How Do Motivations for Commitment in Online Brand Communities Evolve? The Distinction Between Knowledge- and Entertainment-Seeking Motivations

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Abstract

The current study used the concept of motivational hierarchy to investigate how commitment is developed in online brand communities. By examining the online brand communities of two functional (*Canon* and *Nikon*) and two symbolic brands (*Coca-Cola* and *Starbucks*), the study focused on two pragmatic motives, knowledge- and entertainment-seeking motives, that served as the members' initial drives to participate in online brand communities. The findings suggested that different initial motives followed different hierarchical routes to form commitment. Specifically, members with knowledge-seeking motives to participate in online brand communities became committed via two routes: with or without symbolic motives. On the other hand, entertainment-seeking members became committed only via the route through symbolic motives. Pragmatic and symbolic motives were connected by satisfaction, which could be seen as a proxy whether or not the pragmatic and symbolic motives were fulfilled.

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1. Introduction

Online brand communities are brand communities that members can interact with other members or the brands through the Internet without temporal and spatial barriers. They are usually operated through two channels: (1) private channel, a custom-built community owned and managed by the brand companies (e.g., Apple's Apple Support Communities) and (2) public channel, which operates open communities on external existing platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Through these channels, companies are able to directly communicate with their consumers and therefore may establish a long-term relationship with them at a low cost (Hur et al., 2011). At the core of the relationship established via online brand communities is commitment (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek 2013).

Commitment in online brand communities is critical to the success of online brand communities, as it can be translated into commitment to brands (Brodie et al., 2013) and brand loyalty (Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). According to relationship marketing, commitment, or engagement, to brands happens when consumers believe that maintaining an ongoing relationship with the brands provides greater functional and emotional benefits than ending it (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Borrowing the idea from relationship marketing, Madupu and Cooley (2010) extended the ongoing relationship with the brands to include with other members in the communities.

In order to understand how brand community members become committed in community activities, motivation, as the key driver to human behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000), has been extensively discussed in this context (Brodie et al., 2013; Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2004; Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006; Luarn, Yang, & Chiu, 2015; Ouwersloot & Odekerken-Schröder, 2008; Tsai, Huang, & Chiu, 2012, to name a few). But most studies seem to have simplified the motivational process. More specifically, they have treated motivation as either a unidimensional concept, such as "motivation to engage in C2C exchanges" as in Gruen et al.'s (2006) study, or an unranked concept, putting different types of motivations at the same level, as in Luarn et al.'s (2015) research on personal, social, perceptual, and consumption-based motivations. These treatments of motivations were conceptualized, despite the fact that a hierarchical structure of the motivational process has been the dominant structure in the psychology literature (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). As there is scant discussion in its application in the online brand community context, this paper is to examine commitment in online brand communities by using the motivation hierarchy.

The reasons for using the motivational hierarchy in studying commitment in online brand communities are twofold. First, using a hierarchical process to examine motivations enables us to properly see how community members' motivations evolve as their motivations are mutable in different stages according to their micro-level dynamics (David & Shapiro, 2008). Members are motivated to join or participate in brand communities for various reasons, including information, entertainment, remuneration, personal identity, integration, social interaction, and empowerment (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). These motivations can be broadly categorized into pragmatic (functional-related) and symbolic (social-related) motives (Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2004; Lauren et al., 2015; Stragier, Abeele, Mechant, & Marez, 2016). The pragmatic motives are related to solving immediate issues (either search for knowledge or for fun), and the symbolic motives are related to self-identity

and social related drivers. However, these motives have been seen as at the same level (Brodie et al., 2013; Luarn et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012), despite that some earlier studies have suggested that community members tend to move from asocial to social activities (Kozinets, 1999; Walther, 1995). In addition, there has been some disagreement as to how different motives, satisfaction, and commitment in a community are related: while some studies argue that the relationship between motives and commitment can be both direct and indirect (Kim & Drumwright, 2016; Stragier et al., 2016), others believe that the relationship is only an indirect one via satisfaction (Jin, Lee, & Cheung, 2010; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). Therefore, there is a need to synthesize and clarify the relationship between different motives, satisfaction, and commitment in online brand communities.

Second, using a hierarchical process enables us to unravel the possible evolutional routes to commitment by distinct motivations. In particular, we examine two different, but popular, pragmatic motives, namely knowledge-seeking and entertainment-seeking motives. Many members' initial participation involves only browsing information. This kind of browsing is also termed as "lurking," suggesting a passive participation via unobtrusive reading without writing. However, browsing information can result from our need for knowledge (e.g., how do I use a certain tool?) or from our need for entertainment (e.g., to search for fun, fantasy, and relaxing). Knowledge-seeking motive has a functional connotation that answers immediate questions or solves immediate problems, whereas entertainment-seeking motive has an emotional connotation that helps one to pass the time relaxingly and enjoyably. Different connotations suggest the motives are fulfilled in a different way. Therefore, we expect that different pragmatic motives develop different routes to forming their commitment to the online brand communities.

In sum, we propose that community members start from passive participation and then move on to active participation in a progressive manner because of the evolutional

nature in the pragmatic motives and symbolic motives, but that different pragmatic motives (knowledge- or entertainment-seeking) trigger different hierarchies leading to commitment. The current study is to examine the evolutional process of motivations that develop commitment in an online brand community and unravel the intertwined relationships between motivations, satisfaction, and commitment.

