Journal of Business Research 65 (2012) 890–895

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Business Research

How do brand communities generate brand relationships? Intermediate mechanisms[☆]

Zhimin Zhou [a], Qiyuan Zhang [b], Chenting Su [c], Nan Zhou [c,d,*]

[a] Department of Marketing, Shenzhen University, 3688 Nanhai Avenue, Shenzhen, Guangdong, PR China
[b] Department of Strategy and International Business, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong
[c] Department of Marketing, City University of Hong Kong, Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon, Hong Kong
[d] Department of Marketing, Wuhan University, PR China

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 1 March 2011
Received in revised form 1 June 2011
Accepted 1 June 2011
Available online 7 July 2011

Keywords:
Brand community
Brand attachment
Community–brand similarity
Brand relationship
Intermediate mechanism

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the intermediate mechanism that translates brand communities into brand relationships. Using a sample of online brand communities from China, the study finds that consumer brand attachment plays a full mediating role between brand community commitment and brand commitment and exerts partial mediation between brand identification and brand commitment. Perceived community–brand similarity moderates both brand community identification's effect on brand identification and brand community commitment's effect on brand attachment. The findings contribute to the brand literature and provide implications for brand community management.

© 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The past decade bears witness to a growing interest in brand community, a term different from other branding concepts on a single brand consumer (e.g., brand attitude, brand personality, and brand image) (see Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009; Schouten, McAlexander, & Koenig, 2007; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). Brand community refers to "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Traditional literature on brand communication pays attention to the company-to-consumers paradigm, while a brand community describes a new paradigm of consumers-to-consumers communication (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Thus, "community" may replace "relationship" as a new marketing buzzword (McWilliam, 2000).

Prior research examines brand communities' effects on marketing performance (e.g., Fournier & Lee, 2009). Specifically, brand community identification, participation, and commitment all empirically lead to brand loyalty and recommendation (e.g., word of mouth). Although little doubt exists about a brand community's strong impact on branding, the impact's mediation on brand relationships remains unclear. For example, a direct relationship exists between brand community commitment and brand commitment or loyalty (e.g., Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim, 2008). However, given that brand communities and consumer–brand relationships operate at different levels (McAlexander et al., 2002), the mechanisms mediating or moderating brand community effects on the consumer–brand relationship remain uncharted. Specifically, scholars and practitioners should understand how consumers' relationships with a brand community translate into their relationships with the brand, such as their commitment to the brand (e.g., Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava, 2000). This study intends to uncover such intermediate mechanisms to enrich the understanding of brand community.

The reminder of the paper proceeds as follows: the next section presents the conceptual model built on relevant literature that sheds light on the research hypotheses. After the research methods, the paper presents the main research results based on an empirical study using data collected from a Chinese car club. Finally, the paper concludes with managerial implications as well as limitations and further research directions.

2. Conceptual model and hypotheses

2.1. Conceptual model

Consumers in a brand community identify and commit to the community as well as affect toward the brand due to shared brand

---

[☆] The authors acknowledge the financial support from National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant Nos. 70802042 and 71002081) and Hong Kong Research Grants Council (Grant No. 9041466—CityU 150709). The authors also thank Dr. Julie Li and Dr. Wenyu Dou of City University of Hong Kong for their helpful comments to an earlier draft.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Marketing, City University of Hong Kong, Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

E-mail addresses: mnizzm@szu.edu.cn (Z. Zhou), bessieqy@hku.hk (Q. Zhang), mkctsu@cityu.edu.hk (C. Su), mkzhou@cityu.edu.hk (N. Zhou).

0148-2963/$ – see front matter © 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.06.034

experiences (Scarpi, 2010). In addition, a match between the community traits (e.g., community members' demographics and psychographics) and the brand traits (e.g., brand personality) further influences the consumer–brand relationship (Milas & Mlačić, 2007). Therefore, consumer brand-related affect mediates the effects of consumer community-related brand cognition and conation; perceived similarity between the community and the brand plays a moderating role. Fig. 1 presents the conceptual model.

2.2. Research hypotheses

2.2.1. Basic relationships between brand community and the brand

Brand community identification stems from group identification, a specific social identification form in which people define themselves by their group membership (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Shared values and experiences are the basis for brand community identification (Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008). Brand community membership produces an ideal social imagery and nurtures feelings of belongingness (Schau & Muniz, 2002). Brand community identification results in commitment to the brand community, a psychological bond describing a member's relationship with the group (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Previous studies find that functional and social values lead to community commitment (Mathwick, Wiertz, & de Ruyter, 2008). Brand community identification brings forth such social values because the affiliation is based on the shared brand experiences and utility of community members. Identifying with a brand community means that the community members likely would buy the same brand, share their brand experiences, and draw similar functional utility from consuming the brand.

