3	<---	BU	1.000				
bu2	<---	BU	.867	.075	11.611	***	
bu1	<---	BU	.817	.074	11.101	***	
im1	<---	IM	1.000				
im2	<---	IM	1.100	.100	11.031	***	
im3	<---	IM	1.086	.100	10.871	***	
p2	<---	P	1.000				
p1	<---	P	.821	.074	11.082	***	
p3	<---	P	.905	.083	10.945	***	
p4	<---	P	.851	.082	10.359	***	
b1	<---	B	1.000				
b2	<---	B	1.115	.100	11.104	***	
com2	<---	COM	1.000				
com1	<---	COM	.960	.081	11.874	***	
oo1	<---	OO	1.000				
oo2	<---	OO	1.081	.088	12.234	***	
oo3	<---	OO	1.171	.096	12.258	***	
l1	<---	L	1.000				
l2	<---	L	1.015	.103	9.898	***	

Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
bt3	<---	BT	.539
bt2	<---	BT	.560
bt1	<---	BT	.653
ob6	<---	OB	.731
ob5	<---	OB	.652
ob4	<---	OB	.587
sc2	<---	SC	.757
sc1	<---	SC	.743
obsoc2	<---	OBSOC	.546
obsoc1	<---	OBSOC	.528
tt1	<---	TT	.793
tt2	<---	TT	.725
sn2	<---	SN	.657
sn3	<---	SN	.690
sn5	<---	SN	.625
sn6	<---	SN	.565
sn7	<---	SN	.603
ce2	<---	CE	.522
ce4	<---	CE	.721
ce3	<---	CE	.648
bu3	<---	BU	.737
bu2	<---	BU	.636
bu1	<---	BU	.605
im1	<---	IM	.643
im2	<---	IM	.693
im3	<---	IM	.677
p2	<---	P	.710
p1	<---	P	.636
p3	<---	P	.627
p4	<---	P	.587
b1	<---	B	.707
b2	<---	B	.676
com2	<---	COM	.760
com1	<---	COM	.752
oo1	<---	OO	.654
oo2	<---	OO	.692
oo3	<---	OO	.694

		Estimate
11	<--- L	.795
12	<--- L	.851

Intercepts: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
bt3	1.848	.032	57.184	***	
bt2	1.739	.034	51.788	***	
bt1	1.683	.033	50.736	***	
ob6	2.041	.039	52.337	***	
ob5	1.943	.038	50.674	***	
ob4	1.900	.034	55.749	***	
sc2	2.043	.037	54.571	***	
sc1	1.966	.039	51.006	***	
obsoc2	2.000	.037	54.658	***	
obsoc1	1.839	.032	57.079	***	
tt1	1.977	.042	47.551	***	
tt2	1.973	.042	47.309	***	
sn2	1.995	.041	49.004	***	
sn3	2.100	.044	48.129	***	
sn5	2.050	.039	52.781	***	
sn6	2.002	.037	53.998	***	
sn7	2.023	.040	50.001	***	
ce2	2.027	.036	56.994	***	
ce4	1.995	.040	50.105	***	
ce3	1.948	.036	53.459	***	
bu3	2.023	.038	53.869	***	
bu2	1.995	.038	52.930	***	
bu1	2.011	.037	53.846	***	
im1	1.975	.037	53.695	***	
im2	1.995	.038	53.123	***	
im3	2.014	.038	53.036	***	
p2	1.580	.034	46.598	***	
p1	1.605	.031	51.687	***	
p3	1.628	.035	46.800	***	
p4	1.615	.035	46.266	***	
b1	1.862	.032	58.514	***	
b2	1.896	.037	51.104	***	
com2	1.948	.037	52.451	***	
com1	1.932	.036	53.635	***	
oo1	2.048	.039	52.624	***	

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
oo2	1.966	.040	49.486	***	
oo3	2.005	.043	46.686	***	
l1	2.136	.048	44.680	***	
l2	2.138	.045	47.199	***	

Covariances: (Group number 1 - Default model)