2. The Hierarchical View of Motivations

The dominant structure in motivational research is hierarchical (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). However, when the motivations are brought into an online brand community context, the hierarchical structure disappears. Various studies have examined consumers' motivations in participating in brand communities, but their discussion is limited to the type of motivation without considering the hierarchy possibility (Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2004; Luarn et al., 2015; Ouwersloot & Odekerken-Schröder, 2008; Tsai et al., 2012). This disappearance is understandable because unlike other consumption activities (e.g., weight control) or life projects (e.g., self-achievement), there is only a vague, if any, superordinary goal to motivate consumers to join online brand communities. Superordinary goal is a concept from the top-down process of motivation (Austin & Vancouver, 1996), which is usually applied in the psychology literature (Cropanzano, James, & Citera, 1992) and refers to an individual's ultimate goal, such as self-esteem or self-confidence (Leary, 2007). For example, in order to boost self-confidence, our focal goal can be to lose weight. In order to achieve the focal goal, specific subordinate goals, including dieting and exercising, are determined and executed through a range of consumption activities. Once the focal goal (losing weight) is achieved, we are closer to our superordinate goals. In such cases as these, they follow the top-down

structure, which requires that a superordinary goal be identified first and other focal or subordinate goals be determined in order to achieve the superordinary goal.

However, online brand communities lack the clear setting of a superordinary goal. This is because the initial reasons for people to join an online brand community are usually pragmatic (e.g., seeking information or entertainment) and seldom relevant to self-identity. As a result, the bottom-up motivational process is more suitable to understand motivations in this context. A bottom-up process suggests that the goals exist in an accumulated sense and no superordinary goal is clearly identified (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Identifying superordinary goals is also unnecessary because prospect participants in online brand communities are usually occupied with the immediate situation that calls for their joining the communities. In other words, the motivations appear progressively as their experience with the community evolves (David & Shapiro, 2008), and the next level motivation will not take effect until the current level of motivation is fulfilled.

The initial motivation is driven by self-interest (Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2004; Wellman & Gulia, 1999). The self-interest motivation manifests in its pragmatic goals (such as information seeking) or results from a situational happenstance (such as entering a chat room to pass the time and have some fun). In these cases, people do not engage themselves further unless they perceive some value through their observation or participation. This value, in turn, drives their motivation to move up the hierarchy from pragmatic motives to symbolic ones and together with their satisfaction with the community, leads to commitment.

Our proposal of the two hierarchical motives, pragmatic and symbolic, leading to commitment is in line with the two components identified in commitment, namely, rational and emotional (Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999). For example, marriage couples are committed to their marriage not only because of the emotions, such as love, they have for each other, but also because of the moral reasons, such as staying together for the children.

Satisfaction is therefore mainly drawn from the members' functional evaluation (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Bolton & Lemon, 1999), suggesting its rational role in commitment. On the other hand, symbolic motivations are socially and emotionally bound (Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2004). Together, they lead to commitment with the communities. With increased commitment, the likelihood of their participation also enlarges (Woisetschläger et al., 2008) and the intensified participation in the brand communities leads to brand loyalty (Koh & Kim, 2004; Laroche et al., 2013). The conceptual framework is summarized in Figure 1. With this bottom-up hierarchical structure, the reasons that consumers join a brand community and that they stay with the community and participate in the activities can be better understood.

Insert Figure 1 here.

3. Motivations in Online Brand Communities

Brand communities are comprised of "collective brand relationships" (O'Guinn & Muñiz, 2009) which are created through social forces (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). With the advent of the Internet and emergence of social media, offline brand communities "spill out into virtual space" (Kozinets, 2006, p.280). However, empirical research into the motivations that keep consumers active in these online communities remains relatively sparse. How are different motivations activated at different stages in their online community membership? Two specific pragmatic (knowledge-seeking and entertainment-seeking) and symbolic motivations (social integration, and social enhancement) will be examined in this study to explore how they evolve in an online brand community context.

The psychology literature suggests that it is possible for different initial motives to follow different hierarchies in order to achieve the same goal; for example, extrinsic versus intrinsic motivations belong to this possibility. To elaborate, intrinsic motivations are people's motivations to achieve their internal goals, whereas extrinsic motivations are people's motivations mainly influenced by external factors (Vallerand, 1997). Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations have been extensively studied in the education literature because with this model, ways to help learners with different initial motivations to achieve the learning objectives can be identified and therefore nurtured or modified (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, the use of rewards or punishments to encourage learners with extrinsic motivations or use of different types of rewards to direct one's learning objective. Due to the interaction between environmental and personal factors, different motivational routes can be formed (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). In other words, our motivation is not statically residing internally, but can interact with the environment. However, our study does not focus on intrinsic or extrinsic motivations. Nor does it focus on the relationship between motivation change and external environment. Rather, we use these ideas from psychology and expect that different initial motivations play a part in how the motivation hierarchy is shaped. In particular, knowledge- and entertainment-seeking motives will be argued that, because of their different nature in joining online brand communities, follow different hierarchies moving towards commitment in the communities.

Knowledge-seeking and entertainment-seeking motives are categorized as pragmatic motivations because the former needs information to solve one's problem and the latter needs fun to solve one's boredom. These two pragmatic motives have been identified as two most important initial drivers for people to join online communities (Jin et al., 2010). Knowledge-seeking motive suggests the knowledge-seeking function that online brand communities can offer, and includes searching information that can facilitate consumers' decision-making

process or finding solutions to their consumption problems or queries. This motivation is at

cognitive, rational level and greatly relies on a logical reasoning process. This process is

considered one of the strongest factors to first take effect to influence satisfaction because

people are used to subconsciously weighing the costs and benefits in order to mentally

calculate satisfaction (Boyce, Brown, & Moore, 2010). This reasoning process is especially

obvious when a monetary, consumption perspective is involved (Bolton & Lemon, 1999).

Therefore, knowledge-seeking motive, seen as a central pragmatic motivation, directly leads

to satisfaction with the community (H1).

> H1: The community members' knowledge-seeking motive positively influences
>
> their satisfaction with the community.

