Impact of online brand community characteristics on brand loyalty of Consumers of Pakistan

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Abstract

Online brand communities are fading the barriers between the producers and consumers. They are creating change in purchasing behavior of consumers. Online brand community characteristics are studied internationally. Companies in Pakistan are also making brand communities from past few years to create the customer bond with brand. The aim of this study is to identify the impact of online brand community characteristics, information, rewards for activities and interaction, on brand loyalty. This study is based on quantitative approach and the data was collected from the sample of 326 internet users of Pakistan with survey method through adopted questionnaire. The linear Regression method is used for the measurement and to test the hypothesis. The results suggest that online brand community characteristic, information, has positive moderate impact on the brand loyalty. Other two characteristics, interaction, and reward, shows week impact on brand loyalty. This has implication for marketers in Pakistan to focus on information characteristic in online brand community programs, it also provides background for further studies in this regard.

Keywords: Online brand community characteristics; interaction; Information; Reward for activities; brand loyalty.

1. Introduction

A community is made up of group of peoples who have some common norms, values, religion, and identity (Muniz, Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). A community can be identified with the help of three factors which are locality, social interaction, and bond. Community locality differentiates one community from another community. Social interaction is one of the important factors. Through social interaction, relationship among community members is build. Bond defines the sense of relatedness and it gives comfort to community members when they are in community

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(Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim, 2008). The word which community theorists used is sense of community (SOC). Without SOC satisfaction, commitment and loyalty cannot be created among the community members. SOC is considered, sometimes, as a definition of community or outcome of the living in the community. They are also made on the base of interest. "Highly particular and localized" (McMillan, 1996). For community description, McMillan and Chavis SOC descriptive framework has worldwide acceptance because of qualitative empirical support and theoretical based. The framework has four dimensions.

1. Feeling of belonging.
2. Feeling of effect.
3. Fulfillment of need.
4. Emotional connection among members.
5.

On the base of these dimensions, community are made(Blanchard & Markus, 2004).

Online communities are made for interaction, knowledge and to earn money. Online communities are made by audience, who have different demographic and phytogeographic characteristics. The main factor which leads to create online community is internet experience. Characteristics are major factors for sustained online interaction through their present social network (One, 2012). This study strives to find out the impact of information, rewards for activities and interaction on brand loyalty.

There are some common points which make the online community successful which are, selecting content for specific audience, encouraging their early and continued participation. For encouraging online audience for participation, it is important to give them true information, online user privacy, and security rights which can developed their interest. (Andrews, 2002). Social network (SN) is a "web-based service" which gives right to individuals to make their profile semi-public or public within SN, gives the right to the audience to make the list of people whom they want to share their connection within system (Boyd & Ellison, 2010). The way of marketing has recently been changed (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The part of web 2.0 technology gives the right to individual to share content online, produce and connect to the world (Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). Therefore online brand community create the opportunities for the brand owner to do viral marketing, market analysis- by observing customer behavior through their own content generate (UGC) and product development with the help of customer involvement in process (Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013).

Brand community social networks, that provide platforms for marketing, give opportune to connect with the large number of the users, groups without geographically limitation, based on social relationship among community members admired by brand communities (Muniz, Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). For increasing sale, brand communities have found successful tools which help them to improve relationships between the consumers and brand (Sicilia & Palazón, 2008). Brand community gives facility to community members to do interaction and exchange their thoughts and share their views about brand or particular product, this is called word of mouth (Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011). Communication which engage the online consumers on social media. Word of mouth is a powerful tool for marketing which is used by the customers to share

information about brand or product, therefore it leads to increases the brand commitment, purchase decision making and increase the product sale (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). People to people communications on social network referred to an exponential growth of the word of mouth which is also known as viral marketing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In this new marketing era, the term participation and engagement become the prime focus because it defines the nature of participation. One of early definitions of interaction within brand online community members is "consumer initial motivation to cooperate and interact within online community members" (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). Interaction among community members create satisfaction, commitment value, trust, loyalty, and empowerment. It is usually the goal of online brand community to increases the level of interaction among the members on social media which is profitable for company leads to increases the equity of brand and make the positive reputation.