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
BT	<--> SC	.132	.020	6.657	***	
BT	<--> OBSOC	.141	.020	7.230	***	
BT	<--> TT	.171	.023	7.268	***	
BT	<--> SN	.115	.017	6.603	***	
BT	<--> CE	.095	.015	6.241	***	
BT	<--> BU	.149	.021	7.228	***	
BT	<--> IM	.131	.019	7.007	***	
BT	<--> P	.142	.019	7.508	***	
BT	<--> B	.137	.018	7.481	***	
BT	<--> COM	.147	.021	7.115	***	
BT	<--> OO	.159	.021	7.571	***	
L	<--> BT	.128	.024	5.396	***	
OB	<--> SC	.244	.030	8.178	***	
BT	<--> OB	.141	.021	6.848	***	
OB	<--> OBSOC	.198	.026	7.520	***	
OB	<--> TT	.255	.032	7.858	***	
OB	<--> SN	.255	.029	8.761	***	
OB	<--> CE	.164	.023	7.088	***	
OB	<--> BU	.213	.028	7.594	***	
OB	<--> IM	.152	.024	6.384	***	
OB	<--> P	.132	.023	5.861	***	
OB	<--> B	.179	.024	7.459	***	
OB	<--> COM	.211	.028	7.429	***	
OB	<--> OO	.229	.028	8.130	***	
L	<--> OB	.147	.033	4.460	***	
SC	<--> SN	.219	.027	8.174	***	
SC	<--> CE	.141	.021	6.626	***	
SC	<--> BU	.190	.027	7.097	***	
SC	<--> IM	.143	.023	6.207	***	
SC	<--> P	.113	.021	5.252	***	
SC	<--> B	.157	.023	6.883	***	
SC	<--> COM	.139	.025	5.484	***	
SC	<--> OO	.201	.026	7.582	***	

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
L	<-->	SC	.160	.033	4.895	***	
OBSOC	<-->	SN	.219	.026	8.435	***	
OBSOC	<-->	CE	.156	.022	7.221	***	
OBSOC	<-->	BU	.223	.027	8.316	***	
OBSOC	<-->	IM	.175	.023	7.481	***	
OBSOC	<-->	P	.152	.021	7.091	***	
SC	<-->	OBSOC	.176	.025	7.024	***	
OBSOC	<-->	B	.151	.021	7.125	***	
OBSOC	<-->	COM	.185	.025	7.300	***	
OBSOC	<-->	OO	.186	.024	7.598	***	
OBSOC	<-->	TT	.219	.029	7.574	***	
L	<-->	OBSOC	.111	.028	3.919	***	
TT	<-->	SN	.271	.031	8.740	***	
TT	<-->	CE	.190	.026	7.318	***	
TT	<-->	BU	.252	.031	8.027	***	
TT	<-->	IM	.214	.028	7.557	***	
TT	<-->	P	.135	.025	5.485	***	
TT	<-->	B	.193	.026	7.379	***	
TT	<-->	COM	.252	.032	7.924	***	
TT	<-->	OO	.316	.034	9.316	***	
L	<-->	TT	.201	.038	5.327	***	
SN	<-->	CE	.154	.021	7.209	***	
SN	<-->	BU	.219	.026	8.290	***	
SN	<-->	IM	.161	.022	7.251	***	
CE	<-->	BU	.166	.023	7.266	***	
CE	<-->	IM	.127	.019	6.598	***	
BU	<-->	IM	.209	.026	8.021	***	
SN	<-->	P	.093	.018	5.119	***	
SN	<-->	B	.132	.020	6.697	***	
SN	<-->	COM	.165	.024	6.941	***	
SN	<-->	OO	.227	.027	8.444	***	
L	<-->	SN	.137	.028	4.928	***	
CE	<-->	P	.076	.015	4.963	***	
CE	<-->	B	.103	.017	6.098	***	
CE	<-->	COM	.135	.021	6.489	***	
CE	<-->	OO	.138	.020	6.764	***	
L	<-->	CE	.081	.022	3.704	***	
BU	<-->	P	.139	.022	6.321	***	
BU	<-->	B	.134	.022	6.200	***	
BU	<-->	COM	.188	.027	7.047	***	
BU	<-->	OO	.197	.026	7.620	***	

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
L	<-->	BU	.181	.033	5.497	***	
IM	<-->	P	.134	.020	6.638	***	
IM	<-->	B	.137	.020	6.795	***	
IM	<-->	COM	.147	.023	6.358	***	
IM	<-->	OO	.167	.023	7.186	***	
L	<-->	IM	.142	.028	5.006	***	
P	<-->	B	.155	.020	7.615	***	
L	<-->	P	.099	.026	3.760	***	
P	<-->	COM	.146	.023	6.483	***	
P	<-->	OO	.124	.020	6.056	***	
L	<-->	B	.098	.026	3.752	***	
B	<-->	COM	.154	.023	6.817	***	
B	<-->	OO	.179	.023	7.850	***	
L	<-->	COM	.136	.032	4.306	***	
COM	<-->	OO	.187	.026	7.277	***	
L	<-->	OO	.195	.032	6.070	***	
SC	<-->	TT	.215	.031	7.012	***	