On the other hand, entertainment-seeking motive focuses on the entertainment value a

brand community can offer. This value manifests itself in leisure activities, such as playing a

game or engaging in a pleasant conversation. Unlike the central knowledge-seeking

motivation, which has a knowledge-oriented objective, the entertainment-seeking motive is

usually activated without a specific objective but to pass the time. Thus, it can be vague and

difficult to evaluate one's satisfaction based on entertainment-seeking motive. This

motivation, viewed as a peripheral pragmatic motivation, is at emotional level. Specifically,

the entertainment-seeking motive encourages members to involve themselves in events,

workshops, contests, or games, which potentially lead to a high level of social interactions

(Madupu & Cooley, 2010). Hence, the entertainment-seeking motive serves as a protocol

that generates enhanced social interactions (H2). Social interactions are a way to show social

support (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983), which in turn strengthens the relationship between the

members, even if the relationship has a commercial connotation (Price & Arnould, 1999).

The strengthened relationship suggests a strong sense of belongingness (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006), and therefore members who favorably evaluate the relationship may feel satisfied with the community (H3).

H2: The community members' entertainment-seeking motive positively influences their social integration motive.

H3: The community members' social integration motive positively influences their satisfaction with the community.

In addition to the direct influence of the knowledge-seeking motivation on the members' satisfaction with the communities, the knowledge-seeking motivation, though limited in its emotional stimuli (Chiu et al., 2006), is able to activate social motivations, in particular, the social integration motive. This is because a certain level of interaction is unavoidable. Imagine that you search information in a brand community to try to find out whether a particular accessory is worth purchasing to go with your current product, and if yes, which brand would be a good buy. If a direct answer to your specific question is difficult to find just through observation, you would post your question in the community. When the question is posted and answered, social interaction presents. Therefore, the knowledge-seeking motive can also enhance community members' social integration motive (H4).

H4: The community members' knowledge-seeking motive positively influences their social integration motive.

While the pragmatic motives (i.e., knowledge-seeking and entertainment-seeking) are the key reasons to initiate the members' desire to join online brand communities, the reasons are at an individual level regardless whether it is a central or peripheral motive (Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2004). Beyond the individual reasons, participating in online brand communities involves symbolic motivations (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004), which are at a social level, and usually activated after the members have experienced the initial stage of involvement in the community driven by the pragmatic motivations (Zaglia, 2013). There are two levels of symbolic motivations: social integration and social enhancement.

Social integration motive shows two sides of the story. One side is from the existing members' perspective. Their motivation is to integrate the valued new members into the community. By integrating these new members, the existing members welcome the new members by responding to their activities. Through their responses and through other conversations, the existing members are able to demonstrate the culture, ritual, and history to the new members. The other side is from the new members, who would like to be familiarized to the community as familiarity serves as the first stage to the sense of belongingness (McAlexander et al., 2002). The sense of belongingness can be reflected by how much the members learn the culture, ritual, and history of the community (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Moreover, maintaining interaction with others is a means for members to gain technical help. In addition to the pragmatic objectives, members are inclined to obtaining social support by nurturing friendship through socializing with others (Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2004; Madupu & Cooley, 2010). Combining both sides demonstrates the community members' motivation for social integration.

Social enhancement derives from more than other members' acceptance (i.e., a proxy to social integration). It suggests approval of their prestige status within the community (Dholakia et al., 2004). Research shows that a member's status is enhanced because other members recognize his valuable participation in community activities (Kang, Lee, Lee, & Choi, 2007), and this recognition, in turn, increases self-efficacy and self-esteem (Wang & Fesenmainer, 2004). Since increasing self-efficacy and self-esteem is usually the ultimate goal in human motivation for self-identities (Austin & Vancouver, 1996), the purpose of the social integration process is for members, both new and old, to find platforms to perform so that their social identities can be enhanced (Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2004). Therefore, activities in social integration transcend to an opportunity for social performance, which leads to social enhancement benefits (H5). In other words, at the motivation hierarchical structure, social integration brings out social enhancement.

H5:   The community members' social integration motive positively influences their social enhancement motive.

The definition of commitment in consumer research uses the concept of the commitment from interpersonal relationships (Fournier, 1998), which suggests that commitment is comprised of behavioral dedication (Johnson, 1973) and psychological connection (Rusbult, 1980). While the behavioral dedication is the outcome of commitment (for example, the increased participation intensity as a result of commitment to the brand community), the psychological connection is the antecedent to the commitment. There are two routes that form the psychological connection of commitment. The first route is based on cognitive, rational thoughts, which use calculation of the benefits versus costs to determine whether one will commit to a relationship. Most notable is Rusbult's (1983) investment

model, which suggests that investment is viewed as costs for leaving a relationship so the higher the investment in the relationship, the more committed a person would be. Extending the investment model, Morgan and Hunt (1994) include costs should the relationship terminate, and the most significant cost at the cognitive level of leaving an online community is its functional usefulness (Gupta & Kim, 2007), indicating that such benefits as knowledge sharing will cease to exist after leaving the community. Since satisfaction is mainly derived from knowledge-seeking motive, this rational route to commitment takes effect via satisfaction (H6a).

The second route is related to emotion, such as love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) or trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Because of these emotions, one is committed to stay in a relationship, even if it is a relationship with brands (Muñiz & Schau, 2005) or brand communities (McAlexander et al., 2002). Research has shown that these emotions are derived from interactions between the relationship partners, regardless whether the partners are brands (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), people (Sternberg & Barnes, 1988), or a mix of the two, that is, brand communities (O'Guinn & Muñiz, 2009). Therefore, the higher the symbolic motivations one has for a brand community, the more committed one will be (H6b).

H6: Both (a) satisfaction and (b) symbolic motivations positively influence members' commitment to the community.

The hypothesized model is summarized in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 here.