Consumers join the brand communities because they feel the connection with the brand. They consider itself brand and feel loyal to it which is further strengthened by the participation in the brand communities (Mcalexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Participation in brand communities strengthen the relationship and affect the loyalty. Online brand communities are made by customer initiatives and companies are making strategies to create brand communities. In 2004, Porter distinguished between organization and member-initiated virtual communities. Online member-initiated communities can be defined as socially or professionally oriented communities and organization online communities can be defined as nonprofit commercial and governmental communities. Different behavior of members can be observed which create separate categories in brand communities which need to be studied further. Types of behavior, observed in brand communities, include helping other customers or sharing experiences and the non-interactive behavior of those who only read others' comments (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2011).

To create brand loyalty, it is important that product should at least meet consumer need and wants (expectation) if it does not delight them. Many studies show that brand which are best in qualities give more financial benefits to the companies (Mao, 2010). The most common definition about brand loyalty is that customer's thorough decision to buying the same brand over and over again (Tucker, 1964). The term brand loyalty is also defined as the positive attitude of consumers toward the brand which is visible by the customers' repeated purchase of the same brand. Brand loyalty can be understood by operationalize two-factor attitude and behavior (Taylor, Celuch, & Goodwin, 2004). These attitudes of customer become the competitive components for the brand (Romaniuk & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013).

Rewards for activities in online brand community create brand awareness among the consumers and help in brand recognition (Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2011). Online brand communities encourage the consumers to get the maximum relationship benefits from the community by giving rewards to consumer on activities (Schultz, Dayan, & Montague, 1997). If activities are not rewarded by brand community then community members happen to be less wiggle to interact in communities. People feel satisfied when they feel the sense of exchange, so is the case with the brand. Customer feel satisfied when they get rewards from brand (Chan, Lee, & Lee, 2014).

High-quality information is important for online social network users. It helps them to clearly understand the product and feel comfortable and give confidence to make purchasing

decision (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2010). Those online brand communities which give rich and clear information have the competitive advantage. In this way, quality of information creates attraction for online social network users (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair, & Okumus, 2015). Quality of information can be defined by Reliability, updated, credible and rich information. The excessive information leads to negative impression on consumers. They think it is irrelevant information which gives negative impact called low-quality information (Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2011). Highly quality information leads to surge in brand recall and recognition (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012).

1.1. Research problem:

Online communities are different from the traditional communities. Online brand community characteristics are studied internationally. Companies in Pakistan are also making brand communities from past few years to create the customer bond with brand. The aim of this study is to understand the impact of online brand communities' characteristics on brand loyalty.

1.2. Objectives of the study:

1) To measure the impact of quality of information, in an online brand community, on brand loyalty.
2) To find out impact of rewards for activities, in an online brand community, on brand loyalty.
3) To investigate the impact of role of interaction among online community members on brand loyalty.

2. Literature review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Social media:

People spend their one-third of daytime on social media (Ho, 2014). Hallmark social media, Facebook, alone has more than 800 million users. Social media has changed the way of marketing and promoting brand (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). People join the social media to fulfill their need of being socially contacted. People join the communities to get the feeling of belongingness. The basic element of the communities is the sense of being socially connected (Laroche et al., 2012). Rheingold stated, " people are going to do what people always do with a new communication technology: use it in ways never intended or foreseen by its investors" (Laroche et al., 2012).

2.2. Community

Community has been deeply researched, its definition and meaning has changed over time. Community is the construction of social thoughts. Communities contain three elements consciousness of kind, tradition and rituals and senses of moral responsibilities. These elements are defined below:

1) Consciousness of kind: It shows the belongings and the similar attitude among the members. It shows the feelings of one member towards another member. This element makes the difference and disguise the members from another community.