Correlations: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
BT	<-->	SC	.608
BT	<-->	OBSOC	.921
BT	<-->	TT	.674
BT	<-->	SN	.618
BT	<-->	CE	.670
BT	<-->	BU	.701
BT	<-->	IM	.722
BT	<-->	P	.767
BT	<-->	B	.794
BT	<-->	COM	.682
BT	<-->	OO	.816
L	<-->	BT	.439
OB	<-->	SC	.685
BT	<-->	OB	.646
OB	<-->	OBSOC	.791
OB	<-->	TT	.616
OB	<-->	SN	.835
OB	<-->	CE	.704
OB	<-->	BU	.615
OB	<-->	IM	.513

		Estimate
OB	<--> P	.437
OB	<--> B	.634
OB	<--> COM	.595
OB	<--> OO	.717
L	<--> OB	.308
SC	<--> SN	.721
SC	<--> CE	.610
SC	<--> BU	.551
SC	<--> IM	.485
SC	<--> P	.375
SC	<--> B	.559
SC	<--> COM	.395
SC	<--> OO	.632
L	<--> SC	.337
OBSOC	<--> SN	1.028
OBSOC	<--> CE	.958
OBSOC	<--> BU	.917
OBSOC	<--> IM	.843
OBSOC	<--> P	.720
SC	<--> OBSOC	.705
OBSOC	<--> B	.763
OBSOC	<--> COM	.746
OBSOC	<--> OO	.832
OBSOC	<--> TT	.754
L	<--> OBSOC	.331
TT	<--> SN	.768
TT	<--> CE	.705
TT	<--> BU	.626
TT	<--> IM	.622
TT	<--> P	.385
TT	<--> B	.591
TT	<--> COM	.615
TT	<--> OO	.855
L	<--> TT	.365
SN	<--> CE	.776
SN	<--> BU	.739
SN	<--> IM	.637
CE	<--> BU	.733
CE	<--> IM	.655
BU	<--> IM	.724
SN	<--> P	.361

			Estimate
SN	<-->	B	.549
SN	<-->	COM	.547
SN	<-->	OO	.835
L	<-->	SN	.337
CE	<-->	P	.388
CE	<-->	B	.559
CE	<-->	COM	.587
CE	<-->	OO	.664
L	<-->	CE	.260
BU	<-->	P	.474
BU	<-->	B	.489
BU	<-->	COM	.546
BU	<-->	OO	.637
L	<-->	BU	.391
IM	<-->	P	.536
IM	<-->	B	.584
IM	<-->	COM	.501
IM	<-->	OO	.629
L	<-->	IM	.358
P	<-->	B	.651
L	<-->	P	.245
P	<-->	COM	.488
P	<-->	OO	.458
L	<-->	B	.261
B	<-->	COM	.551
B	<-->	OO	.710
L	<-->	COM	.288
COM	<-->	OO	.593
L	<-->	OO	.457
SC	<-->	TT	.522

Variances: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
BT	.134	.024	5.576	***	
OB	.358	.046	7.821	***	
SC	.354	.045	7.918	***	
OBSOC	.175	.034	5.090	***	
TT	.479	.054	8.867	***	
SN	.260	.037	6.933	***	
CE	.152	.029	5.296	***	
BU	.337	.042	7.970	***	
IM	.246	.037	6.705	***	
P	.255	.034	7.573	***	
B	.223	.031	7.168	***	
COM	.350	.045	7.866	***	
OO	.285	.040	7.171	***	
L	.636	.086	7.382	***	
e_bt3	.326	.024	13.539	***	
e_bt2	.341	.026	13.345	***	
e_bt1	.278	.023	11.981	***	
e_ob6	.312	.031	10.184	***	
e_ob5	.372	.031	12.028	***	
e_ob4	.390	.028	13.722	***	
e_sc2	.264	.030	8.813	***	
e_sc1	.293	.032	9.282	***	
e_obsoc2	.414	.034	12.120	***	
e_obsoc1	.329	.026	12.465	***	
e_tt1	.283	.032	8.899	***	
e_tt2	.363	.032	11.168	***	
e_sn2	.415	.031	13.332	***	
e_sn3	.439	.034	12.992	***	
e_sn5	.404	.030	13.582	***	
e_sn6	.412	.030	13.942	***	
e_sn7	.459	.033	13.732	***	
e_ce2	.405	.030	13.485	***	
e_ce4	.336	.032	10.494	***	
e_bu3	.284	.028	10.228	***	
e_bu2	.373	.030	12.330	***	
e_bu1	.389	.031	12.724	***	
e_im1	.349	.029	12.003	***	
e_im2	.323	.029	11.076	***	
e_im3	.344	.030	11.407	***	

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
e_ce3	.339	.028	12.093	***	
e_p2	.251	.023	10.762	***	
e_p1	.253	.021	12.128	***	
e_p3	.324	.026	12.267	***	
e_p4	.351	.028	12.759	***	
e_b1	.223	.023	9.812	***	
e_b2	.329	.031	10.721	***	
e_com2	.257	.030	8.517	***	
e_com1	.248	.028	8.781	***	
e-oo1	.382	.030	12.848	***	
e-oo2	.362	.029	12.300	***	
e-oo3	.421	.034	12.272	***	
e_l1	.370	.064	5.798	***	
e_l2	.249	.063	3.965	***	

Squared Multiple Correlations: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate
l2	.725
l1	.632
oo3	.481
oo2	.479
oo1	.427
com1	.566
com2	.577
b2	.458
b1	.500
p4	.345
p3	.393
p1	.405
p2	.504
im3	.458
im2	.480
im1	.414
bu1	.366

	Estimate
bu2	.405
bu3	.543
ce3	.420
ce4	.519
ce2	.272
sn7	.364
sn6	.320
sn5	.391
sn3	.476
sn2	.431
tt2	.526
tt1	.629
obsoc1	.279
obsoc2	.298
sc1	.553
sc2	.573
ob4	.237
ob5	.425
ob6	.534
bt1	.427
bt2	.314
bt3	.291

Reliability Measures of the Constructs

Construct	Items	Standardized Regression Weights	Squared Multiple Correlation	1-Square Multiple Correlation	Construct Reliability
BT	bt1	0.539	0.427	0.573	0.609330335
	bt2	0.56	0.314	0.686	
	bt3	0.653	0.291	0.709	
	sum	1.752	sum	1.968	
	sum2	3.069504			
OB	ob4	0.487	0.237	0.763	0.659680432
	ob5	0.652	0.425	0.575	
	ob6	0.731	0.534	0.466	
	sum	1.87	sum	1.804	
	sum2	3.4969			
SC	sc1	0.743	0.553	0.447	0.720230474
	sc2	0.757	0.573	0.427	
	sum	1.5	sum	0.874	
	sum2	2.25			
OBSOC	obsoc1	0.528	0.66	0.34	0.646757231
	obsoc2	0.546	0.71	0.29	
	sum	1.074	sum	0.63	
	sum2	1.153476			
TT	tt1	0.793	0.629	0.371	0.731688451
	tt2	0.725	0.526	0.474	
	sum	1.518	sum	0.845	
	sum2	2.304324			
SN	sn2	0.657	0.431	0.569	0.76563956
	sn3	0.69	0.476	0.524	
	sn5	0.625	0.391	0.609	
	sn6	0.565	0.32	0.68	
	sn7	0.603	0.364	0.636	
	sum	3.14	sum	3.018	
	sum2	9.8596			
CE	ce2	0.522	0.272	0.728	0.666535008
	ce3	0.648	0.42	0.58	
	ce4	0.721	0.519	0.481	
	sum	1.891	sum	1.789	
	sum2	3.575881			

IM	im1	0.643	0.414	0.586	0.710885765
	im2	0.693	0.48	0.52	
	im3	0.677	0.458	0.542	
	sum	2.013	sum	1.648	
	sum2	4.052169			
BU	bu1	0.605	0.366	0.634	0.698847045
	bu2	0.636	0.405	0.595	
	bu3	0.737	0.543	0.457	
	sum	1.978	sum	1.686	
	sum2	3.912484			
P	p1	0.636	0.405	0.595	0.611381164
	p2	0.71	0.504	0.496	
	p3	0.627	0.393	0.607	
	p4	0.587	0.345	0.655	
	sum	1.924	sum	2.353	
	sum2	3.701776			
B	b1	0.707	0.5	0.5	0.647340211
	b2	0.676	0.458	0.542	
	sum	1.383	sum	1.042	
	sum2	1.912689			
COM	com1	0.752	0.566	0.434	0.727343068
	com2	0.76	0.577	0.423	
	sum	1.512	sum	0.857	
	sum2	2.286144			
OO	oo1	0.654	0.427	0.573	0.720673293
	oo2	0.692	0.479	0.521	
	oo3	0.694	0.481	0.519	
	sum	2.04	sum	1.613	
	sum2	4.1616			
L	l1	0.795	0.632	0.368	0.808192306
	l2	0.851	0.725	0.275	
	sum	1.646	sum	0.643	
	sum2	2.709316			

Path Analysis

a. CMIN

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	154	1172.936	665	.000	1.764
Saturated model	819	.000	0		
Independence model	39	6643.668	780	.000	8.518

b. Baseline Comparisons

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	.823	.793	.915	.898	.913
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

c. Parsimony-Adjusted Measures

Model	PRATIO	PNFI	PCFI
Default model	.853	.702	.779
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	1.000	.000	.000

d. NCP

Model	NCP	LO 90	HI 90
Default model	507.936	416.457	607.256
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	5863.668	5606.799	6127.078

e. FMIN

Model	FMIN	F0	LO 90	HI 90
Default model	1.785	.773	.634	.924
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	10.112	8.925	8.534	9.326

f. RMSEA

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	.034	.031	.037	1.000
Independence model	.107	.105	.109	.000

g. AIC

Model	AIC	BCC	BIC	CAIC
Default model	1480.936	1500.903		
Saturated model	1638.000	1744.191		
Independence model	6721.668	6726.725		

h. ECVI

Model	ECVI	LO 90	HI 90	MECVI
Default model	2.254	2.115	2.405	2.284
Saturated model	2.493	2.493	2.493	2.655
Independence model	10.231	9.840	10.632	10.239

i. HOELTER

Model	HOELTER .05	HOELTER .01
Default model	407	422
Independence model	84	87

Estimates

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
ob6 <--- OB	1.703	.207	8.246	***	par_1
ob5 <--- OB	1.439	.186	7.753	***	par_2
ob4 <--- OB	1.000				
sc2 <--- SC	.971	.083	11.689	***	par_3
sc1 <--- SC	1.000				
obsoc2 <--- OBSOC	1.184	.121	9.785	***	par_4
obsoc1 <--- OBSOC	1.000				
tt1 <--- TT	1.086	.078	14.006	***	par_5
tt2 <--- TT	1.000				
sn2 <--- SN	.897	.083	10.834	***	par_6
sn3 <--- SN	1.000				
sn5 <--- SN	.865	.079	10.916	***	par_7
sn6 <--- SN	.742	.074	9.985	***	par_8
sn7 <--- SN	.840	.081	10.335	***	par_9
ce4 <--- CE	1.211	.119	10.213	***	par_10
ce3 <--- CE	1.000				

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
bu3	<---	BU	1.000				
bu2	<---	BU	.876	.078	11.212	***	par_11
bu1	<---	BU	.839	.076	11.024	***	par_12
im1	<---	IM	1.000				
im2	<---	IM	1.120	.103	10.839	***	par_13
im3	<---	IM	1.138	.109	10.446	***	par_14
p2	<---	P	1.219	.117	10.460	***	par_15
p1	<---	P	1.000				
p3	<---	P	1.111	.118	9.399	***	par_16
p4	<---	P	1.039	.109	9.537	***	par_17
b2	<---	B	1.000				
b3	<---	B	.869	.085	10.255	***	par_18
com2	<---	COM	1.049	.092	11.425	***	par_19
com1	<---	COM	1.000				
oo1	<---	OO	1.000				
oo2	<---	OO	1.080	.089	12.136	***	par_20
oo3	<---	OO	1.160	.098	11.783	***	par_21
l1	<---	L	1.000				
l2	<---	L	1.046	.117	8.945	***	par_22
ce2	<---	CE	.825	.098	8.406	***	par_60
bt3	<---	BT	.958	.113	8.502	***	par_61
bt2	<---	BT	1.000				
bt1	<---	BT	1.161	.126	9.233	***	par_62
OB	<---	BT	.675	.106	6.360	***	par_23
SC	<---	OB	1.453	.198	7.332	***	par_24
OBSOC	<---	OB	1.114	.154	7.212	***	par_25
TT	<---	OB	1.504	.206	7.306	***	par_26
SN	<---	SC	1.058	.212	4.973	***	par_27
CE	<---	SC	1.478	.435	3.398	***	par_28
BU	<---	SC	6.859	3.248	2.112	.035	par_29
IM	<---	SC	1.537	.764	2.012	.044	par_30
SN	<---	OBSOC	1.091	.169	6.435	***	par_31
CE	<---	OBSOC	.760	.127	5.978	***	par_32
BU	<---	OBSOC	1.397	.213	6.551	***	par_33
IM	<---	OBSOC	.930	.177	5.249	***	par_34
SN	<---	TT	.312	.063	4.938	***	par_35
CE	<---	TT	.244	.049	4.944	***	par_36
BU	<---	TT	.147	.086	1.712	.087	par_37
IM	<---	TT	.112	.073	1.537	.124	par_38
P	<---	SN	14.349	7.719	1.859	.063	par_39
B	<---	SN	13.508	7.100	1.902	.057	par_40

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
COM	<---	SN	10.357	5.632	1.839	.066	par_41
OO	<---	SN	6.790	3.658	1.856	.063	par_42
P	<---	CE	18.506	9.466	1.955	.051	par_43
B	<---	CE	16.537	8.730	1.894	.058	par_44
COM	<---	CE	12.546	6.941	1.808	.071	par_45
OO	<---	CE	7.399	4.504	1.643	.100	par_46
P	<---	BU	.387	.227	1.704	.088	par_47
B	<---	BU	.586	.274	2.139	.032	par_48
COM	<---	BU	.377	.220	1.714	.087	par_49
OO	<---	BU	.532	.206	2.582	.010	par_50
P	<---	IM	.171	.122	1.399	.163	par_51
B	<---	IM	.294	.162	1.816	.070	par_52
COM	<---	IM	.291	.151	1.925	.054	par_53
OO	<---	IM	.267	.120	2.229	.026	par_54
L	<---	P	.272	.162	1.676	.094	par_55
L	<---	B	.296	.147	2.016	.044	par_56
L	<---	COM	.309	.128	2.412	.016	par_57
L	<---	OO	.454	.176	2.574	.010	par_58
BT	<---	L	.120	.065	1.839	.066	par_59

Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
ob6	<---	OB	.642
ob5	<---	OB	.552
ob4	<---	OB	.431
sc2	<---	SC	.750
sc1	<---	SC	.750
obsoc2	<---	OBSOC	.572
obsoc1	<---	OBSOC	.548
tt1	<---	TT	.790
tt2	<---	TT	.725
sn2	<---	SN	.608
sn3	<---	SN	.633
sn5	<---	SN	.614
sn6	<---	SN	.552
sn7	<---	SN	.572
ce4	<---	CE	.622
ce3	<---	CE	.560

			Estimate
bu3	<---	BU	.724
bu2	<---	BU	.631
bu1	<---	BU	.610
im1	<---	IM	.628
im2	<---	IM	.689
im3	<---	IM	.692
p2	<---	P	.705
p1	<---	P	.633
p3	<---	P	.627
p4	<---	P	.584
b2	<---	B	.744
b3	<---	B	.681
com2	<---	COM	.762
com1	<---	COM	.749
oo1	<---	OO	.659
oo2	<---	OO	.697
oo3	<---	OO	.693
l1	<---	L	.783
l2	<---	L	.864
ce2	<---	CE	.474
bt3	<---	BT	.552
bt2	<---	BT	.555
bt1	<---	BT	.652
OB	<---	BT	.855
SC	<---	OB	.739
OBSOC	<---	OB	.926
TT	<---	OB	.731
SN	<---	SC	.613
CE	<---	SC	.728
BU	<---	SC	.075
IM	<---	SC	.083
SN	<---	OBSOC	.699
CE	<---	OBSOC	.657
BU	<---	OBSOC	.909
IM	<---	OBSOC	.712
SN	<---	TT	.342
CE	<---	TT	.362
BU	<---	TT	.022
IM	<---	TT	.147
P	<---	SN	20.222
B	<---	SN	13.525

				Estimate
COM	<---	SN		10.593
OO	<---	SN		7.300
P	<---	CE		19.340
B	<---	CE		12.279
COM	<---	CE		9.516
OO	<---	CE		5.898
P	<---	BU		.538
B	<---	BU		.578
COM	<---	BU		.380
OO	<---	BU		.563
P	<---	IM		.025
B	<---	IM		.187
COM	<---	IM		.185
OO	<---	IM		.137
L	<---	P		.058
L	<---	B		.129
L	<---	COM		.295
L	<---	OO		.311
BT	<---	L		.242

Intercepts: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
ob6	2.041	.039	52.336	***	par_63
ob5	1.943	.038	50.674	***	par_64
ob4	1.900	.034	55.747	***	par_65
sc2	2.043	.037	54.571	***	par_66
sc1	1.966	.039	51.003	***	par_67
obsoc2	2.000	.037	54.657	***	par_68
obsoc1	1.839	.032	56.991	***	par_69
tt1	1.977	.042	47.551	***	par_70
tt2	1.973	.042	47.286	***	par_71
sn2	1.995	.041	49.012	***	par_72
sn3	2.100	.044	48.193	***	par_73
sn5	2.050	.039	52.790	***	par_74
sn6	2.002	.037	54.005	***	par_75
sn7	2.023	.040	50.008	***	par_76
ce4	1.995	.040	50.114	***	par_77
ce3	1.948	.037	53.327	***	par_78
bu3	2.023	.038	53.874	***	par_79

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
bu2	1.995	.038	52.932	***	par_80
bu1	2.011	.037	53.848	***	par_81
im1	1.975	.037	53.704	***	par_82
im2	1.995	.038	53.133	***	par_83
im3	2.014	.038	53.045	***	par_84
p2	1.580	.034	46.750	***	par_85
p1	1.605	.031	51.902	***	par_86
p3	1.628	.035	46.921	***	par_87
p4	1.615	.035	46.370	***	par_88
b2	1.896	.037	51.191	***	par_89
b3	1.844	.035	52.456	***	par_90
com2	1.948	.037	52.478	***	par_91
com1	1.932	.036	53.686	***	par_92
oo1	2.048	.039	52.627	***	par_93
oo2	1.966	.040	49.484	***	par_94
oo3	2.005	.043	46.684	***	par_95
l1	2.136	.048	44.671	***	par_96
l2	2.138	.045	47.188	***	par_97
ce2	2.027	.036	57.000	***	par_98
bt3	1.848	.032	57.183	***	par_99
bt2	1.739	.034	51.788	***	par_100
bt1	1.683	.033	50.736	***	par_101

