

WHICH MATTERS MORE IN “DUAL IDENTITY” ONLINE BRAND
COMMUNITIES: BRAND vs COMMUNITY COMMITMENT?

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COMMUNITIES: BRAND vs COMMUNITY COMMITMENT?**

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

WHICH MATTERS MORE IN ‘DUAL IDENTITY ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES’: BRAND vs COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

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Thesis Abstract - Online Brand Community (OBC) has been a relatively novel and attractive phenomenon in marketing and in the academics thereof, due to its business implications. In this study we define a new type of online brand community: ‘dual identity’ OBC’s, and examined the attitudinal mechanism in these type of brand communities.

In the relational context of an OBC two objects of commitment, brand and community commitment play role in this interaction. This study investigates how the two commitments are generated with their unique antecedents and how they contribute to certain business outcomes, namely as future purchasing intention and community participation intention.

We used a mixed method design, explanatory sequential design as the research methodology of this study. In the quantitative part, we used Structural Equation Modeling technique to test our proposed model and the data (n=1256) were collected from the OBC of a retailing firm that operates country-wide in Turkey. Than in the qualitative part of the study we employed netnographic approach to analyze the community’s Facebook page, to have a deeper understanding of the nature of interaction within the community.

Results have shown that brand realm and community realm, though they show strong coherence within, operate relatively distinct both for their antecedents and outcomes. Especially in the outcomes side, brand commitment did not have a positive effect on the community participation intention and community commitment did not yield to re-purchase intention directly, rather it contributed to re-purchase intention through the mediation of brand commitment indirectly.

Keywords: Online Brand Community, Brand Commitment, Community Commitment

ÖZ

‘ÇİFT KİMLİKLİ SANAL MARKA TOPLULUKLARI’ NDA HANGİSİ DAHA ÖNEMLİDİR: MARKAYA BAĞLILIK YA DA TOPLULUĞA BAĞLILIK?

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Tez Özeti - Sanal Marka Toplulukları (SMT) görece yeni ve sunduğu ticari fırsatlardan ötürü pazarlama alanında dolayısıyla da akademi çevrelerinde çekici bir olgu olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışmada ‘Çift kimlikli SMT’ ismini verdiğimiz yeni bir SMT türü tanımlanmış ve bu yeni tür marka topluluğu içerisindeki tutumsal mekanizma anlanmaya çalışılmıştır.

Bir sanal marka topluluğunun ilişkisel bağlamında iki farklı bağlılık objesinin bu etkileşimde rol oynadığı görülmektedir: markaya bağlılık ve topluluğa bağlılık. Bu araştırma bu iki bağlılığın kendi özel öncülleri ile nasıl oluştuğunu ve nasıl bazı ticari çıktılara, yani ileri satın alma niyeti ve topluluğa aktif katılım niyetine yol açtığını araştırmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada karma araştırma yöntemlerinden Açıklayıcı sıralı dizayn yöntemi benimsenmiştir. Araştırmanın nicel kısmında önerilen hipotetik modelin test edilmesi için Yapısal Eşitlik Modellemesi yöntemi kullanılmış, ve bu amaçla Türkiye çapında faaliyet gösteren bir perakende firmasının sanal marka topluluğundan veri (n=1256) toplanmıştır. Çalışmanın nitel kısmında ise topluluk içi etkileşimin doğası hakkında daha derin bilgiye sahip olmak amacıyla netrografik yöntem kullanılmış ve topluluğun Facebook sayfası incelenmiştir.

Bulgular bize marka ve topluluk alanlarının, kendi içlerinde sıkı bir uyum göstermiş olsa da, öncül ve çıktı faktörleri açısından görece bağımsız işlediğini göstermektedir. Özellikle sonuçlar kısmında, marka bağlılığının topluluğa katılım niyeti üzerinde ve topluluğa bağlılığın da ileri satın alma üzerinde doğrudan pozitif bir etkisi istatistiki olarak bulunamamıştır, fakat topluluğa bağlılık markaya bağlılığın aracılığıyla dolaylı olarak ileri satın alma niyetine yol açmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Online Brand Community, Brand Commitment, Community Commitment



To My Family

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	4
ÖZ	5
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	7
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	8
LIST OF TABLES	10
LIST OF FIGURES	11
ABBREVIATIONS	12
CHAPTERS	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	2
1.3 Research Questions of the Study	4
1.4 Design of the Study	4
1.5 Thesis Outline.....	5
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	7
2.1 Social Commerce.....	7
2.2 Brand Community	19
2.3 Online Brand Community	21
2.3.1 ‘Dual Identity Online Brand Communities’	23
3. HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT	25
3.1 The Concept of Commitment	25
3.2 Previous studies in the literature.....	26
3.2.1 Brand Commitment Studies	27
3.2.2 Online Brand Community Commitment Studies	28
3.3 Drivers of Brand Commitment	29
3.3.1 Brand Trust.....	30
3.3.2 Brand Satisfaction	30
3.3.3 Self-Brand Congruity	31
3.4 Drivers of Online Brand Community Commitment	31
3.4.1 Community Identification	32
3.4.2 Community Value	33

3.4.3	Benevolence	33
3.5	Outcomes of Commitments	33
4.	METHODOLOGY and MAIN ANALYSIS	39
4.1	Research Design of the Study	39
4.2	Phase One: Quantitative Analysis	40
4.2.1	Instrument Development	40
4.2.2	Sampling Procedure	43
4.2.3	Data Collection Procedure	44
4.2.4	Demographics of Respondents	45
4.2.5	Data Analysis	47
4.2.6	Measurement Model	48
4.2.7	Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing	58
4.3	Phase Two: Qualitative Analysis	64
4.3.1	Rationale for the Qualitative Analysis	64
4.3.2	The Netnographic Approach	65
4.3.3	Data Analysis	66
4.3.4	Thematic Coding (Answers to Research Questions)	68
5.	DISCUSSION	71
5.1	Drivers of Brand Commitment	72
5.2	Drivers of Community Commitment	73
5.3	Outcomes of Commitments	74
6.	CONCLUSION	79
6.1	Summary of the Study	79
6.2	Contributions of the Study	81
6.2.1	Implications for Researchers	81
6.2.2	Implications for Managers	82
6.3	Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research	83
REFERENCES		85
APPENDICES		97
CIRRICULUM VITAE		103

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1 Definitions of Social Commerce.....	9
Table 2-2Summary of studied factors in SC	12
Table 2-3Full list of factors studied in SC	13
Table 3-1Papers that studied 'Brand Commitment' in their research model	28
Table 3-2Papers that studied 'OBC Commitment' in their research model.....	29
Table 3-3 Summary of Hypotheses	35
Table 3-4Operational definitions of the Constructs used in the Study	37
Table 4-1Scale Items of the Constructs in our Study	42
Table 4-2 Occupations of Respondents.....	45
Table 4-3Ages of Respondents	46
Table 4-4 Respondent's Location	47
Table 4-5Descriptive and Normality Test of items	48
Table 4-6 Mean Scores of the Constructs	49
Table 4-7Crombach's Alpha Measures of the Scale Items.....	51
Table 4-8Statistics of goodness of fit in structural equation modeling.....	54
Table 4-9Factor loadings in CFA.....	54
Table 4-10 AVE and CR Scores of Constructs	56
Table 4-11Item Correlation and SQRT AVE Comparison	57
Table 4-12 Common Method Bias Test	58
Table 4-13Hypothesis Test Results(*:<0.05, **:<0.001)	61
Table 4-14Proportion of variance explained by the model	62

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3-1The Proposed Research Model.....	36
Figure 4-1 Occupations of Respondents	45
Figure 4-2Frequencies of Age Groups	46
Figure 4-3 Mean Scores for the Constructs.....	50
Figure 4-4 CFA Test Graphical Output	52
Figure 4-5 CFA Test Graphical Output 2	53
Figure 4-6 The Structural Model.....	59
Figure 4-7 Path Analysis (*:<0.05, **:<0.001)	60
Figure 4-9 Community Commitment - Re-Purchase Intention Mediating Effect (**p<0.01).....	62

ABBREVIATIONS

OBC	Online Brand Community
SC	Social Commerce
SNS	Social networking sites
IS	Information Systems
IT	Information Technology
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
WOM	Word of Mouth
B2C	Business to Customer
C2B	Customer to Business
C2C	Customer to Customer
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
EFA	Explanatory Factor Analysis

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the dissertation and explains the research aim and objectives of the study. The chapter is organized as follows. Section 1.1 describes the background of the study, section 1.2 explains the research context and points to research gaps in the literature, section 1.3 introduces research questions of the study, section 1.4 provides the design of the study, and lastly section 1.5 gives the outline of the remaining chapters.

1.1 Background of the Study

The advent and widespread use of social media facilitated users' self-expression and information sharing. Among its many uses, one of the major use of social media is for commercial purposes, where users seek for and share product and brand related information which helps them in their consumption decisions. It is reported that more than 50% of social media users follow brands on social media and 20% of tweets mention brands in their contents (de Vries, Peluso, Romani, Leeflang, & Marcati, 2017).

The use of social media for commercial purposes has led to creation of a new concept: "social commerce" as a new form of electronic commerce operated through the digital medium. Social commerce is defined as a form of internet-based social media that allows people to actively participate in the marketing and selling of products and services in online marketplaces and communities (T. Liang & Turban, 2011). Therefore the concept of social commerce comprises three attributes: social media technologies, community interactions and commercial activities. Therefore social commerce can be observed through three ways: adding commercial features to social networking sites, adding social features to e-commerce sites and the use of social media by traditional businesses to communicate and co-create value with their customers (T.-P. . Liang, Ho, Li, & Turban, 2011).

In social media platforms people form online communities based on the shared consumption interests, mostly in the form of same brand ownership. One of the major type of online communities that built on branded contents is online brand community (OBC). Online brand community refers to online social platforms gathered upon a brand ownership through which customers get information and interact with both the brand owner and other customers (Časas, Palaima, & Mironidze, 2016).

Online brand communities have become the common practice and the main channel of communication between firms and customers and among the customers as well (Verhagen, Swen, Feldberg, & Merikivi, 2015). It is reported in 2012 that 50 of top 100 global brands utilize virtual brand communities as a mean to communicate with

customer (Wirtz et al., 2013). Therefore the field of OBC has been an attractive topic for the academic circles and the business managers as well.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

OBC have been an attractive concept for managers, especially the marketing managers due to its business implications. Firms can utilize OBC as a strategic marketing tool through which they can interact with customers, retain loyal customers, understand customer needs and get valuable feedbacks about the company's products and services (C. Hsu, Chiang, & Huang, 2012; Y.-F. Kuo & Hou, 2017). OBC effects indeed are greater than it is marketing gains, it provides firm-level benefits such that it enforces firms to regard OBC strategy a business-wide strategy rather than the marketing alone (S. Fournier & Lee, 2009).

There are various categorizations of OBCs in the literature, however to the best of our knowledge we could not encounter the classification that is characterized and investigated in this study. Brand communities by definition are mostly built upon a shared brand affiliation, like the most popular example of 'Harley Owners Group' pertaining to Harley-Davidson Company. However there are some brand communities that their names do not directly mention the brand name rather they stand for a common value free from the brand itself. For instance 'Being Girl' is an online brand community, aimed at uniting girls on adolescence experiences. The community is created and organized by Procter & Gamble. It is obvious that being girl is a separate uniting experience than the brand P&G itself and there are no direct semantic connection between the two. However the community is still categorized as a brand community since it is an organization of 'admirers of the brand' (Muniz, Jr. and O'Guinn, 2001). In our study also, we examined an OBC which is built upon a shared value as its name suggest, i.e. being volunteers for a better future, while at the same time it is created and operated by a retailing firm and brand is the necessary linking value behind the apparent uniting value.

As it is so for any opportunity, OBC's are not free from challenges; creating and managing an OBC and realizing expected business outcomes are not found to be effortless. Firstly in the online space especially for the social medium, it is hard to attract and retain people's attention where subscription as well as leaving out are just matters of few clicks. Additionally attracting only passive visitors, called as "lurkers" is not found to be enough, as OBC's survival is firmly dependent on its members' active participation and continuous knowledge contribution (Hashim & Tan, 2015; Pournaris & Lee, 2016; Wiertz & De Ruyter, 2007). Therefore, gaining commitment of the members/visitors appears to be a vital aim in OBC management.

Similar to OBC, brand itself also need to build long-term relationships with its customers to maintain a decent market position. Relationship marketing paradigm suggests that in the competitive environment of businesses, companies should form committed relationships with their customers to ensure satisfactory sale figures in future (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). According to a Forbes report a 5 percent increase in customer retention would lead to 75 percent increase in the company's profitability, whereas attracting new customer is five time costly than keeping existing customers (W. He, Tian, & Wang, 2019). Therefore commitment as an attitudinal factor appears

to have a critical role in attaining main business objectives both for the firm and the community as well.

Commitment is defined as the desire of individuals to pursue their relationship with a partner (Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman, 1993) and this partner can be an individual, an organization and a community as well (Raïes, Mühlbacher, & Gavard-Perret, 2015). Within the relational context of an online brand community, two objects of commitment, both can result from and be result of this community interaction: commitment to the focal brand and commitment to the brand community itself. How these commitments are generated, how they interact with each other and how they lead to desired business outcomes require empirical investigation. This study will examine the unique antecedents of each commitments and their individual and collective effects on the success of OBC. Success of OBC is operationalized in this study by two business objectives; by members' future purchasing intentions and their intention to actively participate in the OBC. While the former is the ultimate aim of any business initiatives, the latter is regarded as the main precursor for success and even survival of an OBC.

A significant number of papers in the brand community field studied the concept of commitment in their analysis, either brand commitment or community commitment and hardly the both. Community commitment was mostly used as an antecedent factor for certain business goals, e.g. brand loyalty (Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim, 2008; Y.-F. Kuo & Hou, 2017), purchase behavior (Časas et al., 2016) and promoting the brand (Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2013) and also for brand commitment (C. Cheung, Lee, & Zheng, 2012; J. W. Kim, Choi, Qualls, & Han, 2008). Brand commitment on the other hand was studied mostly either as an outcome variable (J. Kang, Tang, & Fiore, 2014; Zhou, Zhang, Su, & Zhou, 2012) or as a mediator variable (Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008; Kamboj & Rahman, 2016) and hardly as an independent variable (Wiertz & De Ruyter, 2007). There are few studies (Wiertz & De Ruyter, 2007) investigate the two commitments at the same level and examine their dyadic effect on the business outcomes. Further literature lacks studies which focus on how the two commitments are generated separately with their unique antecedents and examine the roles of these commitments in reaching out the desired business outcomes, despite the fact that commitment is regarded as an intervening factor, mediating between certain antecedent factors and behavioral outcomes (J. W. Kim et al., 2008). Studying the two commitments and their dyadic effects on the certain business outcomes is valuable especially for the OBCs that are not directly linked to the brand name rather gathered upon a common interest or a shared value, as in our case.

Additionally there is a dearth of study in the literature that base their analysis on the retailing sector (Kamboj & Rahman, 2017). This study therefore aims to fulfill these research gaps by examining the two objects of commitment with their causes and effects all in a single framework. The ultimate aim from this analysis is to provide insight for managers which would help them in deciding on the allocation of company resources between the brand building and brand community building efforts. In other words findings of the study would shed light on the interrelations between the brand equity and the community equity for acquiring business outcomes from community initiative investment.

1.3 Research Questions of the Study

Based on the discussions and research interests mentioned in the previous section we define the research questions of the study as:

1. In the relational context of an OBC, particularly ones having ‘dual identity’, how the two objects of commitment (commitment to the brand and commitment to the community) are generated and
2. How the two commitments contribute to each other and lead to certain business outcomes, namely customers’ re-purchase intention and community participation intention?

Studying the community commitment and the brand commitment separately is especially valuable when the context of the brand and the community of this study are taken into consideration. The online brand community that pertains to a country-wide retailing firm operates in Turkey. What is special in for our context is that the online brand community is not build directly on the brand name, rather it is built upon a shared value while demonstrating strong relevance with the company.

We can categorize the OBC into two groups based on the stated linking value of communities: first one is the ones that build the community directly on the shared brand ownership, Harley Owners Group as the best example. The second type is the ones that does not directly stresses the brand name rather it gathers people on a distinct shared value, e.g. Procter&Gamble’s community “BeingGirl”. To the best of our knowledge this is a new distinction in the literature and we called these type of communities as ‘dual identity OBC’: Therefore studying the two objects of commitment within this new context would be a valid research agenda.

1.4 Design of the Study

The study is conducted as follows. Firstly to have a general understanding of the phenomenon we started to investigate the literature related with social commerce field. From these readings we prepared a systematic literature review article which analyzes the social commerce field in terms of social commerce activities, theories and factors studied in the literature. From the diverse social commerce activities we focused on the ‘online brand communities’ field as a major channel of social commerce. We made an extensive literature search and observed the context of OBCs in Turkey and from that search we built our hypothesis to understand how two commitments for each of the entity exist in the OBC context. A country-wide retail firm cooperated with us to test our hypothesis through their online platform by asking its members to response our questionnaire. The responses of the OBC members were analyzed and based on that data our hypotheses were tested with structured equation modeling techniques.

In the second phase of the study, to have more insights about the focal online brand community and to have a deeper understanding of the findings from the quantitative analyzes, we investigated the community with a qualitative approach. We employed Netrography approach, which applies cultural ethnography method on the communities operates in the online medium. The method included non-participant observation of the focal community, by investigating members’ behaviors within the cultural context. Than we synthesize the findings from the two phases of research,

quantitative and qualitative to reach our concluding remarks about the relational context of the focal online brand community.

1.5 Thesis Outline

The following chapters are organized as follows: Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical background of the subject matter of the study by pointing out the related studies in the relevant literature. Chapter 3 describes the reasoning behind our hypothesis development together with the operational definitions of the constructs used in this study. Chapter 4 clarifies the research method employed in this study together with main data analysis on the data and results of the analysis. Chapter 5 covers discussions about our findings by comparing them with relevant studies in the literature. Chapter 6 provides our concluding remarks about the study by pointing out implications of our findings both for academics and practitioners as well and the chapter ends with limitations of the study and suggestions for future works.





CHAPTER 2.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section the theoretical background of the study is presented by referring to the relevant literature. The concept of Online Brand Community is a multi-faceted phenomenon and thus it has roots in diverse disciplines including sociology, consumer behavior, marketing and information systems. Therefore in order to build a coherent theoretical base we made readings from related disciplines through the perspective of OBC and presented our findings in this section.

We organize the literature review based on the conceptual development of OBC field. Understanding the OBC requires to study the concept of ‘social commerce’ since OBC phenomenon can be regarded as a sub-category of ‘social commerce’ and the two are fed from the same source of transformation in social, technological and marketing practices. Therefore we start with social commerce phenomenon in the literature search. From that on we will present the online brand community concept in the logical sequence of community, brand community and lastly the online brand community itself.

2.1 Social Commerce

Social commerce is a relatively new phenomenon in the business domain however its development can be traced with development in information and communication technologies (ICT) which is the subject matter of information systems field. Information systems studies deal with the four main dimensions of a phenomenon: technology, organization, management and people; therefore understanding the social commerce also requires insights from these four domains. Therefore an eligible comprehension of the social commerce requires seeking its development in alignment with the evolution of the information technologies.

The invention of internet affected the way people learn, communicate and conduct commercial activities. People gained access to information from everywhere. Internet has brought dramatic changes for businesses and it transformed all value chain activities especially the distribution, marketing and sale channels (Porter, 2001). Particularly the invention of e-commerce revolutionized commercial transactions that customers had access to full market information and could make purchasing decision regardless of the geographic boundaries which had been a binding factor in the pre-internet period. It had also fundamental changes in the industry structures by enabling direct contact between producers and customers which eventually removed the intermediaries from the business model.

However in the early phase of the internet, namely in the Web 1.0 era the interaction between the site owner and the visitors was unidirectional, and the technology did not allow for customers' collaboration (Martínez-López, Anaya-Sánchez, Aguilar-Illescas, & Molinillo, 2016). The content was generated only by the vendor and users did not have a voice in the platform. From the e-commerce perspective this lead to trust problem and it raised concerns about the credibility of the website owner (N. Hajli & Sims, 2015; Lu, Fan, & Zhou, 2016). For the consumers the only information about the products was the ones that are provided by the vendor in their website.

With the advent of Web 2.0 technology websites become interactive and enabled the users' collaboration through. It allowed for the creation of social media sites where users generate the content and organize based on their personal interests. The interactivity of e-commerce sites together with the use of social networking sites for commercial purposes has led to the birth of the concept of social commerce (Lin, Li, & Wang, 2015).

Definitions of Social Commerce

There are multiple definitions of social commerce in the literature each focuses on different aspects of the term. It is expected to have such variety of definitions since social commerce is a multi-faceted term and a multi-paradigm approach should be taken to understand where it stands in both conceptual and practical terms (Williams, 2014).

Stephen and Toubia (2010) defines SC as a form of Internet-based social media that allows people to actively participate in the marketing and selling of products and services in online marketplaces and communities. Yadav et al. (2013) defines social commerce as “exchange-related activities that occur in, or are influenced by, an individual's social network in computer-mediated social environments, where the activities correspond to the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of a focal exchange”. These two definitions stress the centrality of social media applications as the main feature of social commerce.

Wang and Zhang (2011) defined the social commerce as a new wave of e-commerce in which traditional e-commerce is mediated by social media and social networking services in order to promote online transactions and shopping-related information exchanges. Similar to this definition Liang et al.(2011), described the SC with including commercial features to social networking services and adding social networking capabilities to e-commerce sites. These definitions place the SC as a new an interactive form of e-commerce.

We list here some of the definitions from the literature in order to point out various aspects of the term and show its multi-faceted nature.