2) Tradition and rituals: Rituals and tradition are parts of the history of culture, that members share with each other. Traditions are the common norms, values, and practices, members perform or celebrate (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2008).

3) Sense of moral responsibility: community is made by the sense of responsibility which is felt by the whole community. In every community obligations and duties exist which must be fulfilled by every individual, if a member refused to fulfill these obligation so he will be degraded by other members (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

2.3. Online community

Internet provides the easy infrastructure to make communities and share information within communities to interact with members. Online communities removed the barriers of communication which was space and time. It is important to build the strong relationship with the customers for developing brand loyalty. It is also significant to create emotional connection with customers. Through online communities, firm can create emotional connection, trust, and commitment, which ultimately create the brand loyalty (Laroche et al., 2012). Interaction among community members developed the stronger relationship among the members (Kandampully, Kandampully, & Zhang, 2015). Communities are usually created by the firms because it paves the way for creative ideas and value addition to customers satisfaction and it creates differentiation (T. C. Zhang & Kandampully, 2015).

Online communities are present in different forms, like chat rooms, email and page groups. Online communities fulfill the four types of needs of consumer 1) sharing thoughts and material 2) relationship 3) benefit in terms of money and 4) living in fantasy (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013).

2.4. Online brand community

Online brand community is combination of two terms, social media and brand community. Brand communities are made to engage customers and to know the perception about the brand. Brand communities are made to build connection between customers and firm. Companies make brand communities to trigger connection with their loyal customer and share the information with them (Biedenbach & Marell, 2010). However, community which is on World Wide Web is known to be online brand community. Social media is now mostly used by the company's promotion and for building brand activities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Members have right to join the community if they want. One reason to join community is to feel socially connected with other people. Need of social connection is motivation to generate content. Reaching, entertainment and making money are the other reasons for joining communities or for using social media. Brand community increases the brand loyalty which is called as 'Holy Grail' for business (Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). Consumer empowerment concept is more highlighted these days. Customers have become more empowered due to the social media so companies are spending more budget on brand communities marketing programs. Customers can not only easily reach information and prices of the product but also can generate the content about the product (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013)

The participation in online brand community is most important because it decides the success rate of the community. Participation in the community members is evaluated by these four factors 1)

Motivation of consumer to participate in community 2) Useful share of information which helps other community members 3) Level of interest of consumer to share their experience within community 4) The efforts to encourage the communities (Casaló et al., 2010)

There are three characteristic of online brand community that is given below:

2.5. Quality of information:

The basic purpose of people for getting enrolled in online communities is to get information. The process of gaining information varies from person to person. Members gain information according to their knowledge, experience, and perception. Members engage in online communities to seek information by reading comments, post and opinions of other customers before purchases. According to a survey in China during 2006, 70% of people gave importance to the content validation and consider it most important factor in to make online community attractive (Nielsen, 2015). Information credibility is measured by the relevance of the information, comprehensiveness, and time, accuracy of content, expertise sources and trustworthy sources (C M K Cheung & Lee, 2007). Relevance of the information, comprehensiveness creates more impact on the information used as compare to the time, accuracy, expertise sources and trustworthy sources. Accuracy, expert sources and trustworthy sources in information create impact when there is conflict in the mind of customer or they check for the sources when information varies from their experience or perception (Christy M.K. Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008). Information sharing in online communities shows the helping behavior of the members. It is observed in communities that people want to share their experience and opinion with community members even if they do not know about each other. Diversity, auxiliary resources, inherent size and interaction of both periphery and core members create the helping behavior in the online community members. The cooperation among the community member helps to create the interaction among the community members (Laroche et al., 2012). Cooperative behavior among the members creates positive influence on the helping behavior which increases the rate of participation of community members to share information (Chu, 2009).