4. Method

Data were collected from members of four pre-selected online brand communities; that is, *Nikon* and *Canon*, representing functional brands, and *Coca-Cola* and *Starbucks*, representing symbolic ones. The selection criterion of functional or symbolic brands followed Ratchford's (1987) device on the thinking-versus-feeling dimension. Functional brands are those focusing more on "thinking" while symbolic ones are those focusing more on "feeling." These brands all had active online communities as well as high engagement levels in social media in terms of brand-sponsored websites and groups. A public invitation to participate in the study was announced in the selected online brand communities including their Twitter accounts, Facebook fan pages, and website forums (only for *Nikon* and *Canon*) in the U.S. and U.K. Members were encouraged to fill in the online survey by entering them to a prize draw with five £25 Amazon coupons as incentive. Two screening questions were used to ensure that all participants were sufficiently active in one of the pre-selected brand communities. In other words, they were required to declare whether or not they participated at least once in the last month by posting messages, participating in events like contests or polls, uploading photographs, chatting with or emailing other members or moderators, participating in discussions, sharing information, or a combination of the above. A total of 214 respondents, with average age 30 and about 50-50 split for male-female, participated in the study; 96 from *Nikon* and *Canon* communities and 118 from *Coca-Cola* and *Starbucks* communities. The range of their membership history is from 1 month to 3 years and above, with about 50% of the participants having been members with the communities more than 1 year; 20% of those with a membership more than 3 years. This spread in their membership history was desired as different motivations at different stages of their membership could be accounted for in the data analysis.

Details of the measures used in the survey can be found in Table 2. Motivation measures include knowledge-seeking motivation, entertainment-seeking motivation, social integration motivation, and social enhancement motivation. Other measures include satisfaction with the community, and commitment with the community. All of the measures were adapted from existing measures to suit the study (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Woisetschläger et al., 2008) and measured on five-point Likert scales.

5. Data Analysis

These measurements were first validated by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Table 1 shows the correlation analysis results along with descriptive statistics and Table 2 demonstrates CFA results with satisfactory model fit indices. Moreover, the measurements were examined for discriminant validity via χ^2 difference test. We compared the χ^2 value for a measurement model constraining their correlation to equal one to a baseline measurement model without this constraint. A total of 15 χ^2 difference tests were performed for each pair of factors, and every pair showed significantly different χ^2 values, suggesting that all measures achieved discriminant validity.

Insert Table 1 here.

Insert Table 2 here.

AMOS 18 was applied for path analysis by using maximum likelihood estimation. The results showed satisfactory model fit indices for the hypothesized model (χ^2=333.37, df: 201, p<.01; RMSEA=.06; TLI=.94; CFI=.95; SRMR=.07). The path analysis showed that

there were several routes to increase commitment in online brand communities. The knowledge-seeking motive was the key driver to members' satisfaction with their brand communities both directly (γ=.39, t=4.12, p<.01) and indirectly through the social integration motivation (γ=.21, t=2.80, p<.01), while members' entertainment-seeking motive influenced their satisfaction only through the social integration motivation (γ=.58, t=6.82, p<.01). The direct influence of entertainment-seeking motivation on satisfaction was insignificant (γ=.12, t=1.18=, p>.05). This was tested with a separate path analysis, which added the path between entertainment-seeking motive and satisfaction with the community in the hypothesized model (model fit indices: χ^2=332.00, df: 200, p<.01; RMSEA=.06; TLI=.94; CFI=.95; SRMR=.06). Given the model indices of both models and the χ^2 difference test are similar (χ^2 difference = 1.375, df: 1, p>.2), the model with the added path is no better than our hypothesized model.

Based on the hypothesized model, the path analysis suggested that the social integration motivation resulted in members' satisfaction with the communities (β=.27, t=3.35, p<.01) and led to the social enhancement motive (β=.64, t=8.22, p<.01). Commitment with the community was determined by members' satisfaction with their community (β=.34, t=4.81, p<.01) and the two symbolic motivations (social integration motive: β=.31, t=3.37, p<.01; social enhancement motive: β =.29, t=3.51, p<.01). All hypotheses were supported, and the results are displayed in Figure 3.

Insert Figure 3 here.

As previous studies (Dholakia et al., 2004; Luarn et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012, to name a few) treated motivations at the same level without hierarchies, an alternative model

with the same treatment was carried out to compare with the hypothesized model. A path analysis was performed with maximum likelihood estimation and the results are shown in Figure 4. The model indices deteriorated sharply in the alternative model (model fit indices: χ^2=535.47, df: 204, p<.01; RMSEA=.09; TLI=.85; CFI=.87; SRMR=.21), and a χ^2 difference test (χ^2 difference = 202.09, df: 3, p<.01) further confirmed the hypothesized model to be better than the alternative model. Moreover, entertainment-seeking and social enhancement motives became irrelevant to satisfaction and commitment in the model, which may lead to suspicious conclusions.

Insert Figure 4 here.

Some studies confirmed knowledge- and entertainment-seeking motives influencing commitment either directly or indirectly via the route of satisfaction (Jin et al., 2010), but conflicting results to these investigations also present (Jang, Olfman, Ko, & Kim, 2008; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). Therefore, the second alternative model was proposed to include both direct and indirect paths from the pragmatic motives (knowledge-seeking and entertainment-seeking) to commitment and via satisfaction (Figure 5). The structure of social integration and social enhancement motives in relation to satisfaction and commitment is organized according to previous studies (Stragier et al., 2016; Sung & Choi, 2010) as in our hypothesized model. But, unlike the hypothesized model, we disconnected symbolic motives from pragmatic motives by following the disconnected treatment in the literature (Dholakia et al., 2004; Luarn et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012), and included three additional paths from knowledge-seeking motive, entertainment-seeking motive, and social integration motive to commitment with the community. The model was analyzed by using maximum likelihood estimation and the results are shown in Figure 5. The model fit indices of the alternative

model were worse (χ^2=396.00, df: 200, p<.01; RMSEA=.07; TLI=.91; CFI=.92; SRMR=.14) than those of the hypothesized model, and not sufficiently satisfactory. These results, together with the insignificant χ^2 difference test (χ^2 difference = 62.63, df: 1, p<.01), suggest that our hypothesized model was better, despite the fact that the hypothesized model was more parsimonious. Therefore, a hierarchical process, as in the hypothesized model, to explain how community members' motivations evolved from pragmatic to symbolic motivations leading to commitment was confirmed.