Table 2-1 Definitions of Social Commerce

(Yadav et al., 2013)	Social commerce refers to exchange-related activities that occur in, or are influenced by, an individual's social network in computer-mediated social environments, where the activities correspond to the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of a focal exchange.
(Stephen & Toubia, 2010)	SC is a form of Internet-based social media that allows people to actively participate in the marketing and selling of products and services in online marketplaces and communities.
(H. Zhang, Lu, Gupta, & Zhao, 2014)	Social commerce refers to the use of social media for commercial transactions and activities that are driven primarily by social interactions and user contributions
(Wu, Shen, & Chang, 2015)	Social commerce is an online medium which combines Web 2.0 technologies and the psychology of social shopping within a virtual community
(Gonçalves Curty & Zhang, 2013)	Social commerce is a new wave of e-commerce in which traditional e-commerce is mediated by social media and social net-working services in order to promote online transactions and shopping-related information exchanges
(C. Wang & Zhang, 2011)	SC is a form of commerce that is mediated by social media and is converging both online and offline environments.
(T. Liang & Turban, 2011)	Social commerce involves using Web 2.0 social media technologies to support online interactions and user contributions to assist in the acquisition of products and services.
(Wu et al., 2015)	Social commerce is an online medium which combines Web 2.0 technologies and the psychology of social shopping within a virtual community.

Traditionally shopping in its nature used to be a social activity and occurred through social interactions. Through a long-lasting committed relationship we knew the greengrocer of our street, we asked our friends opinions about our purchases etc. Social commerce brings back the social nature of the commercial transactions to the e-commerce environment, with the functions like ratings, opinions, wish lists, group buying etc. In this vein C. Wang & Zhang (2011) defined the social commerce as the convergence between online and offline environments.

Significance of Social Commerce for Business

“We lived on farms, then we lived in cities, and now we’re going to live on the Internet!” (Sean Parker in the Film ‘The Social Network’, 2010). People spend more than one third of waking hours in social media (Mohammad Reza Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2016). It is hard to capture all the effects of social media in our daily lives, since these effects accrued through multiple dimensions and felt in every aspect of life, like education, social relations, and economic activities. One of its major effects, which is the subject matter of this study is its effect on our habits in commercial activities.

According to a study 76% of people trust their friend’s product recommendations while only 15% of people trust traditional advertisements (Salvatori & Marcantoni,

2015). Therefore social commerce provides a more effective way of gaining customers than the traditional advertisement does. Social interactions within the online medium and ability of users to generate content lead to better informed decision for the customers, which eventually resulted in the prominence of effective word-of-mouth marketing strategies (Ng, 2013).

Social commerce provides ample opportunities for companies especially for the marketing specialists. Understanding peoples' motivations in their purchasing decisions and making the customer a brand advocate in their social circle are among the main motives for firms to engage in social commerce (T. Hu, Zhang, & Dai, 2016). One McKinsey report reveals that 70% of companies utilize social technology and 90% of them gain benefits (Chui & Manyika, 2012). Firms also can retain their loyal customers by providing them a channel to socialize and raise their opinions about company's performance. Without social commerce maintaining a one-to-one relationship with the customer in the long run is costly and not yield to economic benefits as it is accrued in social commerce (M R Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014).

The benefits of social commerce are not restricted to marketing domain only, customer can 'co-create value' through their ability to generate content in social media and bring valuable insights for business managers in terms of their product design and distribution channels. Therefore they can take part in the product development, product design and supply chain and many other business areas by bringing innovative ideas, and valuable feedbacks about the firms' operations (Busalim & Hussin, 2016).

Theories Employed in Social Commerce Research

Social commerce research had a broad range of topics related with technical, managerial, organizational and behavioral dimensions. Within the restriction of our research context we focused on the managerial and behavioral dimensions to understand the motivations of users in participating in SC and effective managerial practices to drive decent business value from SC.

To understand users motivations in social commerce and the social and psychological effects of contextual factors various theories were employed and empirical studies were conducted under the light of those theories.

In their systematic literature review Altınışik and Özkan Yıldırım (2017) organized the theories in the literature into two categories: the social theories which are aimed to explain the social nature of the SC environment and secondly the 'base theories' that explain the context apart from the social impact. The latter ones are theories that shed light upon either the cognitive/psychological states of the social commerce users –e.g. theory of reasoned action, theory of planned behavior or their attitude toward the use of technology - e.g. technology acceptance model- or their use of media–e.g. uses and gratifications theory.

In the literature review study, the mostly used social theories appeared as: social support theory, social presence theory and trust transfer theory. The choice of these

theories indicates that researchers examined the social input present in SC environment which were lacking in the e-commerce environment at its early stages. Social support theory and social presence theory suggest that social commerce facilitates and also make use of the feeling of being cared of and sense of presence of others within the online context (J. B. Kim, 2015; T.-P. . Liang et al., 2011). Trust transfer theory states that the object of trust can be transformed from the community, which occurs naturally, to the site owner, which may end up with purchase decision or raise an affiliation for the company (J. Chen, Shen, & Chen, 2014). This theory also indicates that firms benefit from the social climate of the SC environment which reduces the perceptive ambiguity of context and eliminate trustworthiness concerns for the company.

After the three mostly used theories, papers in the SC field utilized relationship quality theory, commitment-trust theory, social exchange theory, social capital theory in explaining customer participation and purchase decision in the SC environment (Altınışık & Özkan Yıldırım, 2017). These theories also indicate that social input within the SC environment enhances commercial activities for the users and leads to better informed decisions with less uncertainty in their purchasing decisions (K. Z. Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016).

Activities & Applications of Social Commerce

Having stated definitions and theories for the SC domain, it is necessary to indicate what the social commerce alludes to in practical terms. Based on the literature review Altınışık & Özkan Yıldırım (2017) found out that variety in SC definitions showed itself in the understanding of social commerce activities as well.

In the literature there is a general term of social commerce sites, which most of the studies based their analyzes on. From social commerce sites majority of the papers understood Amazon like interactive, social e-commerce platforms where users have personal accounts and can form communities, product groups, make reviews and ratings for products and share their wish lists through the SC platform. Some examples for this kind of SC sites are douban.com, taobao.com, meilishuo.com from China andgroupon.com, kaboodle.com, Amazon from US. Whereas some of the papers specifically meant daily deal sites and group buying sites from the SC sites. The papers in this category studied the effects of social impact on purchase decision and further participation decision within the focal community.

The second group of paper meant the use of social networking sites e.g. Facebook in commercial activities, like brand followers, online brand communities, groups for sharing consumption experiences. This group also studied the effect of social environment under the light of certain social theories and investigated the purchasing and group participation behavior, mostly the sharing and requesting commercial information as the outcome variables.

We can conclude that there is not a consensus in the literature for social commerce in terms of its coverage of activities. However we can assert that it encompasses all collaborative actions, from the product ratings and comments regarding the performance of the product to the brand communities organized toward commercial

purposes. We can deduce from the readings that SC has three major attributes: social media technologies, community interactions, and commercial activities (T. Liang & Turban, 2011).

Factors Studied in Social Commerce Literature

The diversity of the SC definitions and employed theories within the social commerce field has shown itself in the conceptual factors studied in the literature. We found out from the literature review that there are 108 distinct factors studied in the literature (Altınışik & Özkan Yıldırım, 2017). To have a more insight about these factors we categorize those under four categories.

The first group is the factors that are related with the social impact within the SC environment, e.g. social presence, relationship quality, social support, perceived interactivity, informational support, familiarity/similarity. The second group is personal factors, which are related with human cognitions, motivations, psychology, preferences etc.; e.g. trust towards website, perceived enjoyment, perceived usefulness, satisfaction, trust towards members, and trust towards community. The third group is the website or company related factors; e.g. perceived privacy, service quality, perceived security, system quality, reliability. The last group is the ambient and situational factors that exist in the online context: information quality, number of reviews, information value, positive valence of WOM, negative valence of WOM.

Table 2-2Summary of studied factors in SC

Group of Factors	# of factors	Total Frequency
Personal Factors	43	88
Social Factors	22	61
Website/Company Related	26	46
Ambient Factors	17	23

The Table 2-2 above gives the summary of the factors studied in the SC literature. The figures indicate that personal factors were the mostly utilized factors in the literature. This is an expected figure since the papers selected for the review focuses primarily on consumers' adoption of SC. However social factors were used more in per term basis. Table 2-3 gives the full list of papers and theories and factors employed in those papers within the SC domain.

Table 2-3 Full list of factors studied in SC

Reference	Theory/Model/Paradigm	Independent Factors	Mediating Factors	Moderating/Control Factors	Outcome Measure
(Hew, Lee, Ooi, & Lin, 2016)	Expectation confirmation model	Concern for social media information privacy (CFSMIP), perceived usefulness, confirmation	Intention to use mobile SC, Satisfaction		Brand loyalty
(Lu, Fan, et al., 2016)	Social presence theory	Social presence (social presence of web, perception of others, social presence of interaction with sellers)	Trust (Integrity, benevolence, competence)	Comments, perceived price fairness, trust disposition	Purchase intention
(Yichuan Wang & Yu, 2015)	Word of Mouth Communication, observational learning	Positive valence of WOM, negative valence of WOM, WOM content, observing consumer purchase			Intention to purchase, actual purchase and post purchase behavior
(J. Chen et al., 2014)	Commitment-trust theory, trust transfer theory	trust towards members, trust toward community, community commitment			social shopping intention, social sharing intention
(J. Chen & Shen, 2015)	Commitment-trust theory, trust transfer theory, social support theory	emotional support, informational support lead to trust towards members, trust toward community and community commitment			social shopping intention, social sharing intention
(Crossler, 2014)	Uses and Gratifications theory, trust theory	Trust: wom quality, perceived source competency, perceived security, perceived privacy; Uses and gratifications: social presence, familiarity, perceived enjoyment, cool&new trend, information quality; Subjective norm	Trust		Behavioral intention to engage in SC
(K. Lee & Garrison, 2013)	TAM	Collectivism (preference, reliance, concern, norm acceptance, goal priority)		Price consciousness	Intention toward SC, Actual use of SC
(Alshibly, 2014)	Not specified	(Online trust, online service quality) on Perceived value (information value, social value)			Customer satisfaction
(Hwang, Lee, & Kim, 2013)		Trust, Social Presence, and Information Asymmetry	Uncertainty	Mobility, SNS WOM	Purchase intention

(Libo Liu, Cheung, & Lee, 2016)	Social capital theory	Individual motivations, structural capital(out-degrees post, in-degrees feedback), cognitive capital(cust's tenure, cust's expertise), relational capital(reciprocity)			Information sharing behavior
(S. Kim & Park, 2013)	Theory of Reasoned Action	SC Characteristics: Reputation, size, information quality, transaction safety, communication, economic feasibility, and word-of-mouth (WOM) referrals	Trust		Purchase intention, WOM intention
(Xiang, Zheng, Lee, & Zhao, 2016)	Parasocial interaction theory	Information fit to task, visual appeal; similarity, expertise, likeability	Parasocial interaction, perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment		Urge to buy impulsively, impulsive buying tendency
(Venable, Pries-Heje, Bunker, & Russo, 2016)	Social exchange theory, motivation theory	Utilitarian motivation (Anticipated Extrinsic Rewards, Anticipated Reciprocal Relationships); Hedonic motivation (Enjoyment in helping others); Social Motivation (Popularity, Reputation)		Sellers vs Buyers	Intention to share information
(S.-B. Kim, Sun, & Kim, 2013)	Not specified	Hedonic value, utilitarian value, social value	Attitude toward SC usage	Low vs High technology experience	Intention to use SC
(J. B. Kim, 2015)	S-O-R Theory, Presence theory	Stimulus(Interactivity, vividness)	Organism: Presence (Social presence, telepresence), Cognition(Usefulness), Affect(Enjoyment)		Participation intention
(Shim & Altmann, 2016)	Theory of Planned Behavior, S-O-R	Stimuli: Price, Product, Promotion, Subjective norm, perceived behavioral control	Attitude toward SC usage		Urge to buy impulsively

(T. Hu et al., 2016)	Not specified	Technology Quality (Attractiveness, Playfulness, reliability, accessibility, flexibility); Service Quality (Value, delivery, content, convenience)	Experience Quality (Enjoyment, immersion, satisfaction)		Relationship quality (Commitment, loyalty, WOM int., trust)
(X. Yang & Li, 2014)	Uses and Gratifications theory	Relaxing entertainment, information seeking, expressive information sharing, cool and new trends, social interaction, passing time, escape		Gender	Social commerce intention
(Ju & Ahn, 2016)	S-O-R Theory	Stimuli: Social Presence, Music Tempo	Organism: Pleasure, Arousal	Scarcity	Impulse purchasing
(Lu, Zeng, & Fan, 2016)	Not specified	Perceived effectiveness of institutional structures (perceived effectiveness of: feedback mechanisms, escrow services, information security, dispute resolution); Perceived social presence (Perceived social presence of others, PSP of marketplace)	Trust in Marketplace	Trust disposition, familiarity	Transaction intention
(Lal, 2017)	Social network theory, trust transfer theory, task-technology fit theory	Social factors (information support, community commitment); Trust (trust towards community, trust toward members); Website quality (Ease of navigation, service quality)			Social commerce intention
(Hsiao, Lin, Wang, Lu, & Yu, 2010)	Not specified	perceived ability, perceived benevolence/integrity, critical mass; perceived web reputation, web quality, institution assurance	Trust in product recommendation, trust in a website		Purchase intention (for the product and from the website)
(I. Lee, Yoo, Choi, & Shon, 2015)	Not specified	<i>Length of Promotion, Number of Reviews, Existence of Facebook page</i>			Actual coupon sales
(C. L. Hsu, Chen, Kikuchi, & Machida, 2016)	Not specified	Website quality (Perceived information quality, system quality, service quality); Relationship quality (trust, commitment, customer satisfaction)		Country, gender	Purchase intention
(K. Yang, Li, Kim, & Kim, 2015)	Resource Exchange Theory	visual aesthetics, navigation, user friendliness, privacy/security, entertainment, and community drivenness	Participation		eWOM, Co-shopping behavior

(X. Hu, Huang, Zhong, Davison, & Zhao, 2016)	S-O-R Theory, socio-technical theory	Social factors(similarity, expertise, benevolence); technology factors (support for recommendation, support for social interactions)	Organism: perceived utilitarian value, perceived social value	Purchase intention
(Shin, 2013)	TAM/TPB	Perceived Usefulness, perceived enjoyment, perceived trust, perceived social support	Attitude, intention	Purchase behavior
(J. Shen, 2012)	TAM, Social comparison theory, social presence theory	PEOU, Tendency to Social Comparison Online, Social Presence	Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Enjoyment	Behavioral intention to use social shopping site
(Y. R. Kang & Park, 2009)	TAM	Motivations (social, economic, hedonic, convenience); Acceptance factors (PU, PEOU, Perceived Enjoyment)		Intention to use SC
(C. M. K. Cheung, Xiao, & Liu, 2014)	Information signalling theory, dual-process theory	Peer Consumer Purchase, Peer Consumer Review	Consumer engagement, consumer expertise	Consumer purchase decision
(J.-Y. M. Kang, Johnson, & Wu, 2014)	Not specified	Consumer style inventory (price consciousness, brand consciousness etc.)	Opinion seeking using electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in social networking sites (SNSs), attitudes toward online social shopping using SNSs	Intention to social shop using SNS
(H. Zhang et al., 2014)	SOR (Stimuli-Organism-Response)	Stimuli (technological features): perceived interactivity, perceived personalization and perceived sociability	Organism (cust's virtual experiences): social support, social presence and flow	Response: Participation intention (intention to request and share commercial information)
(N. Hajli & Sims, 2015)	Social support theory	social support (emotional, informational), social commerce constructs		Social commerce intention (seek for friends' recommendation, provide experiences and recommendations etc)
(M. N. Hajli, 2014)	Social support theory	Social support, relationship quality		social commerce intention

(Y Wang & Hajli, 2014)	Social Support theory, relationship quality theory	Social support, relationship quality and social commerce constructs		Privacy concerns	Intention to co-creation in branding
(J. V. Chen, Su, & Widjaja, 2016)	Latent State-trait theory	State: Textual information quality (accuracy, relevance.), number of 'likes'		Trait: Consumers' impulsiveness	Intention to buy impulsively
(T. Wang, Yeh, & Yen, 2015)	Social identity theory	Customer Identification, customer loyalty, usage behavior		Computer skill, age	Intention to purchase, purchase behavior
(Chow & Shi, 2014)	Trust transfer theory	Trust for company, social commerce trust (Information based, identification based)		Prior experience	eWOM intention
(K. Z. K. Zhang, Benyoucef, & Zhao, 2016)	Relationship quality perspective	Self-congruance, social norms, information quality, interactivity	Relationship Quality (Trust, commitment, satisfaction)		Brand loyalty
(Sharma & Crossler, 2014)	Communication privacy management theory	Perceived fairness in Exchange(Perceived surveillance, p. linkage, p. Relevance); perceived ownership, perceived benefit	Perceived Privacy		Behavioral intention to voluntarily disclose information
(Sun, Wei, Fan, Lu, & Gupta, 2016)	Uses and Gratifications theory	Formative construct: Social Climate of friendship group (social support, social interaction, social trust)	Social value, hedonic value, self-discovery value, informational value		Member intention, purchase cost, purchase frequency
(Wu et al., 2015)	Not specified	Security, reliability, trust and 3 others			Electronic service quality of social activities
(Ng, 2013)	Trust transfer theory	Closeness, familiarity	Trust in social network community	Culture (Individualism, uncertainty avoidance)	Intention to purchase
(Qin & Kong, 2015)	Not specified	perceived trustworthiness of SC site in protecting users' privacy, perceived trustworthiness of other users' competence	Perceived helpfulness		Intention to seek shopping recommendations
(T.-P. . Liang et al., 2011)	Social support theory	social support (emotional, informational), web-site quality (system quality, service quality)	Relationship Quality (Trust, commitment, satisfaction)		Social commerce intention, continuance intention

(N. Hajli, Sims, Zadeh, & Richard, 2016)	Not specified	Trust for the SNS (Facebook)	Familiarity, Social presence, Social commerce information seeking	Purchase intention
(M. Hajli, 2012)	TAM	Recommendations & referrals, forums & communities, ratings & reviews, perceived usefulness	Trust	Intention to buy

2.2 Brand Community

Brand community is a relatively novel concept in business domain and it has roots in sociology, consumer behavior and marketing disciplines. Additionally the concept has connotations with the notions of consumer culture, modern marketing and mass media (Muniz, Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). Therefore a decent understanding of the term requires to reach their conceptual roots in the relevant domains. For this reason we start with the community construct by touching upon its transformation within the modern times from the sociological and marketing perspective.

The Concept of Community

Community is a central construct in social sciences, and its intellectual history can be traced back to ancient times. Communal life has been an essential and natural need of human beings. From the ancient times human beings needed the help of similar others to obtain the very basics of life requirements, food, shelter, clothes and be saved from enemies those that may harm them (Haldun, 2012). Moreover our need for the communal life cannot be restricted to physical needs; we have social and psychological motives that require the feeling of a membership to a community. For instance Cüceloğlu (2016) states that the feeling of belonging is among the very essential needs mankind have which can be observed even in the infant babies.

Community is thought to be instrumental for the well-being of mankind through which they share their material, emotional and cognitive resources and among them the cognitive one comes forward nearly for all communities (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). People find a meaning both for their selves and the environment through these interactions and it leads to a mental comfort to be part of such a communal understanding.

People do not identify themselves in isolation with the society. The answers to questions for self-conception like “who am I” and “who I think am I” are reciprocally shaped by conception of our ‘social self’ which regards the questions as ‘who we are told to be’, and ‘how we wish to be perceived’ (Floridi, 2014). Similarly social identity theory states identity is shaped not only by personal preferences and capabilities, but also one’s perceived connections with a social group (Tajfel & Turner, 2019). People tend to categorize themselves with a social group based on certain characteristics e.g. lifestyle, beliefs, education, and through this categorization they constitute their identities while classifying people as in-groups and out-groups (Y.-F. Kuo & Hou, 2017)

Community is defined in the Marriam-Webster as unified body of individuals with common interest in a particular area or living in a larger society. That unification is based on a shared feeling of belonging mostly expressed as a shared identity in reaction to existing or imagined ‘others’. Drawing from the sociology literature Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) stated that there are three markers and components of community that constitute a community. First indicator is the consciousness of kind, referring to intrinsic connection that members feel towards each other and a collective sense of difference from non-members. The second marker is the presence

of shared rituals and traditions. Shared rituals and traditions are said to perpetuate the consciousness and culture of the community. They are means of blessing the existence of the community. The third marker of the community is a sense of moral responsibility, a sense of duty or obligation towards the community as a whole and to its members individually. This sense of obligation is activated when there is a threat to the community.

As Tönnies put forward (Tönnies, 1925) based on their nature social relations can be grouped under two category: *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, often translated as community and society. While the community is characterized with local, enduring, intimate, familial relationships, society is described with large-scale, impersonal, contractual, individualistic relations (Jang et al., 2008). There has been almost a consensus among the sociologist that the community has been melted away in modern times and transformed to a large extent into society. This transformation is said to be by-product of urbanization, mass media and market economy (Muniz, Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). Therefore there was a common discourse among the early sociologist that the modernity have annihilate the traditional communities.

In opposition to the discourse about the loss of community in modern times, some scholars argued that communities do exist within the contemporary societies yet in a different format. For instance Cova (1997) put forward that there are 'neo-tribes' of postmodern societies that are inherently unstable, effectual and they are held together through shared emotions, styles of life and consumption practices. This is the point where the idea of brand community can be positioned.

The idea of community mostly believed to be geographically bounded. Community was mostly understood with geographic co-presence of its members. However advances in transportation and communication technologies have widened our understanding of the boundaries of communities. Since the feeling of 'we-ness' and imaginary rival 'others' can be stimulated and disseminated across geographies, the community can also be liberated from territory as well. Media transcends geography, thus what the media offers as a new linking value for people also transcends geography (Muniz, Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001).

There are other approaches to the brand community as a novel form of traditional community as well. As cited by Jang et al. (2008) Gusfield distinguishes two types of communities: the traditional territorial or geographic communities (e.g. neighborhood, town) and relational community which is concerned with human relationships (e.g. fun clubs, hobby groups) (Gusfield, 1975). Brand communities also fall in the second group in Gusfield's distinction.