2.6. Reward for activities

There are two types of rewards in online brand community; monetary rewards and explicit normative rewards. Monetary rewards are like lucky draws, price promotion and lucky points which are usually offered by the firms. Monetary rewards are effective on the all type of members in community but it has short-term effect on members (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). Monetary reward creates negative impact on the intention of the long-term participation in the community (Garnefeld, Iseke, & Krebs, 2012). So, there is no long-term crowding-out effect of the monetary rewards just it has positive effect on the passive members' participation in community to create short time crowding-out effect.

Explicit normative incentives are like intangible rewards which give feeling to member as he is doing something valuable. Activities which are related to the norms like helping other, to achieve a common goal or doing something which create long-term positive effect in society. Explicit normative incentives effect on the active community members and long-term participation in the community. It does not work on the passive members though (Wirtz et al., 2013).

Some people like to join the online brand community because they get the free rewards from them. Some are of the view that they like Facebook pages out of personal interest. Sometimes simply because they give you free samples (Iglesias, Ind, & Alfaro, 2013). These rewards can be in any form, it can be information, interaction or a response from firm members on any complain (Dessart et al., 2015).

2.7. Interaction

Interaction is the characteristic of the online community which can be defined as when consumers share their experience with the members within community (Zhou, Zhang, Su, & Zhou, 2012). This exchange of information, inquire and response done by members, is called interaction. Interaction on online platform increases the awareness among the members and this awareness lead to augment the creation among the members build the trust between the members. This interaction may be between customer to customer, firm to customer or marketer to customer. Consumer interaction influences the purchase decision of the other customer through persuasion and information (Goh et al., 2013).

Interaction has three characteristics in online brand community; product-related sharing information, interaction in community and community engagement. Products share information related to the conversation among the members of community about product experience and how to solve the problem they are facing, it shows the helping behavior of the community members. Community interaction is related to the rate of consumer participation in activities or how much a member is interactive with other members in community. Community engagement includes both online and offline activities (Kuo & Feng, 2013). Interaction is the key factor to develop the trust between the consumer and the product. When they interact about the brand and share their experience with each other so they build the strong relationship with the members so they love more brand (Laroche et al., 2012).

2.8. Brand loyalty

Commitment of the consumer toward the brand emerges because they consider the brand is better than other alternatives and it fully satisfied the needs of consumer and this commitment reinforcement the repeated purchases is called brand loyalty. Brand loyalty can be encouraged by this new way of marketing. Internet provides the ready information to consumers which helps them to easily compare their product with other products (Ehrenberg, 2004). Online brand communities are fading the barriers between the producers and consumers. Customer can create more influence on the brand image and its meaning. This *many-to-many* communication increases the efforts of the marketers because it creates more complication to manage the word of mouth. Online communities empowered consumers to share their view. To give response or monitor these comments make marketers work more difficult (J Holland & Baker, 2001).

Customer engagement in online brand community tends to pave way for brand loyalty because it increases the level of satisfaction when they get engaged with the product or know about its value, it increases the level of satisfaction. In online brand community, when someone shares the experience of the product or recommend product so this recommendation in online brand community strength the relation with brand. Word of mouth has huge impact on the brand loyalty which frequently happen in communities (Wirtz et al., 2013).

Fun activities or engaging activities increase the brand loyalty as a reason, firm should monitor the customer engagement on social sites (Luarn, Lin, & Chiu, 2015). Social media is now become the most important tool for marketing. It the medium for advertising and promoting products and it is the fast way to reached to young customers. This medium has changed the way of marketing it has positive impact on the consumer repeated purchase decisions (Balakrishnan, Dahnil, & Yi, 2014). Customer engagement is the psychological key factor for creation of the loyalty and customer engagement is a dynamic process (Greve, 2014).