Insert Figure 5 here.

6. Discussion

This study addresses the motivational process issue in engaging in online brand communities. Prior studies have either treated motivation as a unidimensional concept (Gruen et al., 2006) or seen different types of motivations as all occurring at the same time (Luarn et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012). Using the motivational research in psychology (Austin & Vancouver, 1996), this paper conceptualized and verified motivation as a hierarchical structure. Moreover, unlike past studies which focused on either pragmatic (Chiu et al., 2006; Koh & Kim, 2004) or symbolic (Cova & Pace, 2006; Schau et al., 2009) motivations, the current paper brings together both types of motivations to form commitment to online brand community by distinguishing different evolutional processes for motivations.

As Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) argued, people have different motivations for participating in brand communities. However, it is not, as Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) supposed, that these motivations are independent. In line with Mathwick, Wiertz, and de Ruyter (2008), we argue that the motivations change over time.

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Moreover, our results suggested that different initial pragmatic motives followed different evolutional processes to influence community commitment. The motivations did not just change over time. Rather, their change over time also depended on what the current motivations were. For example, community members with knowledge-seeking motives became committed through satisfaction, but for those members with entertainment-seeking motives, their satisfaction was not immediately followed when their entertainment-seeking motives were fulfilled. Instead, their satisfaction established until their entertainment-seeking motives moved up the hierarchy into the symbolic ones.

The hierarchical motivation process complements what Mathwick et al. (2008) observed in the production of social capital in peer-to-peer technical support communities. According to Etzioni (1996), social capital is a force that gathers and transforms people into a community. This force enables members to contribute to the community as well as to benefit from the community (Paxton, 1999). Extending social capital to virtual communities, Mathwick et al. (2008) argued for the similarities between virtual and physical communities and evidenced that the transformation of people to a community is generated by similar community norms, including reciprocity, voluntarism, and social trust. More importantly, they found that, as time goes on, the importance of informational value is overtaken by that of the social value. In line with their finding, the current paper confirms that online brand community members start with the pragmatic motivations (i.e., knowledge-seeking and entertainment-seeking motives) as their first stage to engage in a community. Only when pragmatic motivations are fulfilled can the motivations move to the next stages, which are the symbolic motivations. These findings are not limited to a technical-oriented support community, such as Canon and Nikon. Rather, they extend to include communities with a symbolic-orientation, such as Coca-Cola and Starbucks. The symbolic motivations are what Dholakia and Bagozzi (2004) called the "social capital motive," which includes gaining

community acceptance (i.e., social integration motivation) and prestige within the community (i.e., social enhancement motivation). These findings are also consistent with how commitment is formed in physical communities (Crowe, 2010; Wellman & Wortley, 1990) as well as in interpersonal relationships (Rusbult, 1980, 1983).

The hierarchical structure of the motivation processes to form commitment also provides explanation to the inability of finding the influences of pragmatic reasons to community commitment in Jang et al.'s (2008) and Wang and Fesenmaier's (2004) studies. For example, Jang et al. (2008) investigated the antecedents to online community commitment and the antecedents they examined included information quality, system quality, social interaction, and social reward from participating in the community. To their "surprise," information quality and system quality did not influence community commitment. However, our results demonstrate that it can be difficult for such a pragmatic perspective to directly influence commitment. The pragmatic perspective is only the entry point for people to start to join and participate in communities. If we neglect the pragmatic perspective, the risk would be that the true effectiveness of different motivations in the process of building community commitment may be masked. Therefore, examination of the motivational process requires greater reliance on theoretical development.

7. Conclusion

Unlike previous studies (Jang et al., 2008; Madupu & Cooley, 2010; Tsai et al., 2012; Wang & Fesenmainer, 2004), the paper identified the motivations for driving online brand community members' commitment as a hierarchical, sequential structure. Using a survey across online communities of four brands, the paper verified that motivations followed a hierarchical structure, involving pragmatic and symbolic motivations. Pragmatic motivations,

including knowledge-seeking and entertainment-seeking motives, are the initial motives to join online brand communities. After their initial motives are satisfied, members' motivations evolve into symbolic ones, which ultimately contribute to the formation of commitment to communities. More importantly, this study identified that the two different pragmatic motivations have different hierarchical processes to commitment. Members with the knowledge-seeking motives can become committed to communities through a more flexible process, while members with entertainment-seeking motives can become committed only via symbolic motivations. These results suggest that a lack of hierarchy in motivations may disguise the real effects of various types of motivations in forming commitment, and that treating all motivations the same may cloak the distinctions in how different motivations involve different hierarchies; in our cases, the different hierarchies driven by knowledge- and entertainment-seeking motives

In addition to the theoretical implications, the paper offers several pointers for managers. Brand companies should first focus on fulfilling members' pragmatic needs, either knowledge or entertainment. The entry barriers and withdrawal costs of a virtual community are low, and if the members do not see potential benefit to fulfill their pragmatic needs, they might never join or participate in the community in a valuable way. For those with motivations seeking knowledge, once their knowledge-seeking needs are fulfilled, their satisfaction with the community is achieved, and this satisfaction will lead them to commitment. Therefore, for knowledge-oriented brand communities, it is critical to satisfy new members' thirst for brand- and product-related knowledge. Brand managers can consider assisting members by answering their questions and extend their assistance by offering additional insights to their brand communities.