Variances: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
EOB	.023	.008	2.984	.003	par_102
ESC	.167	.030	5.587	***	par_103
EOBSOC	.018	.007	2.534	.011	par_104
ETT	.183	.032	5.725	***	par_105
ESN	-.004	.002	-1.857	.063	par_106
ECE	.002	.001	1.968	.049	par_107
EBU	.081	.023	3.478	***	par_108
EIM	.098	.020	4.964	***	par_109
ECOM	.161	.026	6.203	***	par_110
EB	.147	.030	4.813	***	par_111
EP	.045	.021	2.200	.028	par_112
EOO	.064	.016	3.998	***	par_113
EL	.517	.081	6.401	***	par_114
EBT	.131	.026	5.042	***	par_115

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
e_ob6	.394	.030	13.093	***	par_116
e_ob5	.451	.033	13.689	***	par_117
e_ob4	.416	.029	14.288	***	par_118
e_sc2	.270	.031	8.729	***	par_119
e_sc1	.286	.033	8.749	***	par_120
e_obsoc2	.396	.028	14.310	***	par_121
e_obsoc1	.321	.022	14.294	***	par_122
e_tt1	.286	.032	8.832	***	par_123
e_tt2	.363	.033	11.043	***	par_124
e_sn2	.460	.033	14.113	***	par_125
e_sn3	.501	.036	13.997	***	par_126
e_sn5	.414	.029	14.120	***	par_127
e_sn6	.421	.029	14.292	***	par_128
e_sn7	.484	.034	14.250	***	par_129
e_ce4	.428	.031	13.961	***	par_130
e_bu3	.295	.029	10.300	***	par_131
e_bu2	.376	.031	12.252	***	par_132
e_bu1	.386	.031	12.393	***	par_133
e_im1	.361	.030	11.990	***	par_134
e_im2	.326	.030	10.799	***	par_135
e_im3	.330	.030	10.864	***	par_136
e_ce3	.403	.028	14.234	***	par_137
e_p2	.253	.025	10.141	***	par_138
e_p1	.253	.022	11.702	***	par_139
e_p3	.322	.027	11.754	***	par_140
e_p4	.352	.028	12.439	***	par_141
e_b2	.270	.034	8.014	***	par_142
e_b3	.291	.029	10.012	***	par_143
e_com2	.254	.031	8.125	***	par_144
e_com1	.250	.029	8.567	***	par_145
e-oo1	.377	.030	12.487	***	par_146
e-oo2	.357	.031	11.700	***	par_147
e-oo3	.422	.035	12.055	***	par_148
e_l1	.389	.069	5.619	***	par_149
e_l2	.229	.072	3.188	.001	par_150
e_ce2	.432	.030	14.436	***	par_151
e_bt3	.320	.025	12.859	***	par_152
e_bt2	.344	.028	12.301	***	par_153
e_bt1	.278	.024	11.591	***	par_154

Squared Multiple Correlations: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate
BT	.142
L	.164
OO	.780
COM	.497
B	.561
P	.731
IM	.581
BU	.751
CE	.988
SN	1.011
TT	.546
OBSOC	.867
SC	.546
OB	.756
bt1	.425
bt2	.308
bt3	.305
ce2	.225
l2	.747
l1	.614
oo3	.480
oo2	.486
oo1	.435
com1	.561
com2	.581
b3	.464
b2	.553
p4	.341
p3	.393
p1	.400
p2	.498
im3	.479
im2	.475
im1	.395
bu1	.372
bu2	.399
bu3	.524
ce3	.313
ce4	.386

	Estimate
sn7	.328
sn6	.305
sn5	.377
sn3	.400
sn2	.369
tt2	.526
tt1	.624
obsoc1	.300
obsoc2	.327
sc1	.563
sc2	.563
ob4	.186
ob5	.304
ob6	.412

QUESTIONNAIRE

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT TITLED

Role of Online Brand Communities in Marketing Strategies

This is a personal invitation to participate in a research to understand the role played by the online brand communities in the making of marketing decisions and strategies. This also serves the purpose to obtain your approval that you consent to participate in the survey.