In the pre-modern period commodities were unmarked and they were bought only for their 'use values'. However modern marketing created brands as a symbolic value and positioned the goods as a mean of value expression of the self (G. Wang, 2002). Moreover brands stressed the 'linking value' of their products so that people not only express their self-identity through branded products they bought; they also define their collective identity by their consumption styles. Therefore conforming with the idea of neo-tribes in Cova's (1997) study, follower of a brand constitute new form of community which is liberated from geography. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) have

proven that those brand communities display the three markers of community. Brands can create consciousness of kind, a sense of 'we-ness' and hostility toward competitive brands (Y.-F. Kuo & Hou, 2017) which are the main indicators of existence of a community. Brand communities aim to bring back the sense of belonging which was lost during the shift from community to society (Wiertz & De Ruyter, 2007).

Brand communities have been an attractive phenomenon for managers due to its business implications. Relational marketing had been a dominant paradigm for the B2C relationships for decades. However maintaining a long term one-to-one relationship with customer is costly and thus not effective. Providing a social environment for the customer based upon same brand affiliation brings many benefits for the firm however through a more convenient way (M R Habibi et al., 2014). Among the many benefits customer loyalty (Jang et al., 2008; Luo, Zhang, & Liu, 2015) and oppositional brand loyalty (Y.-F. Kuo & Hou, 2014) comes first. Secondly the interaction between customers creates valuable information for the brands in terms of their products and services.

Moreover it is stated that brand community should not be considered only as a marketing initiative, it should rather be a corporate level strategy. Because what the brand community yields for the company is not restricted with increased sales, therefore be a matter of marketing department, rather it can transform all value creation activities especially production, product design and distribution channels by bringing valuable insights from the real product experiences of the customers (S. Fournier & Lee, 2009).

2.3 Online Brand Community

Though brand community activities were realized on the face-to-face basis and only organized through communication technologies, e.g. e-mails, in its early phases, the online interaction gradually replaced the off-line one. The advent of Web 2.0 and collaborative environment of the internet have paved way to a wide spread use of digital medium as a mean to organize brand communities. Building and organizing a community and through online spaces especially in the social media sites is much more convenient than it through face-to-face one (Časas et al., 2016). Therefore many firms were interested in building an online community on the basis of a common attachment to their brands.

In simplest terms, online brand community is a brand community which exists or is specifically located on the Internet (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017). An online brand community can be regarded as an extension of the physical one and a combination of brand community and electronic networks (Amine & Sitz, 2004). Even the early brand communities started in the offline mode and added the online presence at a later stage, e.g. Harley owners group (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017)

In online communities the interaction between the members is mostly through digital medium and hardly on the face-to-face basis, however they still share a group identity and consciousness of kind as the main markers of community (Muniz, Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). While the brand communities were described as the non-geographic

forms of traditional communities; online brand communities takes the geographic liberation further by eliminating the need for spatial proximity almost completely.

OBCs are defined basically as online social platforms that customers get information and interact with both the brand owner and other customers (Časas et al., 2016). In a broad definition it is “a self-selected, hierarchical and non-geographically bound group of consumers that share values, norms and social representations and recognize a strong feeling of membership with each other members and with the group as a whole on the basis of a common attachment to a particular brand” (Amine & Sitz, 2004). From the definitions one can infer that having the online feature does not violated the very nature of brand community, it is only a computer mediated version instead of its physical form.

There are multiple categorization of OBC in the literature. The mostly studied and apparent categorization is based on who initiates or hosts the community, whether the firm itself and the customers. Firm initiated companies are built mostly for informing customers about firm policies and receiving customers’ ideas and opinions about products and services and through which they maintain customer loyalty. Whereas consumer initiated communities are mostly built by enthusiastic customers who want to share and seek ideas about product uses and establish relationship with other similar consumers (Martínez-López et al., 2016). The second type since it is a voluntary attempt and a result of an affective bond with the brand it is stronger in maintaining customer engagement.

Business Implications of OBC

According to a Forbes report a 5 percent increase in customer retention can increase a company’s profitability by 75 percent, whereas attracting new customers is five times more expensive than keeping existing customers (W. He et al., 2019). And to retain customer loyalty in a highly competitive environment, where customers can access full market information, is getting harder than ever before. A wide variety of marketing policies were implemented to increase customer loyalty. Majority of these programs addressed the economic and functional benefits of the customer, e.g. discounts, coupons etc. However these programs does not satisfy the multifaceted nature of customer loyalty, therefore a more holistic approach should be taken to address variety of needs of customers (Hur et al., 2013).

Relationship marketing paradigm suggested to have a committed relationship with the customer to gain customer loyalty and secure future purchases. However as mentioned in the previous part, maintaining a one-to-one relationship with the customer in the long run is costly. However letting the customer to socialize within the OBC is much easier and yields more benefits than the mere B2C relationship (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012).

Social media allowed people to create content and express themselves in the digital medium. Therefore social media believed to have empowered people in the marketplace, that they are no longer consent with the one sided relationship with firms, as a mere receiver of goods and services, rather they tend to play an “active role” in B2C interactions (Peeroo, Samy, & Jones, 2017). OBC’s play a vital role in

this transformation and give the opportunity for customers to raise their voice and be part of brands' success. They suggest new products or contribute to product development by their valuable opinions. Moreover branding efforts can best be acknowledged through voluntary brand promotion of consumers, and customers are willing to be part of this initiative when they feel affiliation with the brand. In this way firms can drive long-standing loyalty and commitment of customers. OBCs are the most effective method for this purpose among other relational attempts (Časas et al., 2016). Empirical research has found out that customers who are involved in online brand communities tend to have a deeper and closer relationship with the brand than non-members (Y.-F. Kuo & Hou, 2017). Moreover members of a brand community often serve as brand evangelists and champion the brand by disseminating affirmative information about the brand, favoring the brand to others and cultivating the brand culture (Yeh & Choi, 2011).

The novel popular concept 'open innovation' as a business trend also reinforces the existence of OBCs. Because in an increasing fashion firms realize that the most challenging innovative ideas would come from the outside of the company. When the customers are included in brand success they would bring innovative ideas to the ways firm create value. Additionally contemporary thought about the firm and its interaction with its environment have come to a point where it is more responsive and even inclusive to its environment which also dictates the effective utilization of OBCs. Because OBCs are seemingly the best way to include an 'outsider' customer into value creation progress of firms.

Last but not least, marketers lack the analytic capability in understanding the diversity in consumers' behavior. They try to understand consumer preferences by categorizing them at best by their demographic attributes, e.g. age, income and gender. However in online brand communities consumers' interpersonal interactions around their brand experience provides more exploratory power in understanding how consumers spend their time and money than the traditional segmentation techniques (M R Habibi et al., 2014). Their intimate discussions about their brand experiences provide great insights for brand managers that could hardly be accessed through other conventional techniques. By accessing online brand communities, firms can acquire more concrete, multidimensional, and individual information from customers at little or no cost (C. Hsu et al., 2012).

For the reasons mentioned above, businesses have increasingly invested on building a functioning online brand community around their brand identity. In 2012 it is reported that 50% of top 100 global companies have established their own OBC (Wirtz et al., 2013). We could not found an up-to-date information for this trend however it is observed that almost all companies from diverse industries run OBCs at least by having a Facebook community page.

2.3.1 'Dual Identity Online Brand Communities'

In this section the concept of "dual identity brand community" will be discussed briefly. Questions as what is the main distinction between the dual identity brand community and other brand communities and whether this distinction is significant, and how this type of community can still be categorized as brand community would be investigated.

Community as its very essence should be built on a shared consciousness, a sense of “we-ness”, so that it perpetuates its existence on that shared feeling. Communities were thought to be instrumental for the well-being of its members through which they share their cognitive, emotional, material resources; among which the cognitive one, that is creation and negotiation of meaning come forward especially in the geography liberated communities (McAlexander et al., 2002). Therefore there should be a shared understanding among themselves to distinguish themselves from the imagined ‘others’.

Brand communities in this respect should be based on a uniting experience that the brand offers. The cohesion for the group can be accrued either through practical needs –e.g. communities of practice like SAP Discussion Groups- or social/psychological needs of potential members. In the latter the binding effect could be either the symbolic value of brand ownership, or what the product/services of the brand produces as a new meaning for ones’ self and his/her environment –e.g. a life style like Harley Owners Group associated with Harley motors. Therefore brand community should foster a sense of identity in its members that should be a by-product of relationship one engages with the brand itself and the product/services of that brand.

However there are some brand communities that at least their names does not have any direct connotations with the brand and its products. Like our case in this study, it is a grocery type retailing firm and its online brand community named as ‘volunteers for a better future’. It is obvious that the brand and the proposed binding value have no direct semantic adjacency in the mind, unless it is constituted by a systematic inculcation.

We can argue that there are degrees in the semantic proximity of the proposed binding value of the brand community and the brand’s or its product’s symbolic -or ‘real’, if possible- values; and all brand communities can be placed between the two ends of this scale. Firms wish to organize people around a binding value which indeed would be a desired outcome of their products’ usage, not necessarily an automatic outcome of product experience. For instance Red Bull organizes communities engaging in sports activities, however practicing sports is not a necessarily direct result of consuming the energy drink. Therefore in that sense we can propose that indeed almost all brand communities, unless it is for practical needs, are gathered on a distinct identity apart from the brand affiliation itself or the product experience; though they differ in the semantic closeness between the brand/product experience and the constituted binding value of the community. Therefore, indeed all brand communities can be regarded as having dual identity, while the extent to which the two identity, brand and the community value, are semantically linked in the minds may differ. However for some cases like ours, the glue that holds the community together is completely discrete from what the brand or its product connotes. Thus we found it scholarly reasonable to investigate how the attitudinal mechanisms function in these dual identity brand communities, how two commitments are generated and their effects on the business outcomes.

CHAPTER 3.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Having discussed the theoretical background about our research context in the previous part, in this section we introduce our theoretical research model by stating its hypotheses. The research aim of this study is to examine how the two objects of commitment, commitment to the community and commitment to the focal brand are generated, and how they contribute to certain business objectives. Therefore this section starts by introducing the concept of commitment since it is the central construct in our research question and upon which we built our research hypotheses to be tested. Then we will introduce the related works in the literature that we are inspired by and we developed our hypotheses in accordance with. After that we will describe our hypothesis in detail and lastly we will list the operational definitions of the constructs we used in the study.

3.1 The Concept of Commitment

Commitment is defined as the desire of individuals to pursue their relationship with a partner (Moorman et al., 1993), where the partner can be a person, an organization and a community as well. Commitment alludes to developing a stable relationship with partners, accepting short-term sacrifices in order to maintain the relationship (Hur et al., 2013). A committed relationship is accrued through an implicit reasoning that continuing a relationship worth more than ending it.

Commitment is described as an intervening process, mediating between certain antecedent factors and behavioral outcomes (J. W. Kim et al., 2008). It is regarded as an attitudinal factor leads to loyalty behaviors. Therefore having a committed relationship with customers has been an ultimate aim for marketers since it leads to brand preference over others. Commitment-trust theory states that relationship marketing paradigm requires to have committed relationship with customers to ensure customer loyalty in the highly competitive business environment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Based on the context and the nature of relationship there could be three forms of commitment: affective, calculative and normative commitment. Affective commitment arises when the partner has a positive regard, a liking and an enjoyment for the relationship. Calculative commitment occurs when partners desire to endure the relationship when they associate a cost to leaving out that relationship (Wiertz & De Ruyter, 2007). Normative commitment on the other hand arises from a feeling of moral obligation to remain in the relationship (Allen & Meyer, 1993). For our case, in OBC engagement affective commitment is the most appropriate form of

commitment since the relationship is voluntary in its nature and the cost associated with leaving out the community is negligibly small. Therefore we adopt the affective form of commitment as our operational definition of the term, as most of the studies in the field did so (Akrouf & Nagy, 2018).

Within the context of our study commitment is not only a required for B2C relationship, it is suggested for community participation as well. It is known that online environment is the most unstable environment and abundant as objects of interests. Therefore commitment appears to be a vital element for continuance of interaction. It is stated that earlier managerial focus were toward attracting more and more people to join these communities, the latest trend is to take OBC as a tool for creating and maintaining strong and lasting relationship between firms and customers (Pournaris & Lee, 2016).

3.2 Previous studies in the literature

This study intended to investigate drivers of commitment, both for community commitment and brand commitment separately in the OBC interaction environment. In the second phase the study examines the dyadic effect of two objects of commitment on the members' future purchase intention and their intention to participate in the community activities, which are the very essence of brand and OBC survival respectively.

Since they are the most relevant ones we will start with the studies that investigated the two commitments in their research model. Wiertz and De Ruyter (2007) examined both commitments together in their model. In the model they did not include the antecedent factors of commitments rather they used them as independent variables. They analyzed the effects of brand commitment, community commitment together with reciprocity as social capital constituents on knowledge contribution behavior in firm hosted commercial online communities.

Zhou et al. (2012) analyzed the effect of community interaction on brand relationship quality. They studied both of the commitments in their research model however community commitment was an independent variable and brand commitment was the outcome variable. Similarly Cheung et al. (2012) analyzed the effect of participation and promotion on online community commitment and its effect on brand commitment in their study.

As an attitudinal factor, similar to commitment, identification was also used in the literature which can be regarded as a parallel research query with our study. Ho (2015) investigated the dyadic effect of identification with company and identification with brand on certain citizenship behavior and which allude to repurchase intention and community participation intention, similar to our study.

Having mentioned the studies which have similar research direction with our study, that is studying both of the commitments in the model; we will now introduce the papers that specifically studied either the brand commitment or the online community commitment separately.

3.2.1 Brand Commitment Studies

Brand commitment is a major academic theme especially in the marketing literature. Under the relationship marketing paradigm, where the focus of marketing moving from “deals” to “relationships”, transactions are seen as a major constituent of an ongoing relationship (Hur et al., 2013). Therefore retaining the loyalty of the customer requires to establish a committed relationship with the consumers.

We list here the papers especially studied the brand commitment that are to some extent in relation with brand community phenomenon. Otherwise covering the whole body of literature of brand commitment as it is established in marketing literature would be beyond the limits and scope of our study.

Carlson et al. (2008) investigated the brand identification and community identification on the psychological sense of brand community and their collective effect on brand commitment. He tested brand preference, attending brand events, word-of-mouth promotion and celebrating the brand history as the outcomes of brand commitment.

Kamboj and Rahman (2016) analyzed the effect of customers’ participation in social media based brand communities on brand commitment and its effect of brand loyalty at the end. Similarly Kang et al. (2014) studied users’ participation in online brand communities on brand trust and brand commitment at the end.

In general we observed from the relevant literature that brand commitment was mostly used either as an outcome variable or the latest attitudinal factor just before certain business outcomes. Secondly commitment is regarded as a quality attribute in describing the strength of the relationship between brand and its customers. For instance social capital theory utilized the commitment as the relational capital constituent (Wiertz & De Ruyter, 2007). Lastly it is observed that brand commitment antecedents are the ones that elevate the relationship quality in B2C interaction, e.g. brand attachment, brand identification etc. Therefore we can drive that voluntary interaction together with customer engagement and affective attributes of B2C interaction lead to brand commitment and brand commitment contribute to loyal customer behavior as it is explained in the literature.

We list the studies that are investigating the concept of brand commitment in the relevant literature in the Table below. The first column in table presents the source of the respective study, second column indicates how the brand commitment was used in the research model, i.e. independent or dependent variable etc., third column lists the antecedents of brand commitment and the last column indicates the outcome variable if it is applicable.

Table 3-1 Papers that studied 'Brand Commitment' in their research model

Reference	Independent/Mediator/ Dependent Variable	Antecedent/s Of Commitment	Outcomes of Commitment
(Zhou et al., 2012)	Dependent variable	Brand attachment, brand identification, brand community commitment	-
(Kamboj & Rahman, 2016)	Mediator	Active participation	Brand Trust
(Carlson et al., 2008)	Mediator	Identification with brand, psychological sense of brand community	Brand preference, will attend brand events, word-of mouth promotion, celebrate brand history
(G. Wang, 2002)	Mediator	Brand-person fit, brand satisfaction, brand trust	Exclusive purchase intention
(J. Kang et al., 2014)	Dependent variable	Active Participation, brand trust	-
(Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010)	Dependent variable	Brand innovativeness, brand customer orientation, brand-self relevance, brand social responsibility	-
(Y.-F. Kuo & Hou, 2017)	Mediating variable	Brand community identification, self-brand connection	Oppositional brand loyalty
(Pournaris & Lee, 2016)	Mediating variable	Brand community commitment, brand trust	Brand loyalty

3.2.2 Online Brand Community Commitment Studies

There are a bulk of studies in the literature aimed at understanding the relational context of online brand communities. Since online medium is extensively volatile in terms of people's attention and participation and there are abundance of objects of interest in the online space commitment to the online community appears as a vital element in the survival of the online community.

Commitment to OBC has been studied in the literature mostly as a mean to either attitudinal loyalty toward the brand or directly to the behavioral outcomes affirmed by any businesses. Major antecedents of OBC commitment in the literature appeared as community identification as proposed by social identity theory (Zhou et al., 2012), interaction and members' support and benevolence (J. W. Kim et al., 2008), reward mechanism (Jang et al., 2008), freedom of expression (J. W. Kim et al., 2008), community value and like-mindedness (Časas et al., 2016). We can deduct that both the interaction itself and the affective qualities of this interaction were studied as the

drivers of a committed relationship with the online community. The Table below lists some of the articles in the literature that were found mostly relevant to our research agenda. The first column in table presents the source of the respective study, second column indicates how the brand commitment was used in the research model, i.e. independent or dependent variable etc., third column lists the antecedents of brand commitment and the last column indicates the outcome variable if it is applicable.

Table 3-2 Papers that studied 'OBC Commitment' in their research model

Reference	Independent/Mediator/Dependent Variable	Antecedent/s Of Commitment	Outcomes of Commitment
(J. W. Kim et al., 2008)	Mediator	Member support, community value, member contribution, freedom of expression	Brand commitment
(Hur et al., 2013)	Mediator	Brand community affect, brand community trust	WOM, Repurchase, Constructive complaint
(Zheng, Cheung, Lee, & Liang, 2015)	Mediator	Participation, Promotion	Brand loyalty
(Jang et al., 2008)	Mediator	System quality, information quality, interaction, reward	Brand loyalty
(Y. F. Kuo & Feng, 2013)	Mediator	Perceived Benefit (Learning b., social b., self-esteem b., hedonic b.)	Oppositional brand loyalty
(Munnukka, Karjaluoto, & Tikkanen, 2015)	Independent	-	Brand loyalty
(Raïes et al., 2015)	Independent (second order construct)	Affective C.C., Normative C.C., Calculated C.C.	Repurchase, Recommendation
(Časas et al., 2016)	Mediator	Self-expression, connecting, helping, like-mindedness, seeking assistance, validation	Repurchase intention
(Zhou et al., 2012)	Mediator	Brand community identification	Brand commitment

3.3 Drivers of Brand Commitment

Brand commitment is a psychological attachment that leads customers to maintain that relationship by preferring the brand over others (Y.-F. Kuo & Hou, 2017). Therefore it is seen as a vital quality attribute that sought to exist in B2C

relationships. Especially in the ‘relationship marketing’ era, where focus of marketing moves from ‘deals’ to ‘relationships’, firms’ primary aim is to generate a committed relationship with their customers.

Brand commitment is defined in our study as the customer’s desire to maintain a long term relationship with the brand. In line with Wang’s (2002) approach, we determined the antecedents of brand commitment based on two distinct motives of customers that affect their brand/product choice: utilitarian needs and value-expressive needs. Utilitarian needs are related with functional benefits obtained from the product, whereas value-expressive motives are concerned with one’s need to maintain self-image and enhance self-expression. Therefore one’s commitment to the brand could be based firstly on brand’s consistent functional performance, which is captured in this study both by brand trust and brand satisfaction constructs; secondly on the identification with the brand which is operationalized by self-brand congruence construct.

3.3.1 Brand Trust

Trust is assumed to exist when one party has confidence in the exchange partner’s reliability and integrity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In relationship marketing perspective customer transactions are seen as relational exchanges and belief about the exchange party’s reliability is an essential precursor for a long term committed relationship. Ganesan (1994) describes the trust as an expectation about the exchange partner that it would be fair in division of pie of resources in the future.

For the brand-customer relationship trust for the brand can be based upon the belief held by the customer about the brand’s honesty, reliability and being altruistic throughout its transactions (G. Wang, 2002). Honesty refers to the belief that information provided by the brand about its products is truthful. Reliability refers to belief about the extent to which the brand can be relied for its functional performance, whereas altruistic behavior refers to the quality of the brand as being unselfishly caring for the customer and the society as well.

Since customers have limited resources –like money and market information- and expect a long term fulfillment of their desires/needs they seek for a reliable exchange partner in their brand choices.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) cites that relationship characterized by trust are so highly valued that parties will desire to commit themselves to such relationships (Hrebiniak, 1974). Therefore we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1. Brand trust has a positive effect on the brand commitment.

3.3.2 Brand Satisfaction

Brand satisfaction is defined as the outcome of the subjective evaluation that the performance of the brand meets or exceeds expectations (Bloemer, J. M., & Kasper, 1995). Customers are expected to make this elaboration either explicit or implicit for their brand interactions. A satisfactory relationship with the company, if it is a result of explicit evaluation would lead to a commitment in the brand choice; whereas if it emanates from an implicit or limited evaluation it may lead to a relatively more

spurious brand loyalty. (Bloemer, J. M., & Kasper, 1995) In this paper we operationalize brand satisfaction as an overall emotional reaction for the brand interaction and that is the result of an explicit evaluation of the brand performance.

The link between the customer satisfaction and brand commitment is proposed and empirically tested in the literature. Yi (1990) reports that customer satisfaction influences attitudes towards the firm which in turn yields to repeat purchases and commitment to the brand choice. Bloemer and Kasper (1995) proved that customer's satisfactory experiences lead to commitment which forms the base for true brand loyalty. There are also some criticism that the satisfaction is transaction specific, therefore it is short lived and more volatile than trust and commitment. (G. Wang, 2002) Therefore to testify the connection between satisfaction and commitment we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2. Brand satisfaction has a positive effect on the brand commitment.

3.3.3 Self-Brand Congruity

People develop a sense of self-concept, which is a self-schema or knowledge structure about the self that help them to represent, make sense of themselves in their environment (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010). Like individuals, brands also develop an image of personality and maintain that image to differentiate themselves from their rivals (H. He, Li, & Harris, 2012).

When customers perceive closeness between the image of the brand and their ideal personality they are inclined to incorporate the brand into their self-concept. Self-brand congruence is described as closeness between an individual's self-concept and the image and personality of the brand (K. Z. K. Zhang et al., 2016). Such a congruity would foster an identification with the perceived image of the brand by viewing the brand as important component of their personality and use that symbolic image to communicate their personality to others (Y.-F. Kuo & Hou, 2017). The perceived overlap between the ideal self of individuals and brands' symbolic images is regarded as a strong source of a committed connection (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010). In that case they develop a sense of oneness with the brand and be committed to the brand since they would regard brand's success as their own success. (G. Wang, 2002) Therefore we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3. Perceived self-brand congruence has a positive effect on the brand commitment.

3.4 Drivers of Online Brand Community Commitment

There are many attempts of firms to build an online brand community, however majority of these attempts fail due to the lack of number of active members. People often visit the community pages and passively seek for information. Therefore commitment of its members appears to be an absolutely crucial precondition for an OBC in order to exist and to certify future community relationships (Pournaris & Lee, 2016). Commitment to an OBC motivates people to contribute content and feel an obligation for the success of the community (Wiertz & De Ruyter, 2007).

Driving from the relevant literature and by considering the context of the online brand community that we have chosen to cooperate with, we define the antecedents of community commitment as community identification, community value and benevolence. These were the mostly favored factors in OBC commitment studies and the ones that are mostly relevant with our research context. These three factors are also in relation with three markers of brand community proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, a sense obligation for the success of the community.

Social identification theory is a major approach taken in this study, where the self-brand congruity among the antecedents of brand commitment together with community identification among drivers of community commitment are the products of the perspective that the social identification theory. Community value is added in the model especially for understanding the very nature of community spirit in the OBC we cooperate with. The community was based not directly on the brand ownership rather it was gathered upon a common shared value. Lastly social exchange theory perspective and the need for studying the members' care for each other lead us to examine the effect of perceived benevolence in the community on the members' commitment.

3.4.1 Community Identification

Social identity theory proposes that identity is built up not only on one's personal preferences and capabilities, but also on one's perceived connections with other people (Tajfel & Turner, 2019). Therefore the concept of self is defined not only on one's personal attributes, but also with whom he/she has affiliation with. Similarly Belk (1988) introduced the concept of 'extended self' and proposed that identity can be constructed based on our possessions and our social relations as well. Therefore one can identify himself/herself with a community and this identification can be part of their self-conception.

Similar to brands as a different type of organization communities also develop an image of personality and define themselves through it. This symbolic image is fabricated and broadcasted through peoples' ascription of value to them. It is stated that community identification occurs when an individual's self-image overlaps with the perceived image of a social group (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Such a group identification would be based on perceived congruence between ones' values and group collective values.

The identification with a group can be analyzed by having two components: cognitive and affective. While the cognitive component refers to self-awareness of membership, perceived similarities/dissimilarities between the members/nonmembers, the affective component refers to an emotional involvement to the group (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). We incorporate two of the component in our definition of community identification in line with Hsu et al.'s (2012) definition: community identification is a sense of belonging to the online community and feeling of emotional attachment with other participants of that community. Thus by definition the identification with the community would nurture a feel of belonging and eventually lead to a committed relationship with the community. Therefore we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4. Brand community identification has a positive effect on online brand community commitment.

3.4.2 Community Value

It is vital for a community to have a shared value that people gather around. The very definition of community necessitates community to have a common value for its existence. Muniz and O'Guinn, (2001) defined consciousness of kind as one of the markers of community that members need such a consciousness to define themselves and differentiate them from 'others', and this consciousness should be based upon a shared common value as its nature requires.

In line with (J. W. Kim et al., 2008) we define perceived community value as the extent to which a member recognizes the significance of values and common interests of the community. Once the member recognizes the community value he/she would sympathize with these values and perceive a closeness between his own values and that of the community. This congruence between members' interest and community's common interest would generate a sense of belonging to the community and would foster a commitment for the member-community relationship. It is stated that one's psychological attachment to an organization can be traced back to perceived closeness between one's values and those of the organization (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Therefore we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 5. Perceived community value has a positive effect on brand community commitment.

3.4.3 Benevolence

Benevolence is defined as the extent to which a person is interested in others' welfare. (Cho, 2006) Social exchange theory proposes that consumers engage in interactions with others because they expect that doing so will be rewarding (Emerson, 1976). People engage in OBC mainly for social, informational and hedonic benefits (Sun et al., 2016). When members perceive a reward in interacting with an online community he/she would feel a moral obligation to participate and contribute to the well-being of the community (Y. F. Kuo & Feng, 2013). Members' feeling of such an obligation would constitute one of the markers of community, a sense of moral responsibility for the endurance of the community. (Muniz, Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001) It is also empirically proved that the more a member perceives benevolence within an online community the more he/she would perceive social benefit in engaging with the community (X. Hu et al., 2016). In the similar vein, perceived benefit within an online community is proven to generate members' commitment to the community. (Y. F. Kuo & Feng, 2013) Therefore we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 6. Perceived benevolence within an online brand community has a positive effect on the community commitment.

3.5 Outcomes of Commitments

Having stated the hypotheses regarding the drivers of brand commitment and community commitment in the OBC context, our research model also proposes that the two commitments separately and collectively lead to re-purchase intention and community participation intention in customers as the outcomes of commitments.

Outcomes of Online Brand Community Commitment

Commitment to an online community can be defined as a sense of emotional involvement with the community, which is characterized by identification with, involvement in and emotional attachment to the community (Lili Liu, Wagner, & Chen, 2014). It is also defined as the desire of members to pursue their relationship with the community (Moorman et al., 1993). Therefore commitment shows itself as the affective bond toward both the individuals in the group and the community as whole.

When people have an affective bond with the community they would feel as a part of the community and take an active role in the success and endurance of the community (J. W. Kim et al., 2008). Therefore they will be more inclined to help other members of the community and contribute content and knowledge to assist other members (Wiertz & De Ruyter, 2007). Committed members would feel an obligation to perpetuate the community spirit, therefore they would be more willing to share ideas online and participate in group's offline organizations as well.

Moreover since brand community participants would share their experiences with the brand and create shared meanings of the brand (Muniz, Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001) community participation would foster a favorable attitude toward the brand and brand's products (Pournaris & Lee, 2016). Additionally the community can be regarded as a relatively reliable source of information since participants are self-directed and altruistic in their shares, community's favorable messages about their brand experiences would strengthen emotional tie between the member and the host brand. Thus the affective bond with the community would lead to an affective relationship with the brand and its products. The positive link between the brand community commitment on brand commitment and future purchase intention from the brand has been empirically proven in the literature (Hur et al., 2013; J. W. Kim et al., 2008; Raies et al., 2015). Therefore we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 7. Commitment to OBC has a positive effect on commitment to the host brand.

Hypothesis 8. Commitment to OBC has a positive effect on re-purchase intention from that brand.

Hypothesis 9. Commitment to OBC has a positive effect on community participation intention.

Outcomes of Brand Commitment

In the relational marketing era, the focus of marketing moved from deals to relationships. Therefore gaining the commitment of the customer as a driver of a long-term relationship with the brand appears to be among the primary aims of businesses. Commitment is an attitudinal concept which yield to certain behavioral outcomes (Susan Fournier, 1998). In the context of brand-customer relationship a customer having a strong commitment to the brand would prefer the brand over competitors even if it costs more, promote the brand in his/her circles, have greater customer involvement, would attend events designed to promote the brand (Carlson et al., 2008; J. W. Kim et al., 2008). Commitment lead to loyalty behavior toward the

brand and even develop oppositional brand loyalty toward the rival brands (Y.-F. Kuo & Hou, 2017). Therefore a committed relationship with the brand would be a strong indicator of future purchase decision from the same brand.

The committed customers would also participate in the online brand community of the brand since it is the embodiment of their brand connection and a proper channel to display their brand affection. It is highly expected that if one has an affective bond toward a brand he or she would be more inclined to participate in brand specific discussions and engage in brand-related gatherings. They would be more eager to socialize around the brand experience and share their brand passion with similar others. Therefore they would be more willing to participate in the brand community and want to be involved in community events.

Therefore based on the discussions above, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 10. Commitment to brand has a positive effect on re-purchase intention.

Hypothesis 11. Commitment to brand has a positive effect on community participation intention.

Table 3-3 Summary of Hypotheses

#	Hypothesis (Proposed positive links between the constructs)
H1	Brand trust -> the brand commitment
H2	Brand satisfaction -> brand commitment
H3	Self-brand congruence -> brand commitment
H4	Community identification -> community commitment
H5	Perceived community value -> community commitment
H6	Perceived benevolence -> community commitment
H7	Community commitment -> brand commitment
H8	Community commitment -> re-purchase intention
H9	Community commitment -> community participation intention
H10	Brand commitment -> re-purchase intention
H11	Brand commitment -> community participation intention

The table above lists and summarizes the hypotheses of our study. You can find the illustration of the hypothesis on the proposed research model in the figure below. The model illustrated as two separated realms: community realm and the brand realm. While brand realm comprises the antecedents of brand commitment, brand commitment and the re-purchase intention from the same brand, community realm includes antecedents of OBC commitment, community commitment and the community participation intention as the outcome variable. We made the brand-community realm distinction because it helped as to analyze the inner effects and interrelations between the community domain and the brand domain.

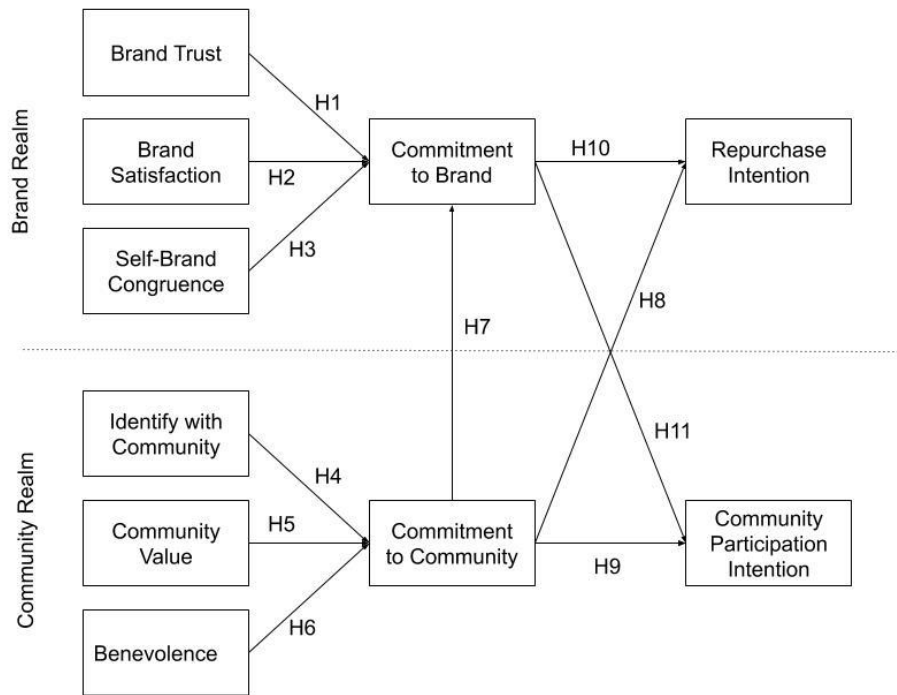


Figure 3-1 The Proposed Research Model

We include here the operational definitions of the constructs used in our study to make it clear what we meant by the concept and take it as a reference point. First column of the table lists the name of the constructs, second column gives the operational definitions of the construct as they are employed in our study, the last column indicates the sources of the definition that we have taken from.

Table 3-4 Operational definitions of the Constructs used in the Study

Name of the Construct	Operational Definition	Reference
Brand Trust	An expectation about the brand as an exchange partner that it would be fair in division of pie of resources in the future	(Ganesan, 1994)
Brand Satisfaction	The outcome of the subjective evaluation that the performance of the brand meets or exceeds expectations	(Bloemer, J. M., & Kasper, 1995)
Self-Brand Congruence	Perceived closeness between an individual's self-concept and the image and personality of the brand.	(K. Z. K. Zhang et al., 2016)
Community Identification	"A sense that people come to view themselves as a member of the online community and feel emotionally connected with other participants in the online community"	(C. Hsu et al., 2012)
Community value	The extent to which a member recognizes the significance of values and common interests of the community	(J. W. Kim et al., 2008)
Benevolence	The extent to which a person is interested in others' welfare	(Cho, 2006)
Online Community Commitment	"A sense of emotional involvement with the online community, which is characterized by identification with, involvement in and emotional attachment to the community"	(Lili Liu et al., 2014)
Brand Commitment	Costumers' desire to maintain a long term relationship with the brand	-



CHAPTER 4.

METHODOLOGY and MAIN ANALYSIS

Following the conceptual development of the research model of the study this chapter is dedicated to the research methodology to test the proposed hypothesis in our conceptual model. The following sections elucidate the research methodology in detail. The first section gives an overview of the research design employed in this study. In the second section we introduce our methodology step by step in conducting the quantitative analysis for our research aim and provide the initial findings from the analysis. In the third part we introduced the qualitative analysis as a complementary investigation for the main quantitative part.

4.1 Research Design of the Study

The empirical investigation of the subject matter of this study included four steps: development of the research model, validating the model through quantitative analysis, examining the nature of community interaction through qualitative techniques and integrating and consolidating the findings from the qualitative and qualitative analysis.

Qualitative and quantitative studies are the two major research methods in empirical studies. They have distinct features in terms of their approach to the object of the scientific query. While quantitative approach gives a general picture and quantified interrelations between the constructs in the focal domain, qualitative approach are taken to have a deeper understanding of the issue, especially taking into consideration the particular contextual factors of the subject matter. While quantitative studies are more descriptive and explanatory in their nature, qualitative studies are more exploratory in terms of main aim of the scientific enquiry. In quantitative studies findings are expected to be generalizable to the related population; however in qualitative studies generalizability is not the main concern, even might not be the concern anyway, since it is aimed to have a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon.

This study employs mix method research design since it involves both the qualitative and qualitative methods together. The main rationale for using the mix method is that one data collection form supplies strengths to offset the weaknesses of the other form (Creswell, 2012). Mix method design provides more insight about the object of the empirical query than the two methods separately, by incorporating in-depth contextual analysis together with quantitative scales describing the major trends in the larger population.

Among the mix method research designs our study corresponds to the ‘explanatory sequential design’. In explanatory sequential design the main focus is on the quantitative part and qualitative data is collected after the quantitative analysis to

help explain or elaborate on the findings from the quantitative analysis (Creswell, 2012, p. 542). Whereas in exploratory sequential design the sequence is the reverse that the qualitative data is collected and analyzed first, than the quantitative phase is conducted as a complementary enquiry.

From the relevant literature and expert opinions both from the IS scholars and managers in the retailing firm that organizes the focal OBC of the study, we drive our set of hypothesis and build the hypothetical research model, which was introduced in the previous chapter. To test the hypothesis we conducted statistical analyses which are described in detail in the next section.

In the second phase of the study we go deep in understanding the main nature of brand-customer, customer-customer interactions within the focal online brand community. Since we study a community having a 'dual identity, that is having both the brand affiliation and a distinct community value as its name suggest, we tried to understand how this dualism was constituted in the minds of community members in real terms that is from their own expressions. Secondly to understand the attitudes of members toward both the community and the brand and their interrelationships, which is the main enquiry in this study we examined the comments of members in the Facebook page of the community.

4.2 Phase One: Quantitative Analysis

This study employs quantitative measurement techniques for the validation of hypothesis described in the previous chapter. Among the quantitative techniques we employed structural equation modeling method to validate the proposed research model and the hypothesis in it.

To test our hypothesis we have chosen the survey method as our data collection method. Through the survey questions we quantified the constructs in our hypothesized model and measured the interrelationship between them through certain statistical techniques. To assess the constructs we used statistically proven scales from the previous works. Then we employed certain statistical tests to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement scales. Once we made certain the validity and reliability of our measurement model, we tested our structural model with structural equation modeling technique. Lastly we drive our conclusions from the quantitative part and moved to the qualitative phase of the study. We discuss these steps in detail in the upcoming parts.

4.2.1 Instrument Development

Once we developed our conceptual research model, constructs in the model are needed to be measured on the empirical level. Items are used to measure the constructs, and collectively they form a single variable usable for the statistical analysis. Determination of the best items to measure the constructs is of a major scholar attempt. In this study we used the previously validated and used items from the well-recognized studies in the literature. The selection criteria for the constructs included the robustness of the study in terms of research methodology, strength of reliability and validity tests and also appropriateness for our research context. The last criteria, the research context is important and had a restricting effect in our scale development, since retail industry and the particular online brand community that we

studied on have distinct characteristics to be dealt with. For example brand commitment takes a unique form when we consider the retail industry, since product and brand have a particular position compared to other industries, e.g. automobile industry (Peters & Bodkin, 2018). Secondly the OBC had also specific qualities e.g. nature of communication, subjects in interactions etc. that restricts the question items from other types of brand communities.

Questionnaire items for brand trust and brand satisfaction has been adopted from Wang's (2002) study that he investigates the attitudinal antecedents of brand commitment in three distinct industries, in which he has taken from (Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992) and (Oliver, 1980) respectively. Self-brand congruence was taken from (K. Z. K. Zhang et al., 2016)'s study in which he investigates the effect of self-brand congruence on the relationship quality between firms and its customers and he originally taken SBC items from (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). While selecting those items instead of other alternatives we look for the questions that best fit with the nature of brand-product-customer interaction in the retailing industry.

The construct of community identification is taken from (Zhou et al., 2012) where he took the questions originally from (Algesheimer et al., 2005), in which they investigated the effect of brand community identification on OBC commitment and brand identification and their effects on the brand commitment in a Chinese car club. Perceived community value questions are taken from (J. W. Kim et al., 2008), where they investigated the effect of community value on the online community commitment. The construct of benevolence is taken from (X. Hu et al., 2016), where they examine the effect of benevolence of the members in a social commerce site on the effect of perceived utilitarian value and purchase intention at the end.

Online brand community commitment questions are taken from the work of (Hur et al., 2013) where he investigates the antecedents and outcomes of OBC commitment in a mobile phone brand community. Brand commitment items were taken from (J. W. Kim et al., 2008) where he studied the effect of OBC commitment on the brand commitment and its effect on certain business outcomes at the end. Users' re-purchase intention questions were taken from (Časas et al., 2016) and community participation intention questions were obtained from (C. Cheung et al., 2012). For the last group of constructs especially the last two ones, re-purchase intention and community participation intention, questions were selected mostly by the appropriateness to the relational context of the focal OBC and brand-customer relationship of the retail brand that collaborated with us for the study. Table 4.1 lists the question items and the source of the items in a brief format.

The item questions were in English in their original form, however the respondents' were assumed to have Turkish as their mother tongue, therefore questions were needed to be translated into Turkish. The backward translation method was used to ensure the validity of the translation and three independent IS experts checked the translation in terms of clarity of wording and expressions. The final questionnaire was also checked by the managers in the retailing firm in terms of clarity of wording and appropriateness for their customer relationships.

Table 4-1 Scale Items of the Constructs in our Study

Construct	Source	Questionnaire Questions
Identifying with the community (CI)	(Zhou et al., 2012)	When I talk about Brand Community X, I usually say “we” rather than “they.”
		I see myself as a part of Brand Community X.
		Brand Community X's successes are my successes.
		When someone praises Brand Community X, it feels like a personal compliment.
		When someone criticizes Brand Community X, it feels like a personal insult.
		I am very interested in what others think about Brand Community X
Community Value (CV)	(J. W. Kim et al., 2008)	The community provides a clear purpose of the community.
		The design of the community site makes it easy for participants to know for what purpose the community exists.
		The community provides a clear message about for whom the community exists.
Benevolence (BEN)	(X. Hu et al., 2016)	Members on X are interested in others' well-being when they recommend products and share product information.
		Members on X put others' interests in mind when they recommend products and share product information.
		Members on X will not tell lies when they recommend products and share product information.
		Members on X will do everything within their capacity to help others.
Self-brand congruence (SBC)	(K. Z. K. Zhang et al., 2016)	I find that the brand is similar to me
		I feel a personal connection to the brand
		I think the brand reflects who I am
Brand Satisfaction (BS)	(G. Wang, 2002)	I am satisfied with my decision to buy from X
		My choice to buy from X was a wise one.
		I am extremely glad that I chose Brand X over other brands I was considering at the time of purchasing.
Brand Trust (BT)	(G. Wang, 2002)	What the brand says about its products/service is true
		I feel I know what to expect from the brand
		The brand is very reliable
		The brand meets its promises
Online Brand Community Commitment (OBCC)	(Hur et al., 2013)	I have a sense of belonging to the community.
		I have psychological attachment to the members of the community
		I think that exchanging opinion with other members is important.
		I expect that I will continuously participate in community activities.
		I am an actively participating member of the community.
Brand Commitment (BC)	(J. W. Kim et al., 2008)	I have psychological attachment to the brand.
		I want the brand to be continuously successful.
		I think that using the brand is important.
		I am a loyal customer of the brand.
Re-purchase	(Časas et	If I could, I would like to purchase from X

intention (RPI)	al., 2016)	It is likely that I will continue purchasing from X
		I intend to continue purchasing from X in the future
Community participation intention (CPI)	(C. Cheung et al., 2012)	I will actively participate in the brand community's activities.
		I will provide useful information for the online brand community members.
		I will help the online brand community members who seek support or help from other members.

Response Format

In this study responses were collected through scaled-responses and questions were kept the same for all participants in order to apply statistical analysis. Likert scale was used to measure to what extent the respondent conformed with the statement. Likert scale responses acquire the direction, either positive or negative, as well as the strength of opinion regarding the focal expression. This study employed five points Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree: 1” to “Strongly Agree: 5” with the “Neither agree, nor disagree: 3” as the middle point.

In our study we did not collect demographic information from the respondents, rather these information were acquired from the related database of the online brand community platform. They provided us the related information about their members and we matched this information with their survey responses by using their real user identification information. Having their membership information from the database can be regarded as more reliable and trustworthy than collecting them by their self-expression through the survey; therefore it is a favorable point for the strength of our methodology.

4.2.2 Sampling Procedure

To test our research hypothesis we have chosen to collect the data from the members of an online brand community belonging to a retail firm operates country-wide level in Turkey. The community and brand interaction has unique characteristics that require empirical investigation. The community was not build upon the brand affiliation directly; rather it is gathered upon a common shared value, while having brand community characteristics. Therefore studying the two objects of commitment, brand and community commitment is valuable in that particular context. Thus we have chosen the actual members of the brand community as our target population. Therefore unit of analysis of our study is the individual members who subscribe to the online community platform.

Once we define the target population the second step is to determine the sampling method. A sample is a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study to generalize the result to the whole population (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The sample is assumed to represent the whole population. The sampling methodologies are of two categories, probabilistic sampling and non-probabilistic sampling. In probabilistic sampling each individual has equal probability to be involved in the sample. However in non-probability sampling researcher select individuals because they are available, convenient and have the certain characteristics that the researcher look for (Creswell, 2012). In this research we used convenience sampling method

among the non-probability sampling methods. The rationale for this selection will be explained in the next section.

4.2.3 Data Collection Procedure

As explained before this study aimed to study the relational mechanism behind online brand community interaction in a brand community that specifically built upon a shared value rather than mere brand ownership. We have chosen to study with a brand community belongs to a country-wide retail firm and fits with our research agenda. The retail firm is of the grocery and super market type of retail firm and has branches over 2000 in Turkey and it has stores outside the Turkey as well.

Once we defined the target population as the OBC of the retail firm, we communicated with the managers of the company, chief level managers responsible for branding and customer relationship have shown interest on the subject matter of this study and they agreed to collaborate with us to collect data from their community members.

The community has its own web platform through which they communicate and organize events, lotteries and even offline meetings. Members can subscribe to the community only by their loyalty card identification information pertaining to the retail firm. Therefore it is taken for granted that the members of the community are the actual customers of the company. The participation of the member through the community yields them monetary bonuses and high rankings among members. They answer to questions of the firm, provide opinions about the products and participate in the discussions and offline meetings.

We prepare our online questionnaire and it was announced on the platform paper. The web platform had its own online survey system where the responses were collected to their databases directly. Participants were awarded for filling out our questionnaire. As we mentioned before the questions regarding the demographic information of members were not included in the survey, it is due to the fact that our questionnaire was applied by the company itself and they rather provided the demographic information from their databases.

The questionnaire appeared four days on the community platform and 1612 responses were collected. We excluded 356 responses due to missing information and unengaged responses and final analysis were based on the remaining 1256 responses. There were 10500 members subscribed to the community, therefore the sample size is enough to represent the population and conduct statistical analysis on.

About the sample size it is far more than the required minimum proposed in the literature (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1990). The only concern can be raised by having a large sample size especially for structural equation modeling technique. It is stated that SEM is sensitive to larger sample size, however its effect are on the fit measures especially the Chi-Square fit indices. However having a larger sample size is always preferred to small ones since the power of representation and generalizability of findings gets more secured as the sample size increases (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Creswell, 2012).

4.2.4 Demographics of Respondents

Since our questionnaire was published and respondents were collected through the community's online platform the respondents in our study were already members of the online brand community and real customers of the retail firm. Both of the two relations –membership to the community and being a customer of the retail firm– were validated, since our questionnaire were responded through the community's online platform accessed with membership credentials, and membership to the community required loyalty card subscription pertaining to the company. Demographic information of respondents were taken from the database of the community platform, by matching their ID's in the response set and membership information in the database.

Since the online community addresses women only, all of our respondents are females accordingly. Hur et al. (2013) also based their analysis on the data from female users of a mobile phone brand community in China. Since the target population, considering the value of the community best fit with females, it is valid to have female only sample for our study as well.

In terms of the occupation of our respondents 46 percent are housewives, 40 percent are working women and 13,5 percent are students. These figures make sense when the community spirit is taken into consideration, that it mainly addresses housewives as the target participants.

Table 4-2 Occupations of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Working	504	40,1
Housewives	582	46,3
Student	170	13,5
Total	1256	100,0

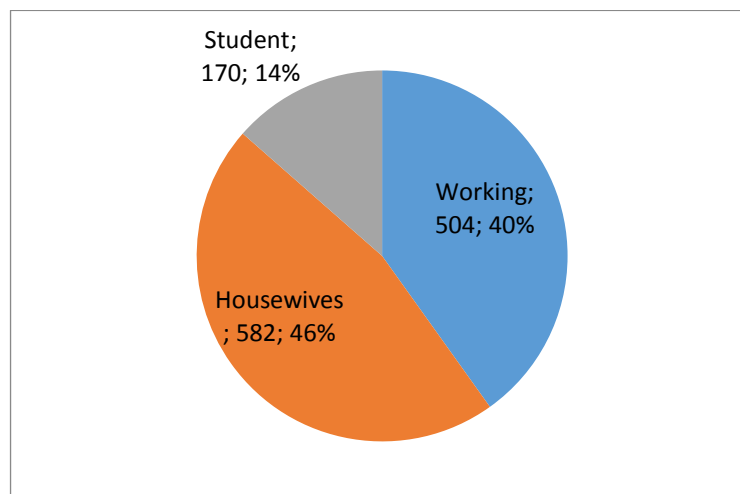


Figure 4-1 Occupations of Respondents

In terms of their ages; 4 percent are below 20, 67 percent are between 20 and 40, 24 percent are between 40 and 60 and 5 percent of them are above 60. Figures indicate that the majority of our respondents are between 25 and 40.

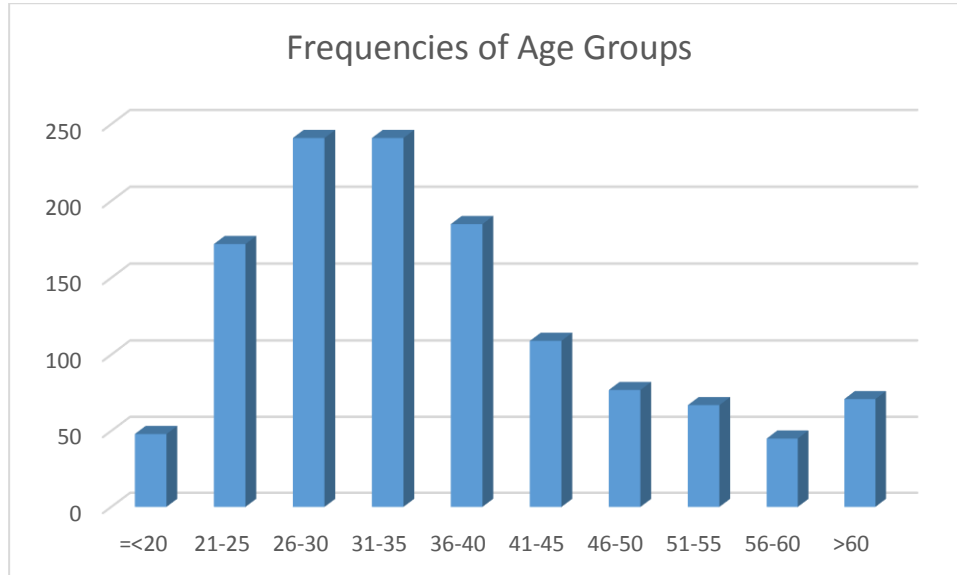


Figure 4-2Frequencies of Age Groups

Table 4-3Ages of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent
=<20	48	3,8
21-25	172	13,7
26-30	241	19,2
31-35	241	19,2
36-40	185	14,7
41-45	109	8,7
46-50	77	6,1
51-55	67	5,3
56-60	45	3,6
>60	71	5,7
Total	1256	100,0

We also had the city information from the database of the community, and from that we observe that participants were from all over the country and numbers seem to reflect the population density of cities in Turkey. Therefore we can conclude that our sample is a strong candidate for reflecting countrywide community members' population. The Table below indicates the city information of respondents. For simplicity only the ones that have the percentage rate above the 2% were included in the table and remaining ones grouped under 'others' category. Nearly all cities of Turkey are included in our sample, which is again an indication of our sample for being a strong representative of the whole country.

Table 4-4 Respondent's Location

City	Frequency	Percent
İstanbul	275	21,9
İzmir	171	13,6
Ankara	116	9,2
Adana	54	4,3
Antalya	45	3,6
Bursa	34	2,7
Malatya	30	2,4
Konya	29	2,3
Gaziantep	27	2,1
Mersin	27	2,1
Diyarbakır	25	2,0
Eskişehir	25	2,0
Kayseri	25	2,0
Others	373	29,7
Total	1256	100

4.2.5 Data Analysis

To test our measurement model and the association between the constructs in our research model we used structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. Structural equation modeling is a multivariate statistical approach best suited for complex theoretical models (Bayram, 2016). This technique enables us to simultaneously examine the association between dependent and independent constructs which are driven from multiple item questions (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014; Kline, 2015). Therefore SEM techniques have been widely used in academics especially by social sciences thanks to its effectiveness in measuring complex and abstract attributes of individuals and organizations as well.

The strength of SEM comes from its ability to check the validity of the relationship between indicators and constructs in the model (Hair et al., 2014). In other words it simultaneously measures the strength of the model both by checking the association between observed variables and unobserved, latent variables and among the latent variables as well. However other statistical methods e.g. regression, correlation only work on observed variables. Secondly SEM has a confirmatory approach which makes it most suitable for hypothesis testing rather than having an exploratory approach as the other statistical methods employ (Bayram, 2016).

Multiple regression as a statistical method can also be used for testing the association between certain constructs however SEM has some advantages that outperform multiple regression and thus widely used in the social sciences. For instance multiple regression have these limitations for which SEM is the available option to conduct the analysis:

- Multiple dependent or outcome variables are not permitted
- Mediating variables cannot be included in the same single model as predictors
- Each predictor is assumed to be measured without error
- The error or residual variable is the only latent variable permitted in the model
- Multi-collinearity among the predictors may hinder result interpretation (Bayram, 2016)

We utilized Version 22 of the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) software package for our statistical analysis. We first test and validate the measurement model by employing confirmatory factor analysis. Secondly we examined the structural model to test the hypothesis and confirm the proposed research model. These steps are explained in the upcoming sections in detail.

4.2.6 Measurement Model

In this part we will examine the quality of measurement model by assessing the questionnaire items' reliability and validity and validity will be accrued through convergent and discriminant validity analysis. Before going into these tests we will introduce the descriptive statistics of the measurement items. We did not have any missing values in the scale items.

Normality is a crucial assumption in SEM analysis. To test the normality of the given data set skewness and kurtosis measures would be checked. It is indicated that for a large sample, where responses are greater than 200, skewness and kurtosis measures should be between ± 2.58 interval (Hair et al., 2014). For our data all measures fall within the accepted range, therefore normality assumption is satisfied for our dataset. The table below indicates the mean scores, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis measures.

Table 4-5 Descriptive and Normality Test of items

Item Name	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
BrSat1	4,03	1,033	-1,427	1,847
BrSat2	4,00	,936	-1,168	1,394
BrSat3	3,98	,879	-,881	,887
BrTrst1	3,98	,884	-,871	,732
BrTrst2	4,00	,894	-,967	1,083
BrTrst3	4,14	,859	-1,112	1,485
BrTrst4	3,95	,939	-,804	,392
SBC1	3,68	,944	-,520	,104
SBC2	3,66	1,068	-,545	-,391
SBC3	3,51	1,035	-,425	-,299
BrCom1	3,36	1,137	-,238	-,691
BrCom2	4,07	,888	-,957	,894

BrCom3	3,83	,950	-,797	,424
BrCom4	4,03	,954	-,990	,684
RPInt1	3,92	,969	-,830	,417
RPInt2	4,08	,882	-,959	,898
RPInt3	4,06	,873	-,933	,917
ComVal1	4,03	,928	-1,024	1,020
ComVal2	3,96	,948	-,867	,581
ComVal3	4,02	,908	-1,047	1,289
Com_iden1	3,76	,994	-,629	,022
Com_iden2	3,97	,905	-,905	,918
Com_iden3	3,83	,984	-,744	,287
Com_iden4	3,76	1,025	-,652	-,057
Com_iden5	3,50	1,087	-,399	-,459
Com_iden6	3,61	1,036	-,601	-,069
Ben1	3,79	,934	-,654	,338
Ben2	3,78	,928	-,615	,193
Ben3	3,80	,939	-,742	,590
Ben4	3,83	,892	-,641	,372
ComComt1	3,72	,935	-,639	,310
ComComt2	3,48	1,042	-,430	-,273
ComComt3	3,88	,876	-,705	,400
ComComt4	3,74	,957	-,584	,149
ComComt5	3,86	,976	-,631	-,093
Part_int1	3,74	,949	-,447	-,151
Part_int2	3,89	,868	-,700	,583
Part_int3	3,83	,859	-,553	,333

Mean Scores for Constructs

The table below indicates the mean scores for the latent constructs and the following graph also illustrate the means graphically. Figures indicate that members show a stronger affiliation with the brand than they show for the community itself. This could be attributed to the fact that the brand had a long history and established a stronger equity than the brand community.

Table 4-6 Mean Scores of the Constructs

Item Name	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Brand Satisfaction	1256	4,0027	0,807
Brand Trust	1256	4,0165	0,70758
S.B. Congruence	1256	3,616	0,87703
Brand Commitm.	1256	3,8227	0,7464
RePurchase int.	1256	4,0183	0,78291
Community Value	1256	4,0035	0,82603

Comm. Identification	1256	3,7399	0,79604
Benevolence	1256	3,799	0,77645
Community Commitment	1256	3,735	0,72063
Participation Intent.	1256	3,8201	0,7485

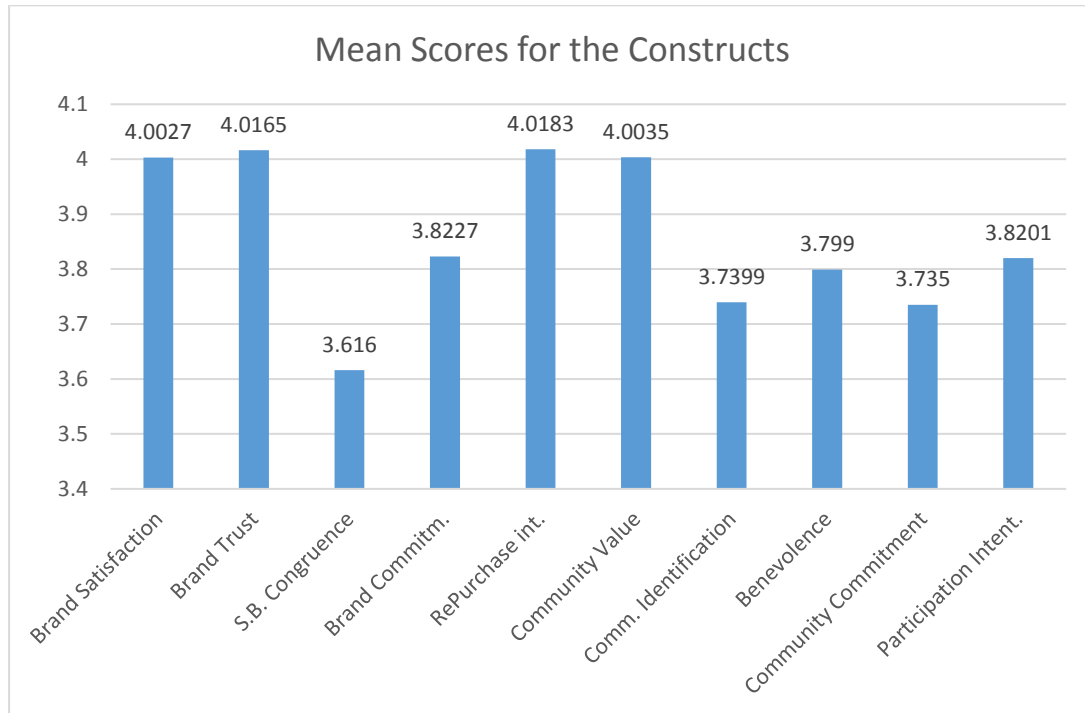


Figure 4-3 Mean Scores for the Constructs

4.2.6.1 Reliability of the measurement model

Reliability indicates the internal consistency of the measurement items which assures that the results are consistent and reproducible. To assess the reliability of measurement items we analyzed the Cronbach's Alpha measures. Cronbach's alpha figures indicates the internal consistency among the measurement items for each constructs. Figures above 0.7 are considered as adequate in the literature (Hair et al., 2014). From the table it is seen that the internal consistency of our measures are above the adequate level.

Table 4-7Cronbach's Alpha Measures of the Scale Items

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Brand Satisfaction	0,813	3
Brand Trust	0,793	4
Self Brand Congruance	0,816	3
Brand Commitment	0,74	4
RePurchase Int	0,836	3
Comm. Value	0,851	3
Comm Ident.	0,884	6
Benevolence	0,866	4
Comm. Commitment	0,815	5
Part. Intention	0,81	3

4.2.6.2 Validity of the measurement model

The validity of the measurement item corresponds to the accuracy of measures, that it is development of sound evidence to demonstrate that test interpretation matches its proposed use (Creswell, 2012). To test the validity of our questionnaire items we run both convergent validity and discriminant validity tests.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity check ensures the extent to which particular constructs and related observed variables share greater variance in common (Hair et al., 2014). In this study to check the convergent validity we run confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by using AMOS software.

CFA is employed to a number of factor loadings fixed at zero to reveal the hypothesis that certain factors affect certain factor indicators. In this study we employed the CFA analysis to confirm the extent to which the measurement model of this study is replicated on the new sample data, since we used previously validated constructs from the literature. We run the CFA both for antecedent factors (6 constructs with 23 items) and for the full model, with 10 constructs with 38 items. We included the CFA output illustrations with the standardized estimates on below.

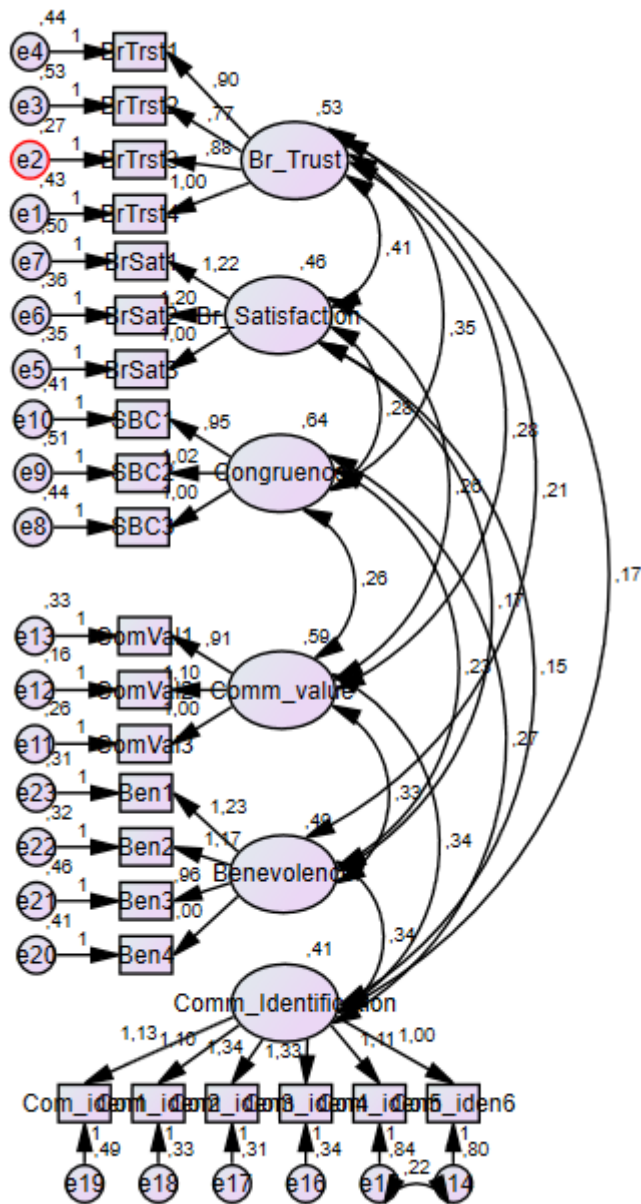


Figure 4-4 CFA Test Graphical Output

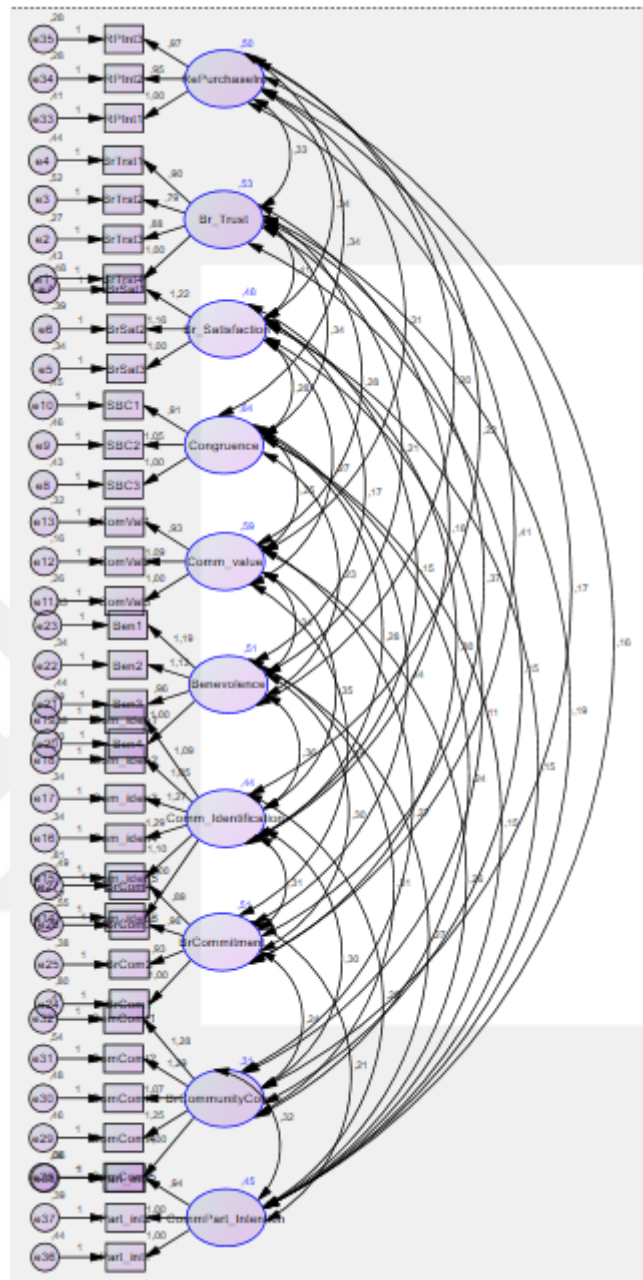


Figure 4-5 CFA Test Graphical Output 2

Goodness of fit (GOF) indices indicate the extent to which the model shows a good fit between the sample covariance matrix and the estimated population covariance matrix. GOF indices therefore are checked to analyze the fit between proposed hypothesized model and the sample data. (Bayram, 2016).

Model fit indices taken as criterion in this study is given in the table below which are taken from Karagöz's (2016) book.

Table 4-8 Statistics of goodness of fit in structural equation modeling

Fit Index	Good Fit	Acceptable Fit
Chi Square fit index	$0.05 < \chi^2 < 1$	$0.01 < \chi^2 < 0.05$
Normed Chi Square	$\chi^2/df \leq 3$	$\chi^2/df \leq 5$
Goodness of Fit Index	GFI > 0.95	GFI > 0.90
Normed Fit Index	NFI > 0.95	NFI > 0.90
Comparative Fit Index CFI > 0.95	CFI > 0.95	CFI > 0.90
Root mean square error of approximation	RMSA < 0.05	RMSA < 0.08

The fit indices for the whole model indicate a good fit with the data. We had the figures as Cmin: 1482.219 with the Df: 224 that lead to Cmin/Df ratio of 6.62. Chi-square indices are found in the acceptable range, not within the good fit range, that is because Chi-square are sensitive to sample size and our sample size (n= 1256) is greater than the recommended interval (Bayram, 2016). To realize this proposition we had run the CFA with randomly selected 300 sub-groups, and Cmin/df indices fell below the 3 level. Therefore it does not raise a concern for our data. We had a GFI figures as 0.904 and AGFI figures as 0.88, which are above the acceptable minimum level. We had the comparative fit index as 0.922 which is again above the acceptable minimum point. The root mean square error of approximation is found as 0.052 for our data, which is again below the 0.08 level as proposed in the literature. ($\chi^2/df=6.62$ GFI=0.904, CFI=0.922, RMSA=0.052)

Since model indices has shown a good fit with the data we then checked the standardized regression weights of each item for its latent construct to assess the strength of measurement model in terms of the explanatory power of item questions on the parent latent construct. From this analysis we can decide whether to include or exclude any item from the analysis. The item loadings are listed in the table 4.10 below. We also run a exploratory factor analysis in SPSS, and factors were found to be loaded on the related latent construct having factor loadings greater than .5 level. Information regarding the factor loadings in the EFA are included in the Appendix.

Table 4-9 Factor loadings in CFA

Item Name		Latent Construct	Estimate
Ben1	<---	Benevolence	0,794
Ben2	<---	Benevolence	0,792
Ben3	<---	Benevolence	0,771
Ben4	<---	Benevolence	0,784
BrCom1	<---	BrCommitment	0,505
BrCom2	<---	BrCommitment	0,664
BrCom3	<---	BrCommitment	0,703
BrCom4	<---	BrCommitment	0,722
BrSat1	<---	Br_Satisfaction	0,755
BrSat2	<---	Br_Satisfaction	0,782

BrSat3	<---	Br_Satisfaction	0,775
BrTrst1	<---	Br_Trust	0,737
BrTrst2	<---	Br_Trust	0,637
BrTrst3	<---	Br_Trust	0,756
BrTrst4	<---	Br_Trust	0,672
Com_iden1	<---	Comm_Identification	0,742
Com_iden2	<---	Comm_Identification	0,794
Com_iden3	<---	Comm_Identification	0,829
Com_iden4	<---	Comm_Identification	0,822
Com_iden5	<---	Comm_Identification	0,66
Com_iden6	<---	Comm_Identification	0,637
ComComt1	<---	BrCommunityComm	0,72
ComComt2	<---	BrCommunityComm	0,634
ComComt3	<---	BrCommunityComm	0,694
ComComt4	<---	BrCommunityComm	0,735
ComComt5	<---	BrCommunityComm	0,626
ComVal1	<---	Comm_value	0,795
ComVal2	<---	Comm_value	0,832
ComVal3	<---	Comm_value	0,803
Part_int1	<---	CommPart_Intention	0,766
Part_int2	<---	CommPart_Intention	0,787
Part_int3	<---	CommPart_Intention	0,75
RPInt1	<---	RePurchaseInt	0,825
RPInt2	<---	RePurchaseInt	0,74
RPInt3	<---	RePurchaseInt	0,741
SBC1	<---	Congruence	0,697
SBC2	<---	Congruence	0,802
SBC3	<---	Congruence	0,821

Factor loadings for each item are all above the required minimum of 0.5 level. Therefore since the Crombach's alpha level are above 0.7 level and item loadings are above the 0.5 required minimum level, we decided not to exclude any item from the measurement model.

To assess the convergent validity we also assessed the average variance extracted (AVE) measures and composite reliability (CR) measures for each construct. average variance extracted (AVE) is a measure of the amount of variance that is captured by a construct in relation to the amount of variance due to measurement error, therefore it indicates the constructs' internal reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Composite reliability on the other hand also indicates the construct internal consistency. AVE scores are expected to be above the 0.5 level while CR scores are expected to be greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014).

The AVE and CR scores for our constructs are above the minimum required levels, CR values are greater than 0.77 and AVE scores are greater than the 0.508. therefore convergent validity of our measurement model have proven to be satisfactory.

Table 4-10 AVE and CR Scores of Constructs

	CR	AVE
Comm_Identification	0,870	0,533
Br_Trust	0,804	0,508
Br_Satisfaction	0,818	0,600
Congruence	0,804	0,617
Benevolence	0,859	0,605
BrCommunityComm	0,805	0,685
RePurchaseInt	0,747	0,664
CommPart_Intention	0,766	0,522
BrCommitment	0,771	0,624
Comm_value	0,876	0,704

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity compares the variance within the construct items with the pairwise variance between constructs, and proposes that the construct itself should show greater variance within than it has with other construct; so that the difference of the construct would be acknowledged in their measurement by having low correlation. For this reason square root of AVE measures are compared with between construct variations. If square root of AVE for each construct are less than its correlation with other constructs than the discriminant validity check would be confirmed. The table below indicates that this criteria is satisfactory for all our constructs, therefore we conclude that discriminant validity is granted for our measurement items. The diagonal elements (bold ones) indicates the square root of AVE measure for each constructs.

Table 4-11 Item Correlation and SQRT AVE Comparison

	Comm_Identification	Br_Trust	Br_Satisfaction	Congruence	Benevolence	BrCommunityComm	RePurchaseInt	CommPart_Intention	BrCommitment	Comm_value
Comm_Identification	0,730									
Br_Trust	0,375	0,712								
Br_Satisfaction	0,343	0,672	0,774							
Congruence	0,513	0,599	0,534	0,785						
Benevolence	0,761	0,410	0,349	0,422	0,778					
BrCommunityComm	0,671	0,380	0,300	0,512	0,589	0,828				
RePurchaseInt	0,539	0,691	0,714	0,690	0,469	0,487	0,815			
CommPart_Intention	0,635	0,390	0,318	0,297	0,569	0,596	0,330	0,722		
BrCommitment	0,653	0,680	0,612	0,659	0,598	0,590	0,660	0,439	0,790	
Comm_value	0,702	0,498	0,506	0,430	0,615	0,632	0,621	0,497	0,561	0,839

Common method bias test:

When respondents fill up a self-report survey once at the same time, potential common method bias could be a concern (X. L. Shen, Li, Sun, & Zhou, 2018). We performed Harman's single factor test to measure the effect of common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Results have shown that the first primary component failed to explain most of the variance, it only explained 34.9% of total variance. Therefore we conclude that common method bias is not a concern for our study.

Table 4-12 Common Method Bias Test

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	13,259	34,892	34,892	13,259	34,892	34,892
2	4,050	10,658	45,550			
3	2,062	5,425	50,975			
4	1,598	4,205	55,181			
5	1,321	3,476	58,657			
6	1,116	2,936	61,593			
7	,951	2,502	64,095			
8	,881	2,320	66,414			
9	,748	1,968	68,382			
10	,724	1,904	70,287			
11	,673	1,772	72,059			
12	,642	1,689	73,748			
13	,633	1,666	75,414			
14	,563	1,481	76,895			
15	,544	1,431	78,326			
16	,531	1,398	79,724			
17	,504	1,325	81,049			
18	,484	1,274	82,323			
19	,448	1,179	83,501			
20	,441	1,161	84,663			
21	,426	1,122	85,785			
22	,405	1,066	86,851			
23	,391	1,030	87,881			
24	,387	1,017	88,898			
25	,367	,966	89,865			
26	,360	,947	90,812			
27	,353	,930	91,742			
28	,337	,887	92,628			
29	,322	,846	93,475			
30	,316	,832	94,307			
31	,315	,829	95,136			
32	,298	,784	95,920			
33	,283	,744	96,664			
34	,274	,721	97,386			
35	,267	,702	98,088			
36	,251	,661	98,749			
37	,247	,649	99,398			
38	,229	,602	100,000			

4.2.7 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Having our measurement model validated through CFA, convergent and discriminant validity checks explained in the previous section, now we build the structural model to test the our hypothesis, that is the association between the construct in our proposed research model.

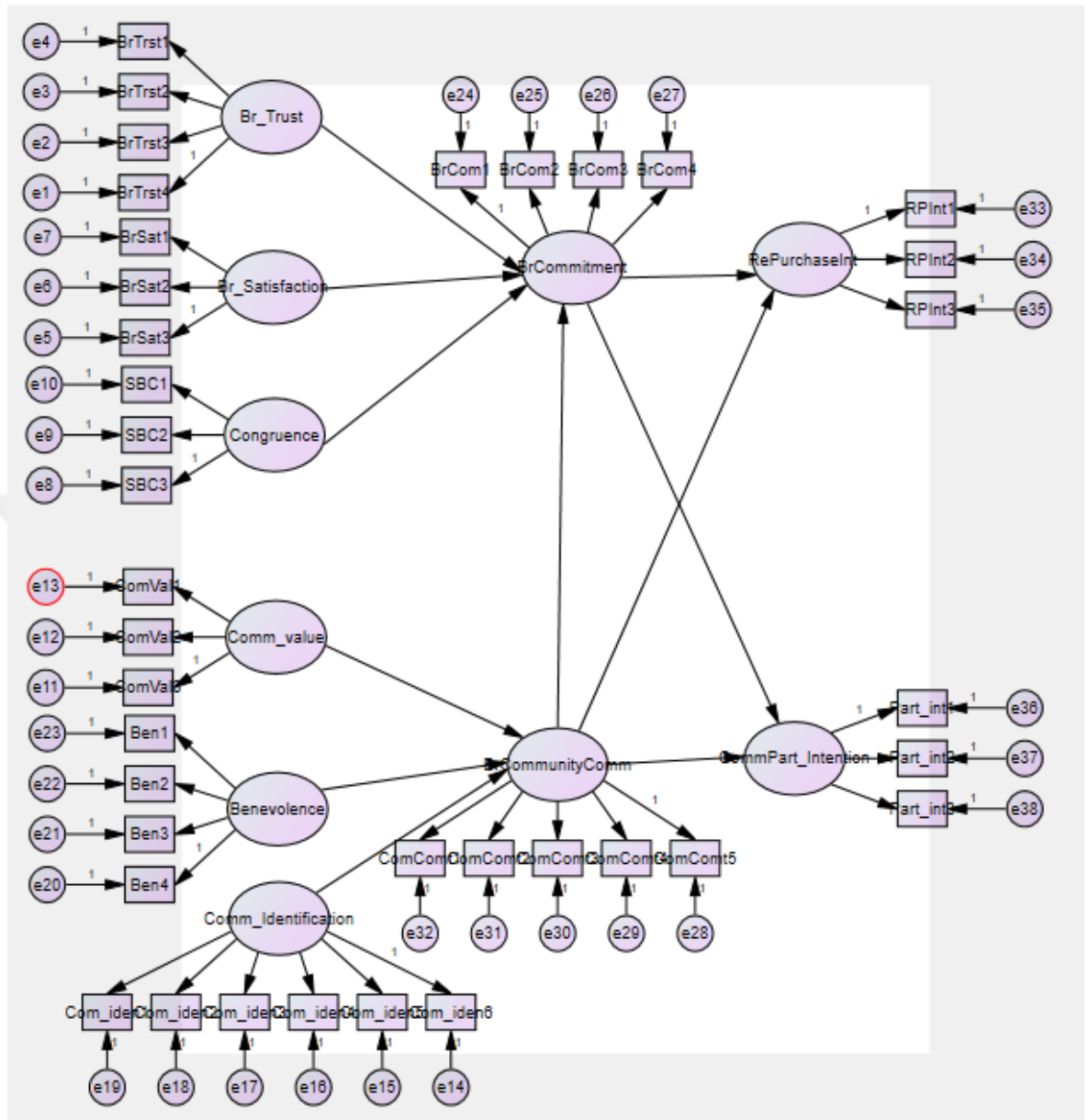


Figure 4-6 The Structural Model

The fit indices for the whole model indicates a good fit with the data. We had the figures as Cmin: 3282,24 with the Df: 635 that lead to Cmin/Df ratio of 5.16. Chi-square indices are just above the acceptable range ($n=5$), not within the good fit range, that is because Chi-square are sensitive to sample size and our sample size ($n=1256$) is greater than the recommended maximum level (Bayram, 2016). To realize this proposition we had run the CFA with randomly selected 300 sub-groups, and Cmin/df indices fell below the 3 level. Therefore it does not raise a concern for our data. We had a GFI figures as 0.875 and AGFI figures as 0.854, which are just below the acceptable minimum level. We had the comparative fit index as 0.911 which is again above the acceptable minimum point. The root mean square error of approximation is found as 0.054 for our data, which is again below the 0.08 level as supposed in the literature. ($\chi^2/df=5.16$ GFI=0.875, CFI=0.911, RMSA=0,054)

Results of Hypothesis Testing

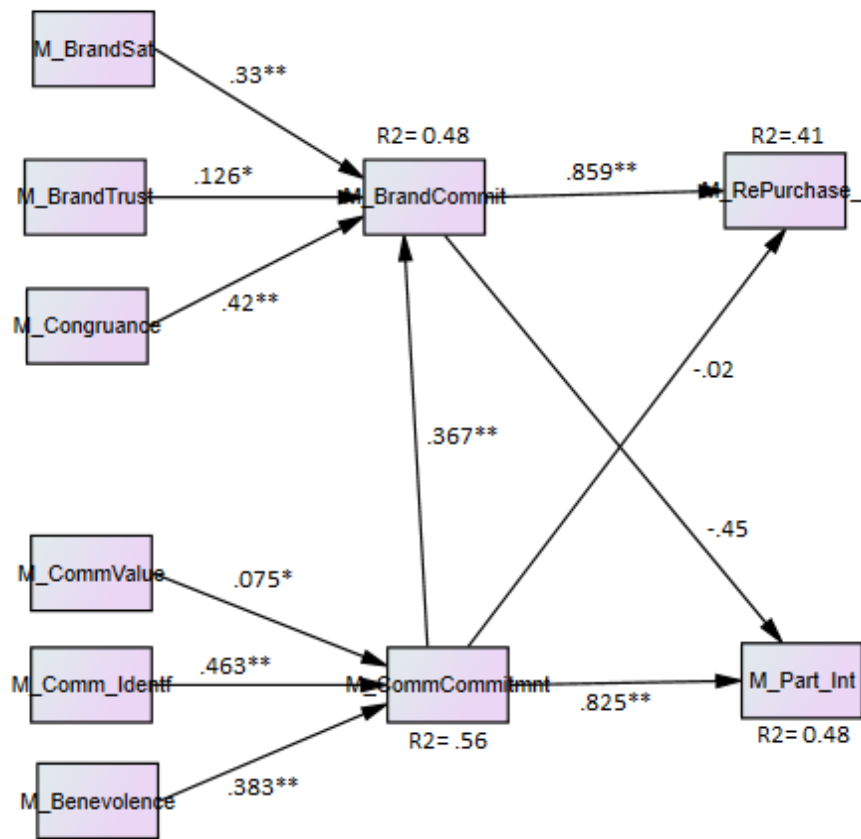


Figure 4-7 Path Analysis (*: <0.05, **: <0.001)

According to our analysis antecedent factors of both brand commitment and community commitment were found to have a significant effect on the respective commitments. Community identification ($\beta=0.46$, $p<0.01$) and perceived benevolence ($\beta=0.39$, $p<0.01$) are found to have a moderate positive effect on the community commitment. Whereas perceived community value has a weak ($\beta=0.08$, $p=0.03$) positive relationship with the OBC commitment.

On the brand commitment side brand satisfaction ($\beta=0.33$, $p<0.001$) and self-brand congruence ($\beta=0.46$, $p<0.001$) had moderate positive effect on the brand commitment and brand trust ($\beta=0.13$, $p=0.05$) had a weak positive effect on the brand commitment.

On the outcomes of commitments side, commitment to community had a strong positive effect on community participation intention ($\beta=0.83$, $p<0.001$) as expected. However direct effect of community commitment on re-purchase intention were found slightly negative however it was not statistically significant ($\beta=-0.02$, $p=0.36$). We also proposed a positive effect of community commitment on brand commitment and that effect was also found significant ($\beta=0.367$, $p<0.001$). Brand commitment had a strong positive effect on re-purchase intention ($\beta=0.86$, $p<0.001$) as expected,

however it had again slightly negative but statistically not significant effect on the community participation intention ($\beta=-0.045$, $p=0.091$). In summary the relationships within the brand realm and the community realm were found strongly significant, however on their outcomes the cross effects, effect of brand commitment on community participation intention and effect of community commitment on re-purchase intention were not found significant.

To validate the structural model and to gain more insight from our data we also tested the cross relationships between brand and community domains, that are the effects of antecedents of community commitment on brand commitment and antecedents of brand commitment on community commitment. We observed that except for community value $\rightarrow$ brand commitment ($\beta=0.176$, $p<0.001$) link, five other links were not found significant. These findings positively contributed to validity assumption of both measurement model and proposed structural model of the study.

Table 4-13Hypothesis Test Results(*: <0.05 , **: <0.001)

	Path	Coefficient	Supported
H1	Community identification $\rightarrow$ community commitment	0,463**	Yes
H2	Perceived community value $\rightarrow$ community commitment	0,075*	Yes
H3	Perceived benevolence $\rightarrow$ community commitment	0,383**	Yes
H4	Brand trust $\rightarrow$ the brand commitment	0,126*	Yes
H5	Brand satisfaction $\rightarrow$ brand commitment.	0,33**	Yes
H6	Self-brand congruence $\rightarrow$ brand commitment.	0,42**	Yes
H7	Community commitment $\rightarrow$ brand commitment	0,367**	Yes
H8	Community commitment $\rightarrow$ re-purchase intention	-0,02	No
H9	Community commitment $\rightarrow$ community participation intention	0,825**	Yes
H10	Brand commitment $\rightarrow$ re-purchase intention	0,859**	Yes
H11	Brand commitment $\rightarrow$ community participation intention	-0,045	No

Moreover the squared multiple correlations for the dependent variables (R^2) are presented in the table below, which were shown in the path analysis figure as well. The R^2 scores ranges from 0 to 1, illustrates how well a regression line estimates the real data point, thus it is an indication of the extent to which the model predicts the real trend (Hair et al., 2014) as it gets closer to 1. Our model was able to explain 48% of the variation in customers re-purchase intention from the brand and 41% of the variation in community participation intention. The R^2 ratios for brand commitment and community commitment are found to be .48 and .56 respectively. Therefore we can conclude that our research model have a high explanatory power in predicting the real trend in community-brand relationships. The table below indicates the R^2 ratios for dependent variables in the research model.

Table 4-14 Proportion of variance explained by the model

Dependent Variable	R ²
Brand Commitment	0.48
OBC Commitment	0.56
Re-purchase intention	0.48
Participation intention	0.41

Testing the Mediation Effects

In the proposed research model we have a mediating relationship, that is brand commitment mediates the link between community commitment and re-purchase intention. Based on our analysis with the data, community commitment did not have a significant direct effect on the re-purchase intention; however it has a positive effect on brand commitment ($\beta=0.367$, $p<0.001$) and brand commitment has a strong positive effect on re-purchase intention ($\beta=0.86$, $p<0.001$). Therefore the effect of community commitment on re-purchase intention had a positive indirect effect with $\beta=0.310$, $p<0.001$ and a total effect with $\beta=0.208$, $p<0.001$. Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediating criteria we reach out the conclusion that in our proposed model the construct of brand commitment fully mediates the relationship between community commitment and re-purchase intention.

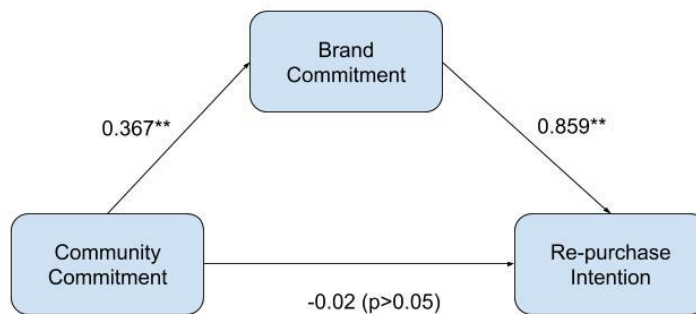


Figure 4-8 Community Commitment - Re-Purchase Intention Mediating Effect (** $p<0.01$)

Moreover, based on our research context and relevant literature we have built our research model which proposes full mediation of community commitment and brand commitment between the antecedent factors and outcome variables. However to assess the strength and credibility of our model and also to drive more insight from our data we tested an alternative model where antecedent factors directly linked to outcome variables. The alternative model showed relatively weak but still valid fit with the data ($\chi^2/df=5,90$, $p<0.001$; CFI=0.883; NFI=0.862; GFI=0.852; and RMSEA=0.063). However the alternative model showed less parsimony, that the paths between the constructs in our original model had 9 out of 11 relations (82%

significance), however the alternative model had 11 out of 17 paths (64% significance). Therefore we conclude that commitment to brand and commitment to community mediates the relationship between the antecedent factors and outcome variables and the original model with the full mediation shows a better fit with the data than that of the non-mediated alternative.



4.3 Phase Two: Qualitative Analysis

The methodology used in this dissertation was a mixed method study as we described in the beginning of this chapter. Among the mix method research designs our study employed ‘explanatory sequential design’ in which the main focus of the scholar enquiry is on the quantitative part and qualitative data is collected after the quantitative analysis to help explain or elaborate on the findings from the quantitative analysis. We introduce the quantitative part of the study in the previous section, now this part is dedicated to the ethnographic analysis of the online brand community that this research dealt with as the target population of the study.

4.3.1 Rationale for the Qualitative Analysis

In quantitative research the research problem is mostly aimed at explaining a trend in the field or explaining why something occurs in the research domain and it provides quantitative figures about the target population of the study. It is mainly used for conforming pre-defined hypothesis. Whereas qualitative research is conducted for developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). It does not have pre-defined variables to study and the literature provides little information about the subject matter; rather the researcher explores the knowledge through the investigation process. In that sense while the quantitative analysis is explanatory, qualitative analysis is regarded as exploratory by its nature.

The first phase, quantitative part of the study examined how the two objects of commitments, commitment to the brand and commitment to the online community are both generated and lead to the certain business objectives. However we admit that there are more to explore in the community brand interaction particularly for our research context. Therefore we defined the research questions of the qualitative part in line with the overall research aim of the study and determined them based on the issues that the quantitative analysis did not cover or could not clarify. For instance though quantitative part provided us about the main causal relationships between the attitudes of customers, we are still unaware about the real nature of relationship in B2C and C2C interactions. Moreover exploring the causal link between customers’ believes and their attitudes through their own expression provide us a greater confidence about the hypothesis and provide deeper insights about the attitudinal mechanisms of customers. Therefore we defined the research questions for the qualitative part with the aim of exploring the nature of the community itself and nature of interactions within the community and community-brand reciprocity in the minds of customers.

The qualitative part of the study is aimed to explore three main questions. Firstly since the focal community operates on two distinct identities it is important to understand the brand-community proximity in the minds of members, that is to what extent they are confluent in the minds of both brand managers and customers. Secondly we will try to explore the nature of interaction both for B2C and C2C in the community and understand the main drivers of users’ participation in the community. Lastly we will try to understand the effect of community participation on the users’ attitudes toward the brand. These questions would increase our insights about the focal community and when combined with the findings from the quantitative part a more complete picture of the subject matter would be drawn.

4.3.2 The Netnographic Approach

Ethnography is a major method in anthropology which denotes the investigation of behavior of the people in their social environment in a naturalistic way. Ethnography involves the investigation of individual cultures within their own setting by observing people's cultural behavior within the community and their own interpretations for those behaviors¹.

Netnography, coined by Kozinets, then is defined as ethnography adopted to the online environment (Kozinets, 2002). It is an unobtrusive, naturalistic method of inquiry conducted for the investigation of online communities (Kozinets, 2002). Its novelty lies in the view that online world is a social and cultural world and interactions within the online community can be understood using cultural frame of reference (Kozinets, 2012). It is faster, simpler and less expensive than the traditional ethnography, because it is easier to access the internet space where the online communities are situated in.

Netnography enables to collect information about a particular culture without the need for observer's active participation in the community. The collection of data as non-participant observation is more advantageous than the traditional ethnographic observation where the researcher actively collect data through interviews and observation within a social context; this is because when analyzing a particular social context, a community, people would not be natural when they realize an observation. However in non-participant observation of an online community one can analyze the members' in-group behaviors without their awareness of the observant, and therefore it would be more likely to observe their indigenous behavior than the traditional ethnographic methods. For this reason it is reported that non-participant observation is the most preferred method in netnographic studies (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017).

In this study we collect data from the Facebook community page of the brand community. The community has its own online platform and it also communicates and synchronizes their messages through some social media sites namely Twitter, Instagram and Facebook as well. We have chosen to collect data from the Facebook page since it is reported that 79 percent of social media log-ins by online retailers are with Facebook and more than 50 percent of adult social networkers follow a particular brand through Facebook (Sloan, Bodey, & Gyrð-Jones, 2015).

The Facebook page of the community has been opened in 2017 and by April 2019 it has about 10 thousand members. It works mainly as a communication channel for the community owners, which are the managers of the host retail firm since it is a firm-hosted online brand community.

Adopted from the ethnographic method, the netnography involves a three-stage process: the cultural entrée to establish oneself as an insider of the community, the collection of data and subsequent analysis of customer-to-customer communication (Kozinets, 2002). We will present the stages of the netnographic enquiry in the upcoming sections.

¹ Obtained from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnography> in 01.10.2020

4.3.2.1 Entrée and Data Collection Phases

The Facebook page of the community is a freely accessible account for everyone and subscription to the page does not require any permission by the account holder. Posts and responses for the posts are publicly available even for the non-members. We subscribe to the community's Facebook page and had a general information about the posts and the reactions of the members.

It is observed that all of the posts were from the community managers, therefore the community page works as a communication channel for the retail firm. Keeping in mind that the Facebook page is not the primary communication channel for the community, having only firm initiated posts is not regarded as a favorable state for a community, because the best examples of the OBC are those members freely share their opinions and experiences. It is stated that the community must be for the customers not for the firms, meaning that firms should not utilize the community page as a broadcast channel, rather they should foster customers' voluntary participation of customers (S. Fournier & Lee, 2009). However it is reported that nearly all brands fall short in this criteria that they used their social media account as broadcasting channel rather than a channel to listen the customers (Lithium Technologies, 2017).

We used crawling software to download posts and comments for further analysis. We downloaded all posts and first 25 comments for each posts for the period between April 2018 – November 2019 (One and a half year) period. We had 24 post and about 600 comments for the posts for analysis. Having only the first 25 comments for each post was a limitation put by the crawling software, for additional data we were able to manually locate and collect the comments for each of the posts. However number of total comments was found to be adequate for our analysis. In qualitative studies collection of data should continue until the knowledge you drive gets 'mature' when it starts to repeat itself rather than creating new knowledge. In our study we found it to be adequate from the data we collected and additional information did not contribute to our main insights about the subject matter.

4.3.3 Data Analysis

In analyzing the text data we firstly employed an inductive coding and open coding approach to fully grasp the nature of the community and the interactions within. Open coding process involved reading through the data and grouping the statements based on their relation to emerging concepts. From that on we derived our first order codes. Then axial coding was employed to review and examine coded groups through and iterative way. Than ideas and themes were organized to identify the key concepts (Meek, Ogilvie, Lambert, & Ryan, 2019). Later selective coding with deductive approach was applied to drive answers for our research questions.

We analyzed the posts and the comments separately for two reasons. First the posts were directly from the host firm and the comments were from the customers and this lead to a major distinction in the nature and content of the messages. Secondly comments and the posts did not form a unity in majority of the posts, because members most of the time used the Facebook page as a mean to deliver their messages to the firm managers.

Main Findings

When we analyze the posts we see that majority of them are for informing the members about certain events, e.g. a meeting, an expert talk online. The meetings are of two kinds, either an informatory gathering directed towards certain issues, (e.g. child caring) with an experts supervision, and secondly a more intimate meeting just for realizing the community spirit. The latter are mostly in the local form e.g. “We are meeting in”. There are also themes for the local meetings directed towards amateur crafts for housewives as well e.g. learning knitting together.

Since the primary target of the community are women and among them the majority of them are the housewives, posts are directed towards the issues for them. They are about children education, fitness and wellbeing in life, fashion etc.

The second group of posts is the ones about informing the members about the incentives, bonuses and promotions. It is aimed to increase the customers’ engagement both with the community and the retail brand itself. The third group of posts is the product suggestions group, which favors a certain product for the members. This group of posts also indicates that the community and the retail brand are strictly related. There were only two posts that collects responses from the customers, other posts were directly informative and did not require any response.

In summary we observe at the beginning the social media page of the community was used mainly by the company as an information channel and lack the community spirit to a certain extent. However the community managers have tried to transform the community interaction from one-way broadcasting channel to relatively more inclusive state as the time progressed till the recent times. Secondly the need for community building activities has been realized in the course of time; therefore later posts are more focused on the creation of community identity.

Analysis of Comments

We initially had around 600 comments for the posts displayed on the community’s Facebook account page. We have analyzed the comments firstly by open coding, inductive method to fully grasp the general picture of members’ reaction.

From the first order codes we see that nearly all of the comments are directed towards the brand, rather than members’ communication with each other. This is again a weak point in the aim of building a self-autonomous community that each member freely interact with each other. However reports demonstrate that indeed majority of the communities fall short in this aim (Lithium Technologies, 2017). By the way this state does not mean that there is lack of community spirit, rather we can infer that members’ interaction within the Facebook page are mainly in the C2B, rather than the C2C form.

Majority of the comments, about 70% of them, are about technical problems regarding the bonus reward system of the web platform. In the main community web platform there are daily, weekly, monthly aims, e.g. responding to a survey, sharing a post etc. and those activities are awarded by monetary bonuses. So the majority of

the responses were in the form of members' complaining about a system problem. Members used the Facebook page as a mean to inform community managers about their malfunction experiences. Since having a technical difficulty or not gaining the promised awards may cause disappointment and resentment it is highly expected to raise their voices for company managers to be heard.

We go deep into these complaining messages for technical problems and categorize them as their resentment level, and observed that most of them kindly showed a disappointment and minority feel very angry about the problem and showed great rage. This can be an indication that members have a positive attitude toward the community. The technical problems were mostly seen in the earlier phases, they seem to resolve most of the problems in the later periods.

Other comments, non-complain comments, are mostly seen as positive affiliation toward both the brand and the community. This group can be categorized as positive reaction for the posts and replying the questions asked by the posts. The first group constitutes showing positive emotions through words and emoji's. In the second group members describe their affective feelings toward both the brand and the community, and expressed their earning through group membership. From those messages we can grasp their attitudes towards the community and brand, and estimate the interrelations between them.

The comments that members describe their feelings toward the community and the brand are critical for our main investigation. In the posts the managers asked the members to express their earnings through the community participation. The messages indicate that they satisfy their social and informational need and they gain economic benefits as well. Economic benefits come forward among others however there are sincere opinions about that express their attachment to the community and the brand.

4.3.4 Thematic Coding (Answers to Research Questions)

In this section we will integrate both the axial codes and the codes appeared in the thematic reading of the comments, through the lenses that our research questions frame.

Q1: Community-Brand proximity: To what extent they are confluent in the minds of both brand managers and customers. This question is critical for our study since the research aim of this study was to understand the effect of two commitments on a new type of online brand community, which is the OBC has a distinct collective value while still having a common brand affiliation. In this type of OBC we need to be sure about the brand-community proximity because otherwise this new type of community would not be an online brand community rather merely an online community. Therefore it is vital to be stick to the very definition of OBC otherwise our investigations would be invalid.

We observe that brand and the community are strictly bounded in the perception of both managers and customers. We already knew that the membership to the community requires loyalty program subscription pertaining to the focal firm. Moreover the monetary awards gained through the community participation can be

cashed in the retail stores of the brand. However in this study we examine whether the distinction exist or not in the perception of customers through their own expressions. In the description of the community page the community is defined as:

“The Community; fikir yürüten, düşünen, tavsiye vermekten ve dinlemekten hoşlanan The Brand ’un sıkı takipçisi olan kadınlardır.

Kısacası The Community, The Brand ’a fikirleri ile ilham veren kadınların buluşma noktasıdır.”

As seen in the expression, the members are defined as the ‘strict follower’ of the brand. Also in the expression of members they show their affiliation both for the brand and the community together:

“The Community üyesi olmak çok güzel bir sorumluluk teşekkürler The Brand.”

“Neler neler kazanmadık ki. Para lar, damak çikolatalar. İndirimler. Teşekkürler The Brand. Teşekkürler The Community. Sayenizde alışverişi eğlenceye dönüştürdük.”

Therefore we conclude that the community and the brand are closely related and it is aimed from the community that members come together with dual identity, both the brand affiliation and the shared value of the community, which is being volunteering for a better future.

Q2: The second research question, the nature of communication within the community is described in the first order of codes in the previous part. Since it was relatively the most apparent quality of the community, we included our observations in that part of the study. In summary we observed that the community interactions are mostly in the B2C form and C2C interaction is lacking in the community. Members used the Facebook community page mostly to inform the firm about their systematic problems regarding the monetary award system. However members also showed strong affiliation towards the community and the brand. Therefore we can conclude that members’ participation in the community mostly driven by economic reasons, however they also show sympathy towards the community as a social entity.

Q3: Does the community participation foster commitment of the customers to both the community and the brand?

By analyzing members’ responses to the posts, we tried to investigate their attitude toward the brand and the community. We observed that the main drive for community participation is the economic benefits accrued through monetary reward system of the platform. This statement is evident through their answers in response to their earnings thought the interaction with the community. Majority of them mentioned about their physical, material gains. Moreover most of the overall messages were about the technical challenge regarding the monetary award system of the platform.

On the other hand there are significant percentage of messages show very strong positive emotions towards the brand, which is an indication of an affective bond to the community and the brand.

*The Community member olmak çok güzel bir sorumluluk
teşekkürler The Brand*

*Yüzlerce liralık alışveriş indirimi , bir çok hediye ve paha biçilmez
bir The Community ailesi kazandım □ The Community hepimize
çok iyi geldi*

*Sadece sihirli puan değil kendime çocuğuma ve eğitim anlamın da
çok katkıda bulundu iyi varsın The Community*

In these messages they also expressed their social and informational gains through the community participation and they show their sympathy toward the community and the brand as a result of their gains, and while doing so they use a sincere tone in their expressions. Therefore we can conclude that even though the primary motive is the economic gains through monetary awards within the community, even for them, their attitude toward the brand is affirmative. Having a material gain does not refrain one to develop an affective bond to the source of the benefit, but rather can reinforce it.

We can conclude that the community is not a self-autonomous, voluntary initiative of the customers, rather it is firm initiated community driven by monetary awards. However it created some sort of ‘we-ness’, a social identity that fosters its members’ positive attitude towards the brand. At least for all members it increases the customer engagement with the brand which yields to brand loyalty of customers which then leads to increased loyalty behavior of the customers, more purchases from the stores, more brand favoring in social circles.

CHAPTER 5.

DISCUSSION

In this part of the study we will elaborate on the findings from both the quantitative statistical analysis and qualitative ethnographic analysis described in the previous chapter. We will try to gain more insights from the findings both by reflecting on them and by comparing them with the similar empirical studies in the literature.

Overview of the Study

The concept of online brand communities has appeared as a major trend in the business domain. There has almost been a unanimous realization of its importance by business owners and a heavy majority of firms attempted to build such a social environment for their customers in order to both gain their loyalty to the firm and drive their ideas about the firm and its products. We observed that some of the brand communities are not directly built upon the common ground of the brand ownership as opposed to heavy majority of mainstream brand communities; rather they are organized as a shared value still having the strong brand connection. Then we wanted to investigate how the relational mechanism works in those communities, that is how the two objects of commitment, brand commitment and community commitment are generated and lead to main business objectives.

Previous chapter introduced the process of data collection from members of the online brand community pertaining to a retail firm operates in Turkey. We also presented our main analysis based on the statistical techniques operated on the quantitative data we have collected. We then provided our preliminary findings from the test of our proposed structural model. Lastly we introduced our qualitative analysis based on the data from the social media account of the OBC at hand. In this chapter of the dissertation we discuss the main findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analysis and relate it with the extant literature.

In the upcoming sections we will mostly mention about the brand realm and community realm in our discussion of the research findings. From brand realm we refer to the brand commitment with its antecedents, brand trust, brand satisfaction and self-brand congruity, together with re-purchase intention as the immediate and necessary outcome of brand commitment. Whereas from the community realm we mean the brand community commitment with its antecedents, community identification, perceived community value and perceived benevolence, together with the community participation intention as the direct outcome of community commitment. In summary re-purchase intention from the brand was positioned in the brand realm with brand commitment, community participation intention outcome

was positioned within the community realm with the community commitment and its antecedents.

The second point about the wording of our constructs in discussion is that we use the antecedent and outcome variables frequently. To make it clear, we mean the precursor factors of brand commitment and community commitment from antecedent factors, whereas we mean re-purchase intention and community participation intention from the outcome variables.

In this study we also proposed a new typology of online brand community to the literature, which is the online brand community that is built upon two relatively distinct uniting experiences: shared brand affiliation and the community value itself. Through our qualitative analysis we observed that it is possible to operate on two distinct identities without having a dichotomy in the minds of members, because we observed through their expressions that members could generate two distinct identifications with both of the object simultaneously without intermingling them.

As an overview of our findings we found out that the antecedent factors for each commitment, brand and community commitment positively contributed to their respective commitments. On the outcomes of the commitment part commitments also contributed to their respective outcome: brand commitment to re-purchase intention and community commitment to community participation intention. However their cross effect, that is between community realm and brand realm effects were not validated. Now we will discuss our findings in more detail under three categories: antecedents of brand commitment, antecedents of brand community commitment and lastly the outcomes of commitments.

5.1 Drivers of Brand Commitment

In our hypothesized structural model we defined three attitudinal antecedents for brand commitment: brand trust, brand satisfaction and self-brand congruity. This part of the study show a high similarity with (G. Wang, 2002)'s study, where he investigated the effect of the same three construct on brand commitment in car, jeans and television brands. Therefore we will refer to his study frequently in the discussion.

By brand commitment we meant the customers' desire to maintain a long-term relationship with the brand and the antecedents were among the attitudinal factors that defines customers' attitude towards the brand offerings.

Brand satisfaction and self-brand congruence had a moderate positive effect on the brand commitment, with R^2 values as 0.33 and 0.42 respectively. However brand trust had a weak positive effect (.126) on the brand commitment. The positive effects of all three antecedents were found to be statistically significant.

Brand satisfaction is defined as the outcome of the subjective evaluation that the performance of the brand meets or exceeds expectations (Bloemer, J. M., & Kasper, 1995). Therefore it is more of a utilitarian factor in explaining person-brand relationship. We found out that customers' satisfaction with the brand has a moderate positive effect ($R^2 = 0.33$) on their commitment to the brand. This confirms our

proposal that utilitarian values play a critical role in determining long term loyalty of customers in the retailing industry. In the qualitative part of our study we also locate comments of customers that signify their brand affection as a result of their satisfaction with the brand's products and services.

Self-brand congruence denotes the perceived closeness between customers' self-image and symbolic image of the brand (K. Z. K. Zhang et al., 2016) in this study. It is therefore a symbolic and self-expressive value that customers attach to brands. In our study we found the self-brand congruence as the strongest predictor of brand commitment, with a coefficient value of 0.42. This can be attributed to the fact that commitment in general is derived more from affective factors than economic and utilitarian factors. Wang's study (2002) also found out the brand-person fit as the strongest and valid in all three samples.

Brand trust was found to be weakly effective on the brand commitment ($R^2 = 0.126$) in our analysis. Our finding is in parallel with Wang's (2002) study, he also found the brand trust as the weakest link between antecedents and brand commitment. This may be due to the fact that trust is a necessary and basic condition for a relationship to exist and be maintained. Therefore it is a common ground for a relationship, however in explaining the sustained affective bond between the two party it loses its effect, and this could be so especially in the retailing industry. Peeroo et al.'s (2017) study on Facebook comments of two retail firm indicates that in retailing sector, especially in grocery stores, trust is the very fundamental criterion for the relationship, therefore it does not satisfy to be a mere precursor for brand commitment.

5.2 Drivers of Community Commitment

As the second object of commitment in our study, online brand community commitment was defined as a sense of emotional involvement with the online community, which is characterized by identification with, involvement in and emotional attachment to the community (Lili Liu et al., 2014). Studying the drivers of community commitment have proven to be vital since in the online environment it is hard to retain visitors, and drive their attention to be involved in the community.

It appeared in our analysis that among the antecedents of OBC commitment, community identification ($\beta = 0.46$) and perceived benevolence ($\beta = 0.39$) are found to have a moderate positive effect on the community commitment. Whereas perceived community value has a weak ($\beta = 0.08$) positive relationship with the OBC commitment.

Community identification and perceived benevolence appeared to have significant effect on the community commitment, which is in line with what we found in the brand realm. Because if we group community identification with the self-brand congruity and perceived benevolence with the brand satisfaction, while the former couple are two forms of self-extension the latter couple can be regarded as the precondition for utilitarian benefits. Therefore we can assert that both the identification motive and utilitarian motive played role in having a committed relationship with the respective partner.

Community identification is the feeling that member regards himself/herself as a part of the community and feel attachment to its member. Therefore it was expected to be strong indicator of an affective bond with the community as a whole. Our findings are in line with the studies in the literature (Carlson et al., 2008; Demiray & Burnaz, 2019; Zhou et al., 2012), that confirmed a strong positive effect of community identification on the members' commitment to the online brand community.

As an indication of utilitarian motives, members' perception of benevolence within the community has found to be a facilitator of their commitment to the online brand community. Social exchange theory states that peoples' interactions with others can be understood as exchange of benefits. Therefore in our case once member perceives other members as being altruistic and helpful he/she develop an affective bond with the community as a whole. Our findings are in line with the findings of other empirical investigations in the literature (X. Hu et al., 2016; J. W. Kim et al., 2008; Qin & Kong, 2015).

Community value on the other hand had relatively weak effect on the community commitment. This can be due to the nature of the community that the community directly unites people around a value, as its name suggest, therefore community value perception might not satisfied the condition to be a distinguishing factor in determining the community commitment. This is evident when we consider the fact that the mean score for perceived community value is relatively high ($m=4.0035$) than that score of other antecedent factors.

5.3 Outcomes of Commitments

In our proposed model the two commitments, community and brand commitment, were supposed to lead to two behavioral outcomes: repurchase intention from the brand and community participation intention. While the former was a utmost business aim for the brand the latter was a necessary precondition for the success of the community. Therefore the outcomes are paired in parallel with commitments as the re-purchase intention is the direct result of brand commitment and community participation intention is the immediate result of community commitment. We also hypothesized the cross relationships between the two realm, and also proposed an effect of community commitment on the brand commitment.

The direct link between the commitments and outcomes have found to be strongly effective, since they had regression coefficient values (R^2) as 0.859 for brand commitment and re-purchase intention link and 0.829 for the community commitment and community participation intention link, both with p values less than 0.01. Therefore we conclude that brand realm and community realm show a high cohesion within themselves.

However the cross effects between community and brand realm were not validated in our statistical analysis. In other words the effect of brand commitment on community participation intention and effect of community commitment on re-purchase intention were not validated, the regression coefficient figures are even slightly negative, while having a p value greater than 0.1.

We found similar pattern, which is having relatively weak cross effect between brand and community domain in the literature as well. Demiray and Burnaz (2019) found out that the effect of brand community commitment on WOM intention is far greater than its effect on purchase intention from the brand. Similarly (Wiertz & De Ruyter, 2007)'s study did not find commitment to the host firm to be effective on knowledge contribution in the community. Two studies also could not statistically validate the effect of community commitment on re-purchase intention (C. Cheung et al., 2012; Raïes et al., 2015).

The point that the cross-links between the commitments and outcomes of the two realm are not statistically validated can be interpreted as follows: though they have a common ground on the practical sense, as an object of interaction they may have distinct existence in the mind of people. People can raise different belief and attitude for each of them, since they are distinct phenomenon. Therefore since the commitment is an attitudinal factor, it may lead to behavioral outcomes directly in their realm, however they did not lead to behavioral change in the other domain directly.

On the outcomes part, the cross effect between brand domain and community domain were not statistically proved, however we had also proposed a positive effect of OBC commitment on the brand commitment as well, and the hypothesis was statistically approved by having regression coefficient of 0.367 with a p value less than 0.01. Therefore in our study we proved that the affective bond with the community can lead to again an affective bond to the brand in the attitudes of customers. However the reverse link, the effect of brand commitment on the community commitment was not statistically validated.

The point that community commitment affects positively the brand commitment and the reverse does not come true makes sense when the cognitive processes are considered in the minds of people, brand in itself has its own conceptual existence in the mind and it does not necessarily lead to an attitude to a secondary entity. However the brand community by its ontological state does not have a distinct existence, rather it is a dependent and secondary entity, comes after the brand in the minds of people. This is so in practical terms as well, that is not all brand customers are community members, whereas all community members are actual customers of the focal brand. Thirdly in terms of managerial aspect, community is a mean to drive the customer loyalty, therefore the direction of effect should be considered from the community to the brand. For this reason we only propose one way effect, which is from community commitment to the brand commitment only. And results have also shown that the effect is only one way in reality as well.

To be more confident about the proposed research model we also tested the antecedent factors and their effects on the opposing commitment, and those links were also were not validated statistically. Therefore together with the fact that cross effect in the outcomes part were not proven statistically we can deduce that the two realm, community realm and the brand realm operates relatively distinct both for antecedent and outcome variables.

We could not validate the direct effect of community commitment on re-purchase intention, however through the mediation of brand commitment it had an indirect effect on the re-purchase intention. Community commitment had a positive indirect effect with $\beta=0.310$, $p<0.001$ and a total effect with $\beta=0.208$, $p<0.001$ on the re-purchase intention explained in the analysis part. This can be interpreted as follows; the affective bond with the community as an attitudinal factor did not directly yield to behavioral outcomes pertaining to brand, rather it engendered again an emotional bond with an associated partner, the host firm in our context and eventually it leads to re-purchase intention as the ultimate outcome. Therefore we can assert that even though as an investment, building and maintaining a brand community might not directly lead to an increase in sales, however it would increase the long term loyalty of existing customers and will eventually affect sales in the long run in an affirmative way.

From the comments of community members on Facebook page we understand that the reward mechanism play a significant role in community participation. In line with (Jang et al., 2008), where they found that in company initiated online brand communities reward mechanism plays a significant role, therefore the system quality plays a more critical role than that of customer initiated OBCs. That is why majority of the comments were about complains regarding the technical problem in the reward mechanism.

Comments of the members also indicated that community building activities, e.g. local meetings, expert talks etc. are favored by the members and help to build a sense of belonging. Therefore while the primary motivation appears to be the economic benefits, social and informative benefits also play role in shaping the attitudes of members toward the community and the brand.

Comments on the social media accounts of the community have revealed that members' main drive in participating within the community is the economic benefits. However there are sincere comments of members that show their affiliation to the community and the brand. As an example of these comments: "*The Community* sayesinde hem çok güzel faydalı bilgiler edindim hemde *para* puanlarla rahatça alışveriş yaptım :) Teşekkürler *The Community* Bu ailede olmaktan çok mutluyum". These posts also indicates that community participation does create a sense of group identity and it ultimately reinforces their affective bond to the brand. Therefore community participation both increases the engagement of the customers with the brand, which yields to more purchase decisions from the brand and also it fosters affective long term loyalty to the brand which again serves to the long term strategic aims of the brand.

We reach out the conclusion from the comments that their participation in the community, together with the reward mechanism increased their brand engagement and brand commitment at the end. (Kamboj & Rahman, 2016) also found out that active participation of brand community members in the community increases their commitment to the focal brand. Therefore the overall conclusive comment would be that as a business investment, building and successfully managing an online brand community, would lead to certain business benefits, both by increasing the engagement of customers with the brand affairs, and by strengthening the affective

ties of customers to the brand, which would lead to customer loyalty and increased sales figures in the long run.





CHAPTER 6.

CONCLUSION

This chapter will introduce the concluding remarks of the study by summarizing the research procedure, analysis and insight we drive from the data analysis. Later we will introduce the implications of the study results both for academics and for business managers. Lastly we will describe the limitations of the study.

6.1 Summary of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the attitudinal mechanisms within the relational context of the online brand community interaction. Commitment is the desire of people to continue a relationship with a partner. We observed that there are two objects of commitment play role in the OBC interaction: commitment to the community itself and commitment to the focal brand.

In this study we also propose a new category of OBC, “dual identity OBC” where the community is not directly built upon the shared brand affiliation rather it is built upon a common value distinct from the brand itself. Therefore we anticipated that brand and the community ought to have separate uniting effects on its members.

Thus to understand this duality of uniting experience in the new type of OBCs we intended to examine commitment factor for each of the objects. While analyzing the drivers of brand commitment and community commitment we intended to investigate their unique antecedents to understand their unique drives within the relational context. We determined the antecedent factors both by searching the extant literature and by considering the online brand community chosen as the target population for this study. We proposed brand trust, brand satisfaction and self-brand congruity as the antecedents of brand commitment, and community identification, perceived community value and perceived benevolence as the drivers of community commitment.

Outcomes of the commitment were determined as the main business objectives especially used in the social commerce literature; re-purchase intention from the brand and community participation intention. While the former is the ultimate goal of any business initiative, the latter is the main precondition for the existence and survival of the community.

Having decided on the hypothesis, we than seek to collect data to test and validate the hypothesis. The main research method of the study is the quantitative data analysis technique which includes complex regression calculations to test the proposed effects among the constructs of the proposed model. The only way to test the latent constructs, constructs that are quantified based on certain number of

question responses, interrelations between these constructs and also to test the overall effectiveness of the whole model is structuring equation modeling technique.

To collect data for the statistical analysis we have chosen the online brand community of a country-wide retail firm operates in Turkey. The community was built upon a common value, at the same time stressing the affiliation for the parent brand, which was perfectly suited for our research aims. The managers from the company collaborated with us to collect data from their online community. Our questionnaire was uploaded on the web platform of the OBC and 1256 final set of responses were collected through the survey system of the web platform.

We test our proposed structural model on the data and tested our hypothesis with version 22 of AMOS software. Results have shown that 9 out of 11 hypothesis were statistically approved. The proposed antecedents of brand commitment and community commitment were found to be effective on their respective commitment.

On the outcomes of the commitment, brand commitment and community commitment contributed to their respective domain very strongly; that is brand commitment contributed to re-purchase intention from the brand and community commitment to community participation intention. However the cross-effects between the community realm and brand realm were not found significant, which indicates that brand and community operates relatively distinctively in terms of their attitudinal and behavioral effects on the customers. However the effect of community commitment on brand commitment was found to be statistically valid. Thus community commitment did not contribute to re-purchase intention directly rather it affected the re-purchase intention through the moderation of brand commitment.

To have a deeper understanding of the community and the nature of relationship within the community we conducted a qualitative analysis on the Facebook account of the focal online brand community. We utilized netnography method to investigate the contextual culture of the community.

From our qualitative analysis we observed that the Facebook page was mostly utilized as a one way communication channel that is the company used it to inform the members about the events and promotions of the brand. There were few posts which required answers from the members. Members also used the page mostly to inform the firm about technical problems in the community platform.

Posts and the comments indicate that the community and brand has intermingled in the minds of both the members and the managers of the firm. Moreover it is observed that the community interaction has increased the brand engagement of the customers. Lastly there are sincere comments which demonstrate that they have an affective affiliation with the community and this affective bond transformed or at least foster their commitment to the retailing firm.

Through the qualitative analysis we also observed that members could generate affiliation and commitment for each of the objects and the two identities were found to be adjacent in the minds of both members and the managers. We saw that

members could generate identifications with both of the entity simultaneously, without interfering each other.

The overall conclusion from our analysis is that community participation increased the brand engagement of the members. Also their commitment to the community led them to have an affective bond to the focal brand. However members' commitment to the community did not affect their purchasing behavior directly, rather it contributed to purchase intention through the moderation of brand commitment.

6.2 Contributions of the Study

We can elaborate on the contribution of the study under two categories based on the addressee of the findings, though this is not a mutually exclusive distinction: its implication for academic circles and practitioners in the business environment.

6.2.1 Implications for Researchers

In this study we characterized a novel category of brand community, 'dual identity OBC' in which the community identity is built upon a distinct common value apart from the brand affiliation, which was regarded as the main glue for brand communities. This new categorization can elaborate our understanding of OBCs by adding a new perspective in analyzing their very nature.

Our findings indicated that community and brand realms have their own attitudinal factors, both as the antecedents and the outcomes. Commitment to each of the entity requires their distinct antecedents, and they hardly contribute to other domain. Whereas commitment to the online community positively affected brand commitment though its effect is relatively weak. On the outcome side we again could not validate a cross effect between the realms, that is the effect of community commitment on re-purchase intention –which is regarded as the outcome in the brand realm–; and brand commitment on the community participation intention was not validated.

Among the antecedents of each commitment, affective and emotional ones have shown greater influence on the commitment than that of the economic and utilitarian ones; it is somehow an expected result since commitment also is an affective disposition and we took the affective form of the commitment as our operational definition of the term. For instance among the antecedents of brand commitment self-brand congruity have shown the greatest effect size than brand satisfaction and brand trust in the sequence of their effect size. Among the antecedents of community commitment members' attitude toward the community as identifying themselves with the community had the maximum influence on the community commitment. This point indicated that identification with and incorporation of the object into one's self concept plays a significant role in building a long-term committed relationship.

The relationship between the two commitments and their effects on the business outcomes indicated that members' interaction with the community and their

commitment to it would lead to again a committed relationship with the brand; but the reverse relationship is not validated in our study. Community commitment did contribute to brand commitment however it is not found directly influential on the future purchase intention as a direct outcome of brand commitment. However the effect of community commitment on the re-purchase intention was accrued through the mediation of the brand commitment.

Further we can assert that a mere quantitative analysis of consumer behavior in online brand communities may not provide a comprehensive picture of the focal social phenomenon. The qualitative analysis we conducted for this study enabled us to have a deeper understanding about the nature of interaction within the community. Therefore we made our conclusions from the quantitative analyzes more concrete by observing them in the expressions of the members in the community.

We observed especially through the qualitative analysis that having a dual identity type of OBC might not cause dispersion in the minds of customers and they could generate affiliation with both of the brand and the community simultaneously though separately. We reached out this conclusion by analyzing the posts and comments of in the community's Facebook account.

6.2.2 Implications for Managers

Our study confirmed the general conviction that OBCs are important drivers of brand loyalty and effective means of customer retention. While it has been proposed as the main source of customer loyalty by the relationship marketing theory, sustaining a long lasting one-to-one personalized relationship with the customer is proven to be costly for firms. OBC would provide the customer to engage with and socialize around the brand instruments, while obtaining what the relationship marketing offers through a more efficient way (M R Habibi et al., 2014). Based on our analysis we can assert that even though OBC investment might not directly yield to increase in sales in advance, it would drive customer loyalty to the firm and ultimately generate additional sales in the long run. However the reverse is not verified in our study that is having a committed relationship with the brand might not lead to participation with the community. Therefore firms should particularly invest on community building and ensure customer participation for its permanence without relying on the brand's equity.

Secondly customer's perception of closeness between their self-image with that of the brand and the community are appeared to be leading drivers of a long term committed relationship with the firm. Therefore firms should build and continuously foster their symbolic image both for the brand and the community and try to make the customer to identify with them.

We found that customers' commitment to the online community would not directly contribute to their future purchase intentions. Therefore an online brand community might not positively affect sales in the short run. However we also found that community commitment may lead to commitment to the brand itself which eventually lead to increase in sales. Therefore community commitment affected the sales positively in the long by increasing customers' emotional bond with the focal brand.

On the other hand brand commitment did not contribute neither to community commitment nor members' participation intention in the community. Therefore managers should consider the performance of the brand community directly with its own dynamics and success factors, since brand affiliation does not directly lead to community engagement in customers.

We also observed through our analysis that retailing sector might have the difficulty in creating a brand image and create and identification through that image so that people would gather around and identify with the brand personality. That might be because of the fact that retailing sector especially the grocery type firms offer a wide range of products and those products mostly addressed daily needs and they are non-enduring; therefore it is hard to drive a stylish experience and a source of identification through their products. Thus retailing sector is the most expected sector to build brand communities in dual identity that is not directly building on the brand or product affiliation, rather on a shared common value.

Therefore the overall conclusive comment would be that as a business investment, building and successfully managing an online brand community, would lead to certain business benefits, both by increasing the engagement of customers with the brand affordances, and by strengthening the affective ties of customers to the brand, which would lead to customer loyalty and increased sales figures in the long run. However if there is a duality nature within the relationship in community engagement, managers should consider community and the brand as having separate entities and invest on each of their equity individually since the interrelations between the two have found relatively weak in our study.

6.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As it is so for any study, this study also is not free from some limitations. Firstly contextual factors should be considered when applying the study results for online brand communities in other industries and cultural context. The study was conducted in an OBC pertaining to a retailing firm in Turkey. Both the brand–community interaction and within the community interactions might show differing qualities for various industries and cultural settings. Indeed this study based its research question on the particular type of online communities, dual identity OBCs, where community and brand have relatively separate uniting effects on its members, which made it more context specific than other studies in the brand community literature.

From this point on we can drive that future studies could study the dual identity nature of the brand communities in other industrial context as well. Similarly a cross-cultural and cross-industry study would help us to understand the contextual effects more effectively.

Moreover we acknowledge that retailing industry is the most expected case for having a dual identity nature for its communities, since it has a wide product range and difficult to generate a brand/product based uniting experience. Therefore to best understand the duality nature of brand and community, scholars should investigate other industries under this perspective.

Lastly there could be further conceptual and qualitative studies to better theorize the dual identity nature of relevant online brand communities by examining the reasoning of company managers in choosing a common value as the glue for the community instead of brand affiliation directly, as much of the brand communities do so.



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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Exploratory Factor Analysis: Factor Loadings Table

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
BrSat1								,750		
BrSat2								,772		
BrSat3								,647		
BrTrst1					,657					
BrTrst2					,707					
BrTrst3					,703					
BrTrst4					,727					
SBC1			,644							
SBC2			,791							
SBC3			,812							
ComVal1							,698			
ComVal2							,741			
ComVal3							,753			
Com_iden1	,574									
Com_iden2	,549									
Com_iden3	,703									
Com_iden4	,744									
Com_iden5	,733									
Com_iden6	,600									
Ben1				,710						
Ben2				,756						
Ben3				,684						
Ben4				,637						
BrCom1										,766
BrCom2										,645
BrCom3										,574
BrCom4						,576				
RPInt1						,678				
RPInt2						,794				
RPInt3						,766				
ComComt1									,532	

ComComt2									,619	
ComComt3									,613	
ComComt4									,569	
ComComt5									,777	
Part_int1		,813								
Part_int2		,787								
Part_int3		,694								

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.



Appendix B: Report of Ethics Committee

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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08 OCAK 2019

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Prof.Dr. Sevgi Özkan YILDIRIM

Danışmanlığını yaptığınız Said ALTINIŞIK'ın "Online Marka Toplulukları'nda başarıya götüren nedir: Markaya bağlılık mı, Topluluğa bağlılık mı?" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay 007-ODTÜ-2019 protokol numarası ile araştırma yapması onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımla bilgilerinize sunarım.

Prof. Dr. Tülin GENÇÖZ

Başkan

Prof. Dr. Ayhan SOL

Üye

Prof. Dr. Ayhan Gürbüz DEMİR (4.)

Üye

Prof. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKÇI

Üye

Doç. Dr. Emre SELÇUK

Üye

Doç. Dr. Pinar KAYGAN

Üye

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ali Emre TURGUT

Üye

APPENDIX C: Survey Questions in the Turkish Form as it is applied in the Community Web Platform

Sanal Marka Toplulukları Araştırması Anket Soruları

Giriş ve Tanıtım Yazısı

Bu çalışma Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, Enformatik Enstitüsü Öğretim Üyelerinden Prof. Dr. Sevgi ÖZKAN YILDIRIM ve Araştırma Görevlisi Said Altınışik tarafından yürütülen bir çalışmadır. Bu çalışmada 'Sanal Marka Toplulukları'nda başarıya götüren faktörler araştırılmaktadır.

Çalışmaya katılım tamamıyla gönüllülük temelindedir.

Ankette, sizden kimlik belirleyici hiçbir bilgi istenmemektedir. Cevaplarınız tamamıyla gizli tutulacak ve sadece araştırmacılar tarafından değerlendirilecektir; elde edilecek bilgiler bilimsel yayımlarda kullanılacaktır.

Anket Soruları (39 Soru)

Brand Satisfaction / (Marka Memnuniyeti Soruları) (3 soru)

<i>The Brand</i> 'tan yaptığım alışverişten ötürü memnunum.
<i>The Brand</i> 'tan yaptığım alışverişimin mantıklı olduğunu düşünüyorum.
Alışveriş kararı verirken kararımı <i>The Brand</i> 'tan yana verdiğim için çok memnun olurum.

Brand trust / Marka Güveni Soruları (4 soru)

<i>The Brand</i> 'un ürün ve hizmetleri hakkında söyledikleri doğrudur
<i>The Brand</i> 'tan neler bekleyeceğimi bildiğimi düşünüyorum
<i>The Brand</i> bence güvenilir bir markadır
<i>The Brand</i> vaatlerini her zaman yerine getirir

Self-Brand Congruance Questions / (Kişi-Marka Eşleşimi soruları) (3 soru)

<i>The Brand</i> 'un benimle benzerlikler taşıdığını düşünüyorum
<i>The Brand</i> 'a kişisel bir bağlılık hissediyorum

The Brand'un kişiliğini yansıttığını düşünüyorum.

Brand Commitment (Marka Bağlılığı) (4 soru)

The Brand'a psikolojik bir bağlılık hissediyorum

The Brand'un her zaman başarılı olmasını istiyorum

The Brand'un ürünlerini kullanmayı önemsiyorum

The Brand'un sadık bir müşterisiyim

Community Value / Topluluk Değeri/Amacı (3 soru)

The Community topluluğu temel amacını net bir şekilde hissettirir.

The Community'nin sitesi topluluğun varoluş gayesini kolaylıkla anlayacak şekilde tasarlanmıştır

The Community kimler için var olduğunu açık bir şekilde ifade eder.

Brand Community Identification (Marka Topluluğu ile kendini tanımlama) (6 soru)

The Community hakkında konuştuğumda genellikle “onlar” yerine “biz” derim.

Kendimi *The Community*'nin bir parçası olarak görüyorum.

The Community'nin başarısı benim başarımdır.

The Community takdir edildiğinde kendim takdir edilmiş gibi hissedirim.

The Community eleştirildiğinde kendimi hakaret edilmiş gibi hissedirim.

Başkalarının *The Community* hakkında ne düşündüklerini çok merak ederim.

Benevolence / Yardımseverlik (4 soru)

The Community üyeleri yaptıkları paylaşımlarda başkalarının iyiliğini düşünürler.

The Community üyeleri yaptıkları paylaşımlarda başkalarının faydalarını göz önünde bulundurlar.

The Community üyeleri bir ürün önerdiklerinde veya herhangi bir ürün bilgisi paylaştıklarında yalan söylemezler.

The Community üyeleri ellerinden geldiğince başkalarına yardım etmek isterler.

Brand Community Commitment (Marka Topluluğuna olan Bağlılık) (5 soru)

The Community topluluğuna bir aidiyet hissediyorum

The Community üyelerine karşı psikolojik bir bağlılık hissediyorum

Diğer üyelerle fikir alışverişinde bulunmak bence önemlidir

The Community'nin faaliyetlerinde her zaman yer almak isterim.

Ben *The Community*'nin aktif paylaşımında bulunan bir üyesiyim

Repurchase intention (Časas et al., 2016) (3 soru)

Mümkün olduğunca *The Brand*'tan alışveriş yapacağım.

Büyük ihtimalle *The Brand*'tan alışveriş yapmaya devam edeceğim.

Gelecekte *The Brand* alışverişlerimi devam ettirmeye niyetliyim.

Community Participation Intention (3 soru)

The Community faaliyetlerine aktif olarak katılacağım

The Community üyeleri için faydalı paylaşımlarda bulunacağım

The Community üyeleri destek veya yardım istediklerinde onlara yardımcı olacağım

CIRRICULUM VITAE

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Education

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BS	Boğaziçi University, Management Dept.	2010
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Work Experience

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