As community members' knowledge-seeking needs are fulfilled, their experience of interacting with other members may elevate their motivations from a pragmatic level to a symbolic one. Moreover, for those with motivations seeking entertainment, the evolution of their motivation follows from a pragmatic level to a symbolic one before becoming satisfied or committed to the communities. Therefore, while it is important to ensure the entry points of brand communities to be able to fulfill members' initial needs, it is equally important for a brand company to help cultivate its community's culture, ritual, and history through existing members' interactions. These interactions can help develop members' social integration and social enhancement, which is an important route to members' commitment with the community.

Finally, we acknowledge three main limitations in our study and propose future research to examine these limitations and extend the current study. First, while the paper verified the motivational process by including different types of online brand communities (i.e., functional oriented brand communities, such as *Nikon* and *Canon*, and emotional oriented ones, such as *Starbucks* and *Coca-Cola*), the positioning orientations of these online communities were not examined or controlled in the data analysis because of the limited sample size in each community group. While PLS might have been used to test the potentially differences between the brands, we decided to forgo the use of PLS because we wished to concentrate on the hierarchical routes, rather than on the differences between different online brand communities. However, the motivation hierarchy in different brand communities is an important topic worth future exploration, such that whether different positioning orientations would generate different motivational processes.

The second limitation is that, while we focused on online brand communities, it is important to bear in mind that most brands are not just represented online. It is possible that

our participants may have responded to the questionnaire based on their overall perceptions and experiences of the brand itself, not just its online format. We did not examine this carryover effect in the current study, but it is also an area worth investigating in the future. For example, what is the relationship between the actual use of the brand, brand loyalty, experience of online interactions in the brand community, and their motivations and commitment to stay with the community?

The third limitation bears the limitations of a hierarchical approach, and in particular, the sequential route in a hierarchy does not always hold. Take Maslow's hierarchy of needs for an example; some people may sacrifice their basic needs for self-actualization needs – Liu Xiaobo, the Chinese Nobel peace prize winner who passed away recently, is one such example. The current study has identified the hierarchical routes for the evolution of motivations in online brand communities, but these routes may only present a basic structure, like what is proposed in the Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Now that the basic structure is identified, future research is encouraged to explore different boundary conditions that break the hierarchical routes. Is it possible online brand community members by pass functional motives are initially motivated by social reasons? If it is, then in what condition does this possibility present and present in what way?

Social media have made online brand communities accessible, and more than a decade has passed since 2004 when social media started to gain popularity (for example, Facebook was founded in 2004). Research around online brand communities has become increasingly more mature. It is time to acquire more detailed knowledge of the psychological processes a consumer goes through. This acquisition will contribute to further developing theoretical underpinnings for online brand communities and help brand companies to design effective strategies to cultivate their online communities.

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Table 1: Descriptive and Correlation Analysis

	Cronbach's alphas	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5
1. Entertainment-seeking motive	.85	3.48	.89					
2. Knowledge-seeking motive	.71	3.50	.84	.09				
3. Social integration motive	.82	3.33	.91	.45**	.22**			
4. Social enhancement motive	.90	2.68	.96	.41**	.21**	.56**		
5. Satisfaction	.81	3.79	.74	.21**	.39**	.29**	.23**	
6. Commitment	.90	2.66	.86	.36**	.37**	.52**	.52**	.44**

* $p < .05$, 2-tailed; ** $p < .01$, 2-tailed

Table 2: CFA of the measurements

Constructs (Scale Sources): Item	Item Loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE
Motives to participate in a brand community (Dholakia et al., 2004)			
I visit this brand community . . .			
Entertainment-seeking motive		.85	.60
to be entertained.	.70		
to play.	.86		
to relax.	.85		
to pass the time away when bored.	.66		
Knowledge-seeking motive		.73	.47
to learn how to do things.	.62		
to solve problems.	.81		
to make decisions.	.62		
Social integration motive		.83	.62
to have something to do with others.	.80		
to stay in touch.	.84		
to build relationship with others.	.71		
Social enhancement motive		.90	.75
to feel important.	.87		
to gain prestige.	.90		
to attain status in the community.	.83		
Satisfaction with the online brand community (Woisetschläger et al., 2008)		.82	.69
Overall, this online brand community meets my expectations.	.79		
The content of this online brand community matches exactly with my interest.	.87		
Commitment in the community (Meyer et al., 1993)		.90	.56
It would be very hard for me to leave this online brand community right now, even if I wanted to.	.82		
Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave this online brand community.	.82		
I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this brand online community.	.76		
If I had not already put so much of myself into this online brand community, I might consider other communities.	.64		
One of the few negative consequences of leaving this brand online community would be the scarcity of available alternatives.	.66		
I really feel as if this online brand community's problems are my own.	.71		
This online brand community has a great deal of personal meaning for me.	.82		

Notes:
All items were measured using five-point scales anchored by 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree" unless otherwise stated.
Model fit indices:
χ^2=320.74, df=194, p<.01; RMSEA=.06; NFI=.88; CFI=.95; GFI=.88; SRMR=.05
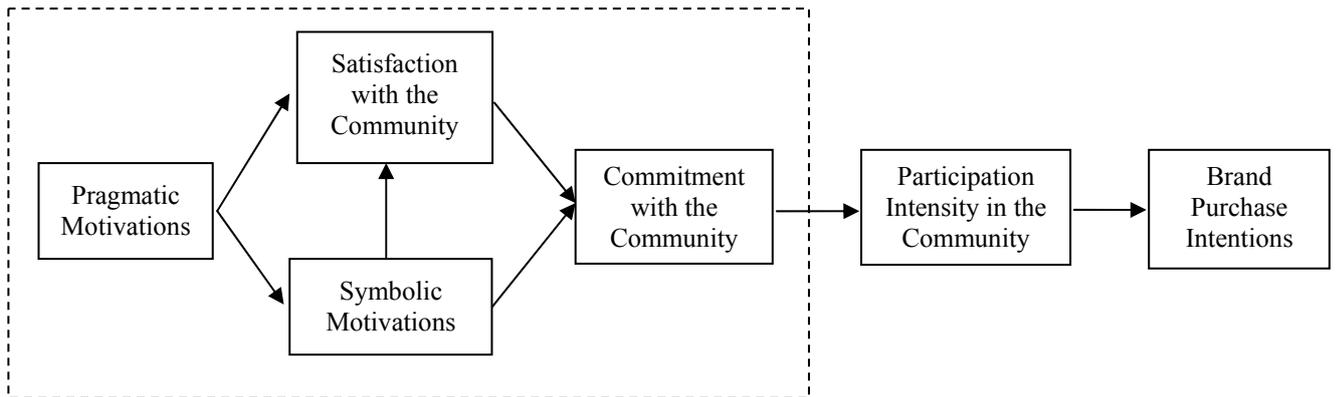
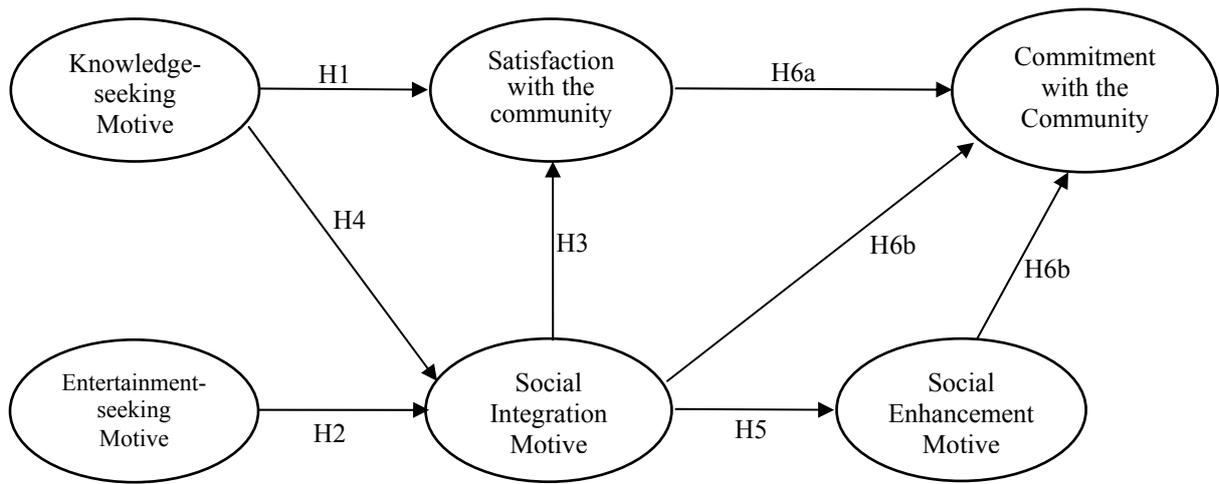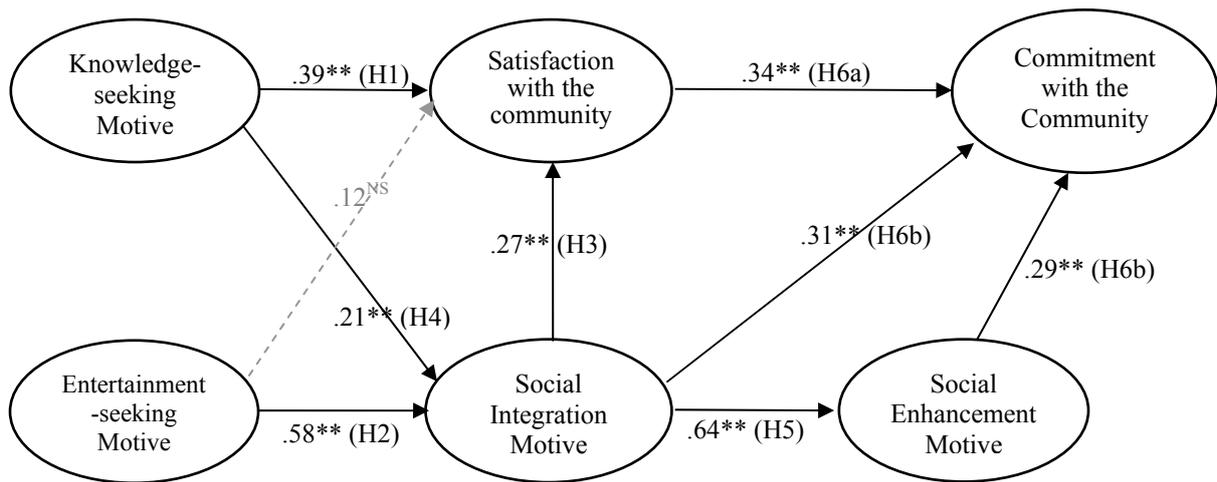The focus of the paper is within the dotted box.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
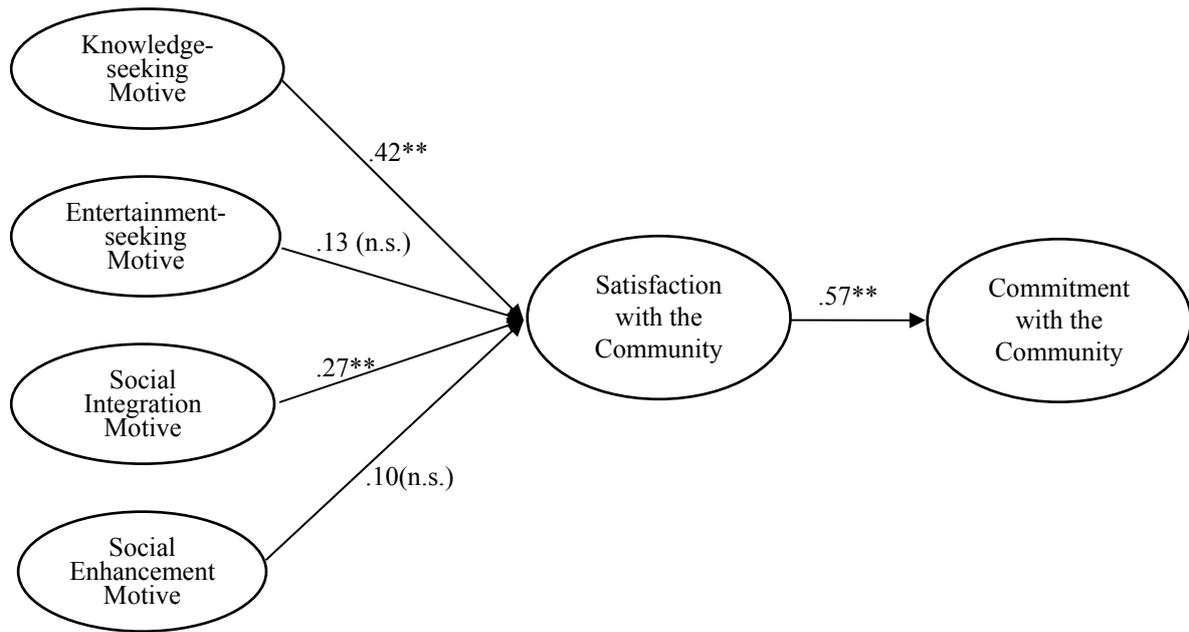
Figure 2: The Hypothesized Model

Model fit indices:
χ^2=333.37, df: 201, *p*<.01; RMSEA=.06; TLI=.94; CFI=.95; SRMR=.07
* *p*<.05; ** *p*<.01

The gray dash line is insignificant, but it was tested with a separate model with model fit indices as χ^2=332.00, df: 200, p<.01; RMSEA=.06; TLI=.94; CFI=.95; SRMR=.06. It is included here for the ease of comparison.

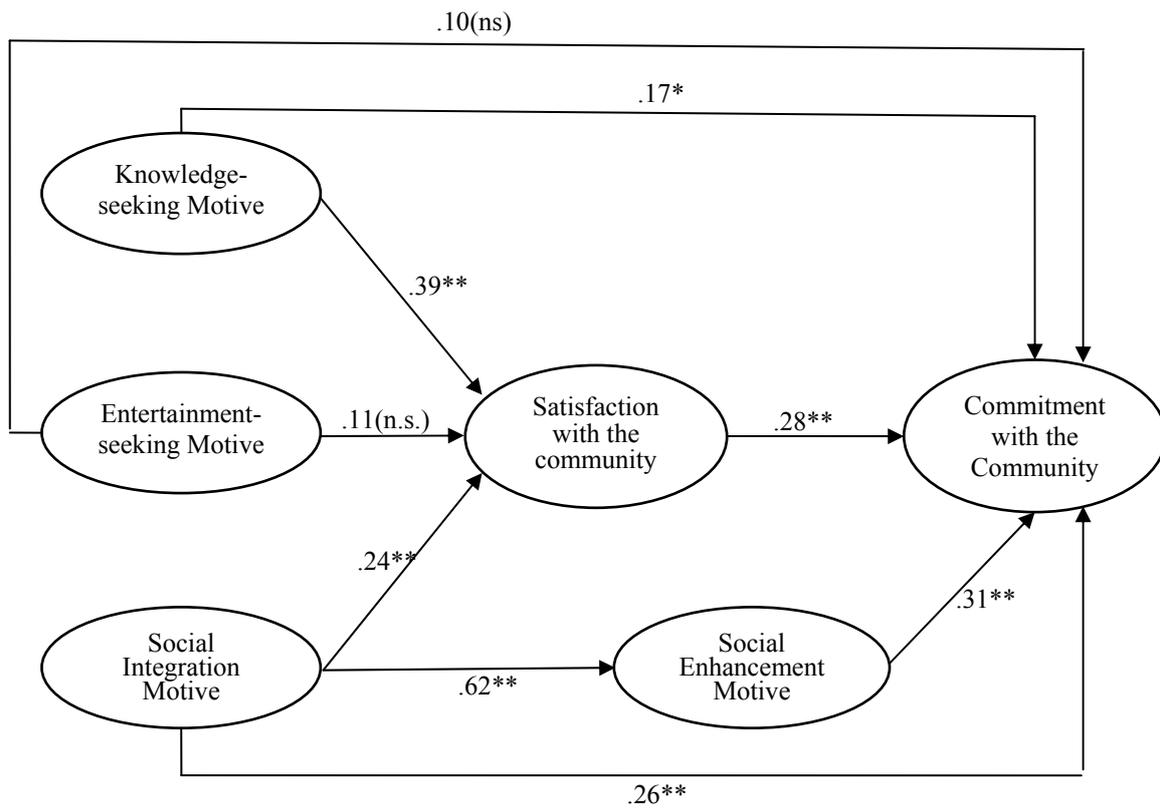Figure 3: Results of Path Analysis – the Hypothesized Model

Model fit index:
χ^2=535.47, df: 204, *p*<.01; RMSEA=.09; TLI=.85; CFI=.87; SRMR=.21

p < .05; **p* < .01

Figure 4: Results of Path Analysis – Alternative Model (1)

Model fit index:
χ^2=396.00, df: 200, *p*<.01; RMSEA=.07; TLI=.91; CFI=.92; SRMR=.14

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01

Figure 5: Results of Path Analysis – Alternative Model (2)