Along with this letter is a short questionnaire that asks a variety of questions about you. I kindly request you to look over the questionnaire and, if you choose to do so, complete it and submit it. It should take you about 10-15 minutes to complete. I assure you that if you decide to take part in this survey, your responses will not be identified by individual and would be completely anonymous. All responses will be compiled together and analyzed as a group. None of the information collected will be shared anyone outside me and my supervisor. Your participation is voluntary. The survey should take very little of your valuable time to complete and we sincerely hope that you will take the

time to complete and return the questionnaire. Regardless of whether you choose to participate, I thank you for the time devoted.

Please read the following sentences carefully and select a YES or a NO for the question at the end of this page.

This is to state that I agree to participate in the research being conducted by Ramesh Sankaranarayanan of Marketing Department of Concordia University (*contact number 001 514 962 3569; email id: ramesh123.hi@gmail.com*).

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.

If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact the study's Principal Investigator Dr Michel Laroche, Dept of Marketing, John Molson School of Business, Concordia University via e-mail at laroche@jmsb.concordia.ca or phone (001- 514- 8482424 ext 2942). If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, Dr. Brigitte Des Rosiers, at (514) 848-2424 x7481 or by email at bdesrosi@alcor.concordia.ca

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Yes

No

PERSONAL DETAILS

- 1) Please Indicate your gender:
Male Female
- 2) Please indicate which age group you belong to:
a) 16 – 20
b) 21 – 25
c) 26 – 30
d) 31 – 35
e) 36 – 40
f) 41 – 45
g) 46 – 50
h) Others please specify ()
- 3) Which mention the country you reside in: ()

Please read the following carefully and answer the questions that follow:

Consider any social media website that you are a member of such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Orkut, Four Square or any other such sites. These sites have numerous groups or communities which refer to the Brands or Companies that you know of such as Nike, Chevrolet, Apple, Dell etc.

Please mention the names of one such community/group that you are a member of: ()

Based on your experiences with the community mentioned above, please rate the extent to which the following are true by marking the corresponding area.

Item	Totally True	Somewhat True	Neither True Nor False	Somewhat False	Totally False
The community allows direct user input or posting to site.					
Customers share experiences about products online with other customers.					
The community is useful for gathering various information about the product or brand.					
The members of this community benefit from the community.					
The members share a common bond with other members of the community.					
The members are affiliated with other members.					
The Brand Community keeps in touch with me with notifications.					
At least some of members of my community know me.					
I receive special treatment after I became a member.					
The community provides with me product information.					
The community is concerned with my needs.					
The community collects my opinions about the services/product.					
The community recognizes special occasions and sends me greetings.					
I share my opinions on the community.					

On the statements below rate the extent to which you agree/disagree. The scales are marked from Totally Agree to Totally Disagree.

Item	Totally Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Totally Disagree
The members of the community assist/advice other members of the same community in proper use of the brand.					
The community engages in integrating and retaining members.					
An intrinsic connection is felt among the members.					
A general sense of difference exists from members who are NOT in your community.					
I benefit from following the community's rules.					
I am motivated to participate in the activities because I feel good afterwards or because I like it.					
I am motivated to participate in the community's activities because I am able to support other members.					
I am motivated to participate in the community's activities because I am able to reach personal goals.					
Members of my community share useful tips about better uses of the product or brand.					
Members of my community share their experiences about their successful and UN-successful attempts at customization of the product.					
Members of my community monitor and foster the activities deemed to help community building.					
Community encourages					

Item	Totally Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Totally Disagree
discussions related to company, brand or the product.					
Members actively engage in discussions in order to justify their reasons for their affinity towards the brand.					
Members actively defend/refute the actions of the company's management.					

Please answer the following questions based on the brand, product, or company of the community which you are a member of.

Item	Totally Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Totally Disagree
I love the product of the brand.					
I am proud of the product.					
The product is one of my prized possessions.					
The product is fun to use					
I value the heritage of the brand.					
If I were to replace the product, I would replace it with another product of the same brand.					
My brand is of the highest quality.					
The COMPANY understands my needs.					
The COMPANY cares about my opinions.					

Please answer the following questions based on the extent to which you consider them true by marking the right area:

Item	Totally True	Somewhat True	Neither True Nor False	Somewhat False	Totally False
My brand gives me everything that I expect out of the product.					
I rely on my brand.					
My brand never disappoints me.					
I consider myself to be loyal to the brand.					
If the brand is not available at the store, I would buy the same brand from some other store.					
I am willing to pay more for my brand.					
I have met wonderful people because of the community.					
I have a feeling of kinship with the other owners.					
I have an interest in the community because of the other owners of the brands.					
I recollect vital social tradition or ritual specific to the brand community.					
I think these traditions contribute towards a specific culture of the community.					

4) **Please highlight the extent of your likelihood for the following question.**

Item	Very Likely	Somewhat likely	Neither Likely nor Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Very Unlikely
How likely is it that you will recommend the brand to your friends or colleagues?					

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