The relationship between customer community and brand loyalty is not novel, there is, however, need to study it from different characteristics of community and from different context, this is what has been strived in this study.
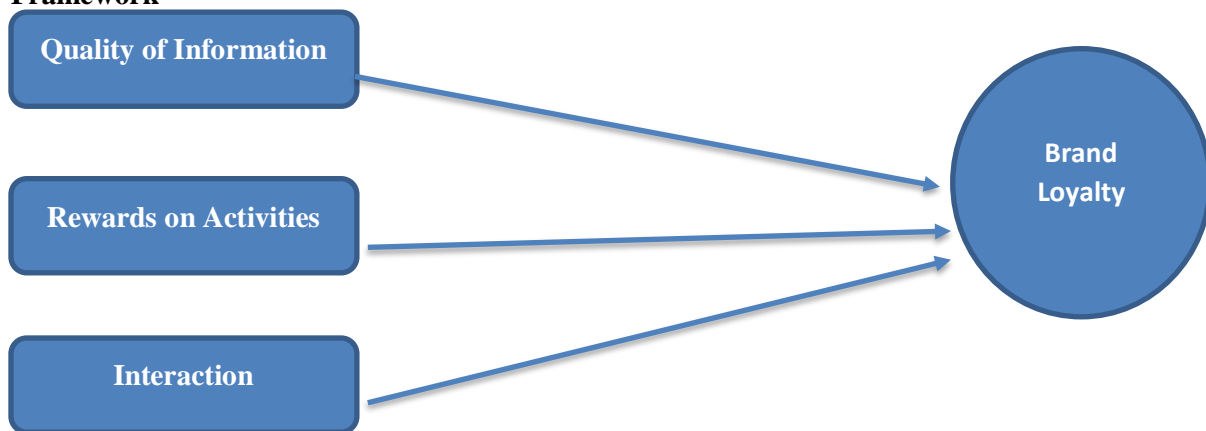
2.9. Research hypothesis and Theoretical Framework

H1-1 = higher quality of information in an online brand community leads to higher brand loyalty.
H1-2 = Higher interaction among online brand community members leads to higher brand loyalty.
H1-3 = Greater rewards for activities in online brand community leads to higher brand loyalty.

Framework

3. Research methodology

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design:

With roots in positivist philosophy, this study is based on explanatory strategy, with quantitative approach. The data is gathered through adopted close-ended questionnaire. It is conducted in Pakistan. The study uses the quantitative tool which is regression line.

3.4. Sample

This study used convenient sampling strategy. The sample size was 326, as more than 375 questionnaires were distributed but 326 were received in usable condition. The questionnaires were got filled from customers of Karachi who are active social media users.

3.5. Instrument selection

Instrument to gauge brand loyalty is adopted from (Lau & Lee, 1999) and online brand community characteristics questionnaire adopted from (Baldus, Voorhees, & Calantone, 2015).

3.6. Variables

Independent variable:
Online brand community characteristics are
  1) Quality of information
  2) Rewards on activities
  3) Interaction

Dependent variable:
Brand loyalty

4. Result

4.1. Descriptive

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Brand Loyalty	25.1484	4.81433	326
Total Interaction	10.9440	2.73583	326
Reward	21.1893	4.18103	326
Information	11.8497	2.54023	326

The above table 1 represents the mean and standard deviation values of brand loyalty, total interaction, reward and information. The total number of sample collected was 326.

4.2. Correlation

From the table 2 named as correlation, the relation among brand loyalty, total interaction, reward and information was examined utilizing Pearson feature short time connection coefficient. Preparatory investigation was performed to guarantee no infringement of the suspicious of typicality, linearity and homoscedasticity. There is positive moderate relationship of brand loyalty with information. There is positive week relationship of brand loyalty with total interaction and reward. Values of total interaction is 0.181, reward is 0.307 and information is 0.443. The values show that there is a significant positive moderate relationship of brand loyalty with information and week relationship with total interaction and rewards.