Group members with the shared brand experience and values more likely commit to the brand community to maintain a long-term relationship.

H1. Brand community identification influences brand community commitment positively.

According to organization science, a strong link exists between identification and commitment (e.g., Wan-Huggins, Riordan, & Griffeth, 1998). Company loyalty is a key consequence of consumer–company identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Similarly, consumers' brand identification should lead them to commit to the brand. A long-term brand relationship likely develops when consumers believe the brand reflects their personalities and enhances their self-esteem and social status (Wang, 2002). When consumers form strong brand identification, self-identification and satisfaction with the brand promotes their commitment to the brand (Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2007).

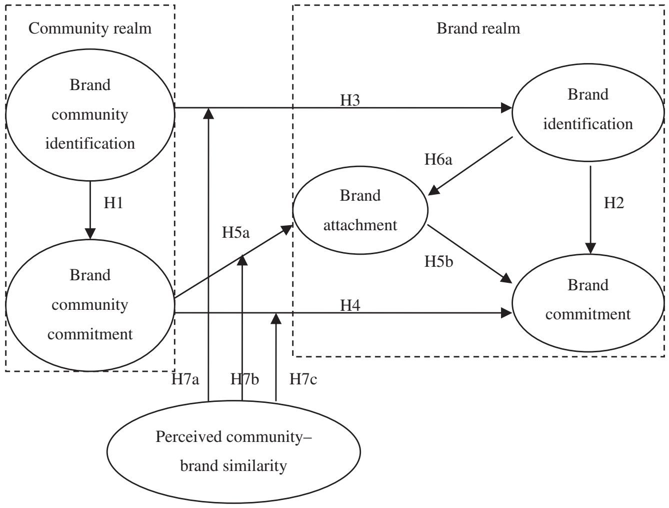

Fig. 1. The conceptual model*. *The model does not show the hypotheses of the mediating effects (H_{5c} and H_{6b}).

H2. Brand identification influences brand commitment positively.

Two competing propositions exist on the relationship between brand community identification and brand identification. One study supports the positive influence of brand community identification on brand identification (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006), while another study supports the reverse relationship, that is, brand identification leads to brand community identification (Algesheimer et al., 2005). These findings imply a two-way relationship may exist between brand community identification and brand identification.

However, as a platform for consumers to share their brand experiences and values drawn from the brand, a brand community may reinforce consumers' brand cognition and attitude, thus enhancing their identification with the brand (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). For example, Harley Owners Group (H.O.G.) consists of many passionate fans, who regularly gather to share their Harley-Davidson brand experiences. Such intimate community relationships lead to strengthened brand identification (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

H3. Brand community identification influences brand identification positively.

Much research finds that members' commitment to a brand community leads to their commitment to the brand (e.g., Kim, Choi, Qualls, & Han, 2008). Consumers committing to a brand community tend to purchase the same brand consistently (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Purchasing a competing brand likely leads to cognitive dissonance and mitigates their relationships with other members (Scarpi, 2010). The committed participation and interactions with other members help strengthen consumers' brand experience and value, leading to their enhanced brand commitment or loyalty (Jang et al., 2008).

H4. Brand community commitment influences brand commitment positively.

2.2.2. The mediating effects of brand attachment

Bowlby's (1979) seminal research defines attachment as an emotion-laden, target-specific bond between a person and a specific object, typically a caregiver. Attachment occurs and develops when people get closer to share emotions (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). The marketing researchers introduce the concept of attachment into branding research (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, and Iacobucci (2010, p. 2) define brand attachment as "the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self."

In a long-term relationship with a brand community, consumers continuously interact with other members and draw values and utilities from consuming the same brand. This sharing over time derives more brand value, developing closer consumer relationship within the community and brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

The brand enables the consumers to realize more of their consumption objectives. Consumers committed to the brand community understand and sense the brand deeply and continuously, forming a strong brand attachment (Park et al., 2007; Park et al., 2010).

H5a. Brand community commitment influences brand attachment positively.

In psychology literature, people showing attachment to others tend to be loyal to their partners, resist competing alternatives, and make sacrifices to support the relationship (Thomson et al., 2005). In marketing literature, attachment strongly impacts sustained, cross-time consumer brand behaviors and exchanges (Thomson et al., 2005). Gratified, enriched, and enabled by consuming a strong brand,

دریافت فوری ← متن کامل مقاله

ISIArticles
مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات