

The Influence of Online Brand Community on Customers: A Case Study of A Multinational Motorcycle Company in Nepal

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Abstract

Online brand community (OBC) played critical role among motorcycle riders in Nepal who were so passionate about motorcycles since it allowed them to share and learn information as well as the experience among the members. The purposes of this study were as follows: 1) to explore the relationship among brand reputation, brand trust, and brand loyalty; and 2) to examine the relationship among OBC engagement, OBC attitude, brand trust, and brand loyalty. This study used a quantitative approach via self-administered questionnaire using the convenience sampling. They were distributed to customers who had accessed to online brand community (OBC) of the selected multinational motorcycle company in Nepal in 2023. The study included 297 respondents. The regression analysis and coefficients showed that product & services dimension ($\beta=.176$) of brand reputation has positive impact on brand trust, while social & environmental responsibility dimension ($\beta=-.259$) of brand reputation has negative impact on brand trust. Furthermore, the study found that OBC engagement ($\beta=-.126$) has negative impact on OBC customer attitude; OBC customer attitude ($\beta=.832$) has positive impact on brand trust; and brand trust ($\beta=.765$) has positive statistically significantly impact on brand loyalty. The findings concluded that the company should focus on improving OBC customer attitude in order to increase brand trust, which also would enhance improvement on brand loyalty, thus, achieve their organizational objectives.

Keywords: Brand reputation, brand trust, OBC engagement, OBC customer attitude, online brand community

Introduction

For businesses to market their products, digital marketing is thought to be a good platform. As a result, the internet has become a way of life for humans, and its use will continue to grow with technological advancement and the passage of time (Odlyzko, 2012). According to a report from the measuring digital development series of statistical and analytical publications, Internet users increased by 10% annually on average between 2005 and 2019 (Doreen, 2019). The Nepal Telecommunications Authority reported the number of internet users of 27.3 million in May 2021 which raised from 21.5 million in May 2020. It means that 90.56 percent of the country's population has internet access (Kathmandu, 2021). However, the data should not be interpreted as an exact figure because many people may have signed up for multiple internet services and can be counted as many people as their subscriptions. According to internet service providers, the increased demand for work from home and online classes as a result of the coronavirus infection fears has resulted in an excessive increase in the number of subscriptions across the country (Kathmandu, 2021).

In 2020, over 3.6 billion people used social media globally and it is projected to increase to nearly 4.41 billion by 2025 (Saied, ElSabagh, & El-Afandy, 2020). Social media applications such as Facebook, YouTube, and others are clearly "overtaking the world" and may be considered a "global consumer phenomenon" (Saied et al., 2020). According to Camilia, Sajoh, & Dalhatu, (2013), if Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest after China and India, and twice the size of the United States. The Rising Nepal (2023) reported that Nepal has over 12.60 million social media users in January 2023 which is accounted for 41 per cent of the total population.

Social media has risen to prominence as a marketing tool that plays an important role in establishing trust and generating brand loyalty as a result of its widespread use. Consumers are hesitant to trust a brand in the internet world because they are afraid of numerous frauds caused by a lack of adequate information and identity in cyberspace. As consumers read about brand community members' experiences with the brand's products through reviews, the brand community in the online world promote the brand in securing trust. Customers, brands, companies, and other consumers can all benefit from the online brand community (OBC), which can help to build brand trust and brand loyalty (Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). Thus, Nepalese motorcycle riders who join the OBC of the motorcycle company or specific

group (s) may strengthen the relationship with the brand as well as its members that shared the same interest.

All marketing mix strategies and brand management decisions, according to Fournier (2014), can be construed as behaviors enacted by the brand. This puts the concepts of brand reputation, OBC engagement, customer attitude toward OBC, brand trust, and brand loyalty, which are the foundation of this study, into proper perspective. Despite the flourishing state of branding research, there are some major flaws in the existing literature. To begin with, the majority of trust research has modelled trust as an outcome, mediator, or moderator variable (El-Naggar & Bendary, 2017). Brand trust has been modelled as the main predictor of brand loyalty in only a few studies. Second, empirical research on brand trust and loyalty has focused disproportionately on the moderating role of brand reputation in the same relationship (Zehra & Arshad, 2019).

Brand reputation, according to Chun (2005) distinguishes, attracts, and encourages both external and internal stakeholders to feel like they belong to the company via an online medium. According to Loureiro, Sarmento, & Le- Bellego (2017) a strong online community brand reputation leads to positive consumer perceptions of current and future products. The initial focus on the importance of strong brand reputations has been expanded to include brand reputations' roles in overall company success (Anisimova, 2013).

Furthermore, a limited number of research explore the influence of OBC in Nepal. The aforementioned gaps are serious flaws in the branding literature. As a result, the current study aims to advance knowledge by examining the effects of brand reputation, OBC engagement, and OBC customer attitude on brand trust and brand loyalty among Nepalese motorcycle riders. Given the emotional attachment that motorcycle owners have to their brands, the importance of brand trust and reputation in determining their brand loyalty cannot be overstated. Although there is a growing body of research on brand reputation and agreement on the benefits of brand trust and loyalty, as well as their importance in establishing a long-term relationship between a company and its customers, there is a scarcity of research on the impact of brand reputations, OBC engagement, and OBC customer attitude on trust and loyalty. This research aims to contribute to the filling of this gap.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the relationship among brand reputation, brand trust, and brand loyalty
2. To examine the relationship among OBC engagement, OBC attitude, brand trust, and brand loyalty.

Literature Reviews

OBC Engagement and Customer Attitude

Online brand community (OBC) engagement is the compelling intrinsic motivations to continue interacting with an online brand community (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Therefore, OBC management is the key for organizations intent on forming and consolidating online customer relations and engagement which is essential to the understanding of OBC dynamics (Kumar & Nayak, 2019). In this light, it is understood that a consumer must have a sufficient level of trust in the brand in order to be willing to co-create value with it; indeed, it is a necessary condition (Tiruwa, Yadav, & Suri, 2016), which in-line also helps lessen perceived risks and opportunistic behavior in interactions, positively impacting supportive behavior among group members in OBC engagement (Barkholz & Rechten, 2012).

Brand Reputation

Base on Martínez-López et al. (2016) appraisal of online brand community, credibility is sometimes used as a major intangible attribute that may be either positive or negative. Maintaining a positive reputation takes tremendous effort. It is hard to heal when it has been injured. Moreover, poor reputation not only degrades the quality of the brand, but also has the capability to develop a challenge for the company (Martínez-López et al., 2016). A good-reputation brand means a good product position; the lower the consumer risk, the lower the cost of gathering information before purchasing (Erdem, Swait, & Louviere, 2002).

Brand Trust

According to Dalziel, Harris, and Laing (2011), brand trust is evaluated from the perspectives of the reasons for reliance on the brand, as well as the brand's capacity and intentions to keep its promises to consumers. To this end, Farid and Hammad (2022) argue that brand trust is the result of previous experiences and interactions, and that it reflects the learning process over time. This position backs up Krishnan's (2006) assertion that the most relevant and important source of brand trust is brand experience. As a result, the primary marketer's goal in building brand relationships is customers who are loyal to the brand (Soong et al., 2011).

Brand Loyalty

Building strong and positive brands generally leads to customer preference for a particular brand, which can induce brand loyalty over time. Loyalty is driven by a strong bond between a customer and a brand (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy, & Pervan, 2011) The loyal customers are likely to be less price sensitive and willing to pay a higher price for a particular brand over other alternatives since they perceive the brand to have unique value (Kim, Choe, & Petrick, 2018) Brand loyalty can also enhance marketing advantages in the form of enhanced word of mouth among brand loyal customers, thus increase profitability (Kim et al., 2018).

Hypotheses development

Brand reputation and brand trust among online customers are highly related. According to Soviar et al. (2019), company attempt to produce consumer perceptions of their reputation in the online world in order to gain brand trust that will enhance a sense of security while using the brand product because social media is very extensive and unlimited marketing strategy tool. Therefore, this study proposed.

H1: Brand reputation has a positive impact on brand trust.

According to Tiruwa et al. (2016) study that showed the impact of online brand communities (OBC) engagement on customers' attitudes. The study findings show that the proposed framework had a good fit, and there was a positive significant impact of the OBC engagement on customers' attitudes. Therefore, this study proposed:

H2: OCB engagement has positive impact on OCB customer attitude.

According to Dheenadhayalan and Sandeep (2020), the social media platform can be used to market brands online and attract customers. According to this study, social media has become a very useful tool in making purchasing decisions. As a result, social media is increasingly influencing and changing the way consumers behave and make decisions about whether or not to trust their online purchases. Therefore, this study proposed:

H3: OBC customer attitude has a positive impact on brand trust.

Brand trust and loyalty have been identified as critical components of brand management. According to Rehman and Shafiq (2019), the findings of their research revealed that there is a mutual relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. Brand trust is perceived as expectations based on beliefs that a brand possesses specific features and traits that are consistent, competent, and credible. Therefore, this study proposed:

H4: Brand trust has a positive impact on brand loyalty.

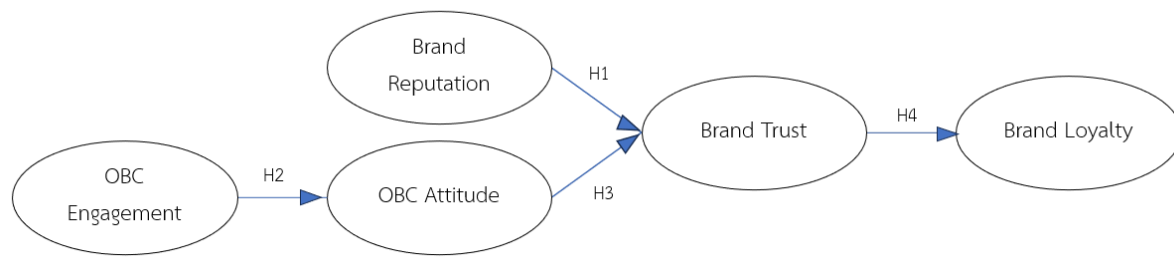


Figure1 Research Model

Methodology

Data collection and sample

One thousand self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the multinational motorcycle company's customers who frequently interact with the company OBC in Nepal. The study employed non-probability sampling approach using convenience sampling technique. Three hundred and eighty-five (377) respondents return the questionnaire. with a response rate of 37.7% However, 80 cases were removed from the analysis due to the validity of the responses, reducing the sample size for the study to two hundred and ninety-seven (297). According to Cochran (1963) in determining the sample size of unknown population number, the minimum sample size with 90% confidence level should be at least 270.6, thus, 297 respondents of the current study exceed the minimum requirement.

The respondents of the study were male (81%) and female (19%). Majority of the respondents (63%) were in the age between 26-40 years old, while 69% of the participants occupations status were employed full time, business owner and employed part time. In term of income, 29% of respondents earned a monthly income between 50,001Rs to 70,000Rs. For their education qualification, 38% of respondents had master degree while 31% of the respondents had bachelor degree. Around 76% of the respondents had been riding motor bike for more than two years and 81% of the respondents visited multinational motorcycle company Facebook fan page/online community for more than once a week.

Measurement items

The measurement items of brand reputation have six dimensions based on Reputation Quotient which were adapted from Chun (2005) includes 20 measurement items such as “XXX induces good feelings about their online services.” The measurement items of OBC

engagement have 11 dimensions adopted from Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2014) with 40 items such as “I am motivated to participate in this brand community because I can help improve the brand and its products”.

OBC customer attitude has 10 measurement items as adopted from Wu and Chen (2005) and Nambisan and Watt (2008) such as “I think following the advice obtained in this online community would be good for me”. Brand Trust has two dimensions with eight items adopted from Flavián, Guinaliú, and Gurrea (2006) and Bearden, Hardesty, and Rose (2001) such as “XXX guarantees satisfaction.” Brand loyalty has four measurement items adopted from Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) such as “I intend to keep purchasing motorcycle from XXX Company.”

Validity and Reliability Test

As shown in table 1, confirmatory factor analysis suggested that the loadings of all measurement items for each construct were above 0.5 except Connect 2 with loadings of 0.494 but it should be kept in the model confirming convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, the composite reliability of variables exceeded 0.7, showing internal consistency for reliability based on Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). All variables have Cronbach’s Alpha value above 0.8 which reflected that all variables have high internal consistency (Brand reputation (0.943), OBC engagement (0.958), OBC customer attitude (0.927), Brand trust (0.812), and Brand loyalty (0.797). Hair, Andersen, and Tatham (2010) asserted that 0.6 is the minimum appropriate standard of Cronbach’s Alpha for every construction to achieve sufficient reliability.

Table 1 Validity and reliability test

	Loadings	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability	Number of Items
Brand Reputation	0.509-0.847	0.943	0.944	17
OBC Engagement	0.494-0.866	0.958	0.958	22
OBC Attitude	0.524-0.850	0.927	0.930	10
Brand Trust	0.565-0.780	0.812	0.825	5
Brand Loyalty	0.679-0.723	0.797	0.796	4

Findings

As shown in table 2, Model 1 of this study used linear regression to test hypothesis 1 which was statistically significant at 95% confidence level as p-value of the model is less than .05. A linear regression indicated that only two dimensions of brand reputation which were “Product & services” and “Social & environmental responsibility” dimensions were statistically significant impact on brand trust ($F(2,294) = 4.215$, p-value = .016). Adjusted R-Square of the model was .021, Hence, the two dimensions of brand reputation accounted for 2.1% of the variability in brand trust. Product & services of brand reputation ($\beta = .169$) has statistically significant positively impact on brand trust at 90% confidence level while Social & environmental responsibility of brand reputation ($\beta = -.266$) statistically significant negatively impact on brand trust at 95% confidence level. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is partially supported.

For hypothesis 2, the linear regression model 2 was statistically significant at 95% confidence level as p-value of the model is less than 0.05. A linear regression indicated that OBC engagement is statistically significantly impact on OBC customer attitude, $F(1,295) = 4.782$, $p=.030$). Adjusted R-Square of the model is 0.013, Hence, OBC engagement accounted for 1.13% of the variability in OBC customer attitude for the Multinational Motorcycle Company. OBC engagement ($\beta = -.126$) negatively statistically significantly impact on OBC customer attitude at 95% confidence level. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is not supported.

For hypothesis 3 the linear regression model 3 was statistically significant at 95% confidence level as p-value of the model is less than 0.05. A linear regression indicated that OBC customer attitude is statistical significantly impact on brand trust, $F(1,295) = 661.862$, $p=.000$). Adjusted R-Square of the model is 0.691, Hence, OBC customer attitude accounted for 69.1% of the variability in brand trust for the Multinational Motorcycle Company. The regression equation was clearly show that OBC customer attitude ($\beta = .884$) statistical significantly impact on brand trust at 95% confidence level. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is supported.

For hypothesis 4 the linear regression model 4 was statistically significant at 95% confidence level as p-value of the model is less than 0.05. A linear regression indicated that Brand trust is statistically significantly impact on brand Loyalty, $F(1,295) = 415.490$, $p=.000$). Adjusted R-Square of the model is 0.583, Hence, Brand trust accounted for 58.3% of the variability in brand loyalty for the Multinational Motorcycle Company. Brand trust ($\beta = .679$)

statistical significantly impact on Brand loyalty is 95% confidence level. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is supported.

Table 2 Result of Regression Analysis

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	β	β	β	β
Brand Reputation				
- Products & services	.176*			
- Social & environmental responsibility	-.259**			
OBC engagement		-.126**		
OBC Attitude			.832***	
Brand Trust				.765***
N	2,294	1,295	1,295	1,295
R ²	.028		.692	.585
Adj. R ²	.021		.691	.583
F	4.215**	4.782**	661.862***	415.490***

Note: *p < .1 **p<.05 ***p<.01

In summary, this study found that product & services of brand reputation ($\beta = .176$) has positive impact on brand trust, while social & environmental responsibility of brand reputation ($\beta = -.259$) has negative impact on brand trust; OBC engagement ($\beta = -.126$) has negative impact on OBC customer attitude; OBC customer attitude ($\beta = .832$) has positive impact on brand trust; and finally, Brand trust ($\beta = .765$) has positive statistically significantly impact on brand loyalty ($p = .000$) with 95% confidence level.

Discussions and Conclusion

This study explores the impact of brand reputation and online brand community engagement and attitude on brand trust and brand loyalty. This study confirmed the product & Services dimension significance was observed at a 90% confidence level, given that the coefficient's p-value is below 0.1. The linear regression analysis indicated that only the dimensions of Brand Reputation pertaining to Product & Services has positive impact on brand

trust ($\beta = .176$) while Social & Environmental Responsibility have a statistically significant negative impact ($\beta = -.259$) on brand trust. This assertion regarding the product and services dimension finds support in a study by Jiang, Rashid, & Wang (2019), which examines the connection between this dimension of brand reputation and consumer trust. The study delves into the intricate relationship between these aspects and consumer trust, highlighting how they collectively contribute to overall brand reputation. Brands are recognized not only for their products but also for the services they offer, and both elements contribute to the overall perception of brand reputation. Similarly, the assertion regarding the social & environmental responsibility dimension is supported by the study conducted by González et al. (2019) explores the link between the dimension of brand reputation related to social and environmental responsibility and its impact on consumer trust. The authors argue that while businesses increasingly acknowledge the significance of aligning with environmental sustainability and social responsibility values, there is evidence to suggest that a focus on these aspects in building brand reputation may have a detrimental effect on customer trust. a close link between business objectives and social or environmental issues can be backfire. This relation leads companies to take opportunistic advantage of green trends and consumers may perceive a firm's CSR programs to concealed motives, causing the distrust perceptions and less favorable attitudes (Chuah et al., 2020; Chen & Chang, 2013; Kim & Ferguson, 2019).

Furthermore, this study linear regression analysis reveals that there is a negative significant impact of Online Brand Community (OBC) engagement on OBC customer attitude ($\beta = -.126$, $p = .030$) with 95% confidence level. This finding aligns with Yang, Cai, and Tu (2021) whose research highlights the emergence of OBCs as influential platforms fostering engagement, interaction, and brand loyalty. Interestingly, their study identifies a paradox: higher engagement within an OBC seems to correlate inversely with customer attitude toward the brand. Cooper, Stavros, and Dobeles (2019) asserted that as OBCs expand and accumulate more content, customers may confront with information overload. The abundance of information in these communities can lead to cognitive fatigue, impairing active engagement. Interestingly, as engagement levels decrease due to information overload, customers' overall brand attitude remains positive.

This study also indicated that a simple linear regression model was statistically significant at 95% confidence level as p-value of the model is less than 0.05, whereby the linear regression indicated that OBC customer attitude has positive statistically significant

impact on brand trust ($\beta = .832$). This assertion is supported by the study of Pinto et al. (2022) where they explore the relationship between customer participation in online brand communities (OBCs) and brand trust. OBCs often revolve around shared interests, passions, and values. The research findings indicate that active positive attitude towards OBCs positively influences customers' brand trust. By participating in OBCs, customers develop a sense of social identity with the brand, leading to increased trust in the brand.

Likewise, this study also confirmed that a linear regression model was statistically significant at 95% confidence level as p-value of the model is less than 0.05, whereby the linear regression indicated that brand trust has positive statistically significant impact on brand loyalty ($\beta = .765$). This assertion is supported by the study of Nasir et al. (2020) that highlights the positive impact of brand trust on brand loyalty. Trusting the brand strengthens consumers' confidence in its offerings. When community members have faith in the brand's reliability and credibility, they are more likely to engage actively within the community.

Managerial Implication

This study found that OBC customer attitude ($\beta = .832$) has stronger impact on brand trust than product & services dimension of brand reputation ($\beta = .176$). Hence, the company should focus on improving OBC customer attitude in order to increase brand trust. To improve OBC customer attitude in a multinational motorcycle company, the company must properly understand the essence of showcasing their brand values, mission, and heritage within the OBC. Share stories, historical facts, and milestones to evoke a sense of pride and emotional connection among community members. Consistently communicate the company's commitment to quality, innovation, and customer satisfaction, reinforcing the brand's reputation and trustworthiness. The company should encourage OBC members to create and share user-generated content, such as photos, videos, and stories featuring their experiences with the brand's motorcycles. The multinational motorcycle company should also offer exclusive events, meet-ups, and experiences for OBC members. This could include test ride opportunities, VIP access to motorcycle shows or industry events, or even brand-sponsored rides and tours. By providing unique experiences, the multinational motorcycle company demonstrates its appreciation for loyal customers, deepening their connection to the brand and fostering trust.

Although this study found a stronger impact of OBC customer attitude on brand trust than brand reputation, the brand reputation still produces some significant impact on brand trust. The company should improve workplace environment (\bar{X} = 3.63), social & environmental responsibility (\bar{X} = 3.72), financial performance (\bar{X} = 3.75) as they obtained the lowest mean value among brand reputation dimensions by making sure the motorcycle company should have good employees, the multinational motorcycle should make sure all its operations looks like an excellent company to be trusted, and the management should make sure the multinational motorcycle company is well managed. The management and employees should make sure the multinational motorcycle is an environmentally responsible company. The management should also make sure the multinational motorcycle maintains a high standard in the way it treats people and also supports good causes towards achieving the company's objectives. The management should ensure the multinational motorcycle company possesses strong prospects for future growth, they should also ensure the company outperform its competitors with a strong record of profitability and a low-risk investment.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study is focus on the impact of brand reputation and online brand community engagement and attitude on brand trust and brand loyalty of a multinational motorcycle company in Nepal. The future research should investigate the factors that contribute to brand reputation and how they influence customer attitude, engagement, brand trust, and brand loyalty. They should explore the role of social influence within online brand communities as well as investigate how social influence factors, such as peer recommendations, group norms, and social identity, impact customer attitude, engagement, brand trust, and brand loyalty within OBCs.

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