Table 2 Correlations

		brand loyalty	total interaction	reward	Information
Pearson Correlation	Brand Loyalty	1.000	.181	.307	.443
	Total Interaction	.181	1.000	.343	.289
	Reward	.307	.343	1.000	.516
	Information	.443	.289	.516	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Brand loyalty	.	.001	.000	.000
	Total Interaction	.001	.	.000	.000
	Reward	.000	.000	.	.000
	Information	.000	.000	.000	.
N	Brand Loyalty	326	326	326	326
	Total Interaction	326	326	326	326
	Reward	326	326	326	326
	Information	326	326	326	326

4.3. Model summary

From the table 3 named as model summary, the value of R square is 0.205 which means that total interaction, rewards & information are explaining 20.5% of variance in brand loyalty

Table 3 Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.453[a]	.205	.198	4.31121	.205	27.761	3	322	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), information, total into, reward

b. Dependent Variable: brand loyalty

4.4. Coefficient

From the table 4 name as coefficient, we can see that the beta value for total interaction is 0.037 and beta value for reward is 0.094 which means that total interaction and reward make the less unique contribution to explain the brand loyalty, when the variance explain by all other variable in the model is controlled for. The beta valve for information is greater (0.382) which means information makes the stronger unique contribution to explain the brand loyalty.

Table 4 Coefficients [a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	13.491	1.451		9.299	.000	10.636	16.345					
Total interaction	.066	.094	.037	.699	.485	-.119	.251	.181	.039	.035	.865	1.156
Reward	.111	.069	.097	1.621	.106	-.024	.247	.307	.090	.081	.693	1.443
Information	.724	.111	.382	6.524	.000	.506	.942	.443	342	.324	.720	1.389

a. Dependent Variable: brand loyalty

5. Discussion

This study examined relationship between online brand community characteristic (interaction, reward, and information) and brand loyalty. Only one of the online brand community characteristic (information) has positive moderate significant effect on the brand loyalty. The result indicates that information can create impact on brand loyalty. Other two characteristics (interaction and reward) show week significant effect on brand loyalty. Interaction and reward create less impact on brand loyalty.

The results of this study are similar when compared with previous research findings that show that information is the basic interest element for customer to make purchase. In online brand

communities, customers seek detailed information about product to build trust to purchase the brand and this factor motivate customer to participate in community (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2007). The other study, however, shows deviant finding that some consumers have exploratory buying behavior. These type of consumers seek information about product then make decision which cause less repeated purchase (Tucker, 1964).

This study found out that information has moderate impact on brand loyalty while interaction has week significance effect on brand loyalty. Community members interact with each other because they need information. Community members interact to learn about product, share experiences to influence others. Interaction is important only when it give some new knowledge or entertainment. Community members will remain in community when they get update about their brand which builds trust. Interaction builds the relationship between brand and customer when it gives value-in-exchange and value-in-use. If members in community do not get any valuable information so they will not participate in community. Information is the motive of community (Brodie et al., 2013). Another study shows different finding that interaction in online communities create loyalty among customers and it is motive of the community to increase the participation of consumers for ongoing purchases (Sicilia & Palazón, 2008).

To produce interesting and valuable content, along with social interaction, is reward for internet users (Jonna Holland & Baker, 2001). Brand loyalty is the complex phenomena that warrants a more multifaceted conceptualization than has been attempted previously (Dick & Basu, 1994). Rewards work differently on consumer purchasing behavior. If consumer is light buyer so rewards will not create impact on brand loyalty. They generally shift from firm to firm to get more rewards while rewards create positive impact on the moderate and heavy buyer loyalty. So, it shows that reward work according to customer usage level. To understand the reward impact on brand loyalty we have to first consider consumer idiosyncrasies (Liu, 2007). In online brand communities, those members who participate willingly in community after rewards their motivation to perform in community decreases and they will only participate when they see any reward. Reward also create short-term impact on consumers it cannot create long-term impact (Jang et al., 2008).

6. Conclusion & Future Recommendations

The results of this study show that information creates impact on brand loyalty. The other two characteristics (reward and interaction) create less impact on the brand loyalty. The study suggested that information can built trust. More update information available on websites help customers to make purchasing decision. However, the future research is recommended on the other characteristics of online brand community that can be influential on not only brand loyalty but on other marketing objectives as well.

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