A Study on the Impact of Brand Commitment Among Participants in Brand Community on Word-of-mouth, Brand Loyalty, and Consumer Happiness

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Abstract

Following an empirical investigation, this study revealed that brand commitment among participants in a brand community positively influences word-of-mouth, brand loyalty, and consumer happiness, offering various benefits to the operating companies. For example, it is expected to lead to the creation of long-term, high-quality word-of-mouth.

Keywords

Brand community, ambassador program, brand commitment, consumer happiness

1. Introduction: Background and Objectives

With the spread of the Internet and social media, the influence of word-of-mouth has attracted much attention. Word-of-mouth about products and brands influences product purchases (Amemori & Ikeda, 2005). How do companies generate word-of-mouth for their brands? Several studies have been conducted on this topic. This study focuses on the creation of word-of-mouth through brand communities, which have proven effective in addressing the modern challenges of stealth marketing (Fujisaki, 2022). Furthermore, Fujisaki (2022) demonstrates that word-of-mouth creation through brand communities has a sustainability that differs from word-of-mouth strategies based on monetary rewards.

What should be done to achieve sustainable word-of-mouth creation? First, it is important to determine whether the use of the product affects the happiness of brand community participants. In other words, if participants in a brand community feel that their happiness has increased through the use of the product, their relationship with the brand community will continue. However, if they do not feel that their happiness has increased, their relationship with the brand community will dissolve.

Recently, the importance of well-being has been emphasized. It is also important for companies operating brand communities to confirm whether they provide a feeling of comfort for community participants. Therefore, this study investigates whether participants in brand communities feel happy. Building on Fujisaki & Katayama's (2022) research, this study aims to expand the insights into the effects of brands.

2. Previous Research

2-1. Previous research and issues related to word-of-mouth creation

Various studies have been conducted on word-of-mouth generation (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009; Kikumori, 2020). However, many existing studies have limitations. These include focusing on short-term word-of-mouth generation and primarily examining word-of-mouth communication based on monetary rewards (Fujisaki, 2022). While reward-based word-of-mouth strategies can be effective in the short term, word-of-mouth dissemination ceases once the rewards are removed (Kikumori, 2016).

Furthermore, the quality of word-of-mouth creation is important. For companies to obtain high brand evaluations, it is important to increase the ratio of positive word-of-mouth (Kubota & Shibuya, 2018). When considering word-of-mouth, which motivates consumers, it is important to focus on thoughtful word-of-mouth, which reflects the genuine feelings of the person sharing it rather than superficial word-of-mouth. However, no previous research has addressed the continuous generation of reviews of consistent quality from this perspective.

2-2. Brand Community Research

A brand community is a specialized community formed by supporters of a specific brand or service that is unrestricted by geographical constraints (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Brand communities are formed by passionate fans of a particular brand, and participants engage in various activities (Kubota, 2003). Brand fans strengthen their bonds with the brand by participating in brand communities, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and generating word-of-mouth that communicates the brand's value (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Kubota, 2003; Hatou, 2019).

Conversely, brand communities may have potential that has not been demonstrated in previous studies. Specifically, word-of-mouth communication by brand fans is not based on monetary rewards (Kojima, 2019; Fujisaki, 2022); it is expected to be continuous rather than temporary. Additionally, fans participating in brand communities are passionate brand users (Kubota, 2003); they can expect high-quality positive word-of-mouth based on their own experiences.

Studies on influence within brand communities include Hatou (2019) and Fujisaki & Katayama (2022). Hatou (2019) and Fujisaki & Katayama (2022) demonstrate that brand commitment influences word-of-mouth and brand loyalty.

Matsubara (2022) noted that theoretical research on brands and happiness is still in its infancy and focused on brand communities in the study of consumer happiness. He highlighted the importance of brand commitment. He also revealed that the value of a brand not only contributes to corporate marketing activities such as word-of-mouth but also influences consumer happiness. Note that "brand community" is an academic term, and in practice, it is often referred to by policy names such as "○○○ Ambassador Program" or "○○○ Fan Program" (Fujisaki & Katayama, 2022).

3. Research Framework and Hypothesis Setting
3-1. Research Framework

This study is based on the concepts of brand commitment, word-of-mouth, and brand loyalty,

which have been clarified in previous brand community studies by Hatou (2019) and Fujisaki & Katayama (2022). Furthermore, this study incorporates the concept of consumer happiness in brand communities, as clarified by Matsubara (2022), into the analysis model.

The model utilizes the influence structure of brand commitment as an attitude, as in Hatou (2019) and Fujisaki & Katayama (2022). Moreover, it focuses on confirming the importance of brand commitment effects.

3-2. Hypothesis Model Setting

Fujisaki & Katayama (2022) conducted empirical research on ambassador programs based on Hatou's (2019) research. We developed a hypothetical model based on Fujisaki & Katayama's (2022) model: specifically, that brand commitment influences word-of-mouth (WOM) and brand loyalty. This study re-examined these effects. The following hypotheses were formulated:

Figure 1: Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Content
H1	In an ambassador program, brand commitment has a positive influence on word-of-mouth.
H2	In the ambassador program, brand commitment has a positive effect on brand loyalty.
H3	In ambassador programs, brand commitment has a positive effect on consumer happiness.

(Source) Created by the authors

Figure 2: Hypothesis model in this study
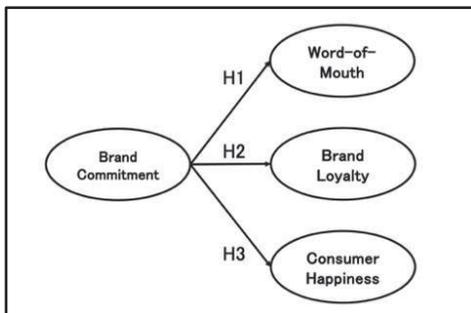
In an ambassador program, brand commitment positively affects word-of-mouth (H1). In an ambassador program, brand commitment has a positive effect on brand loyalty (H2).

Matsubara (2022) clarified the sense of happiness consumers gain through brand communities. This can also be applied to ambassador programs, which are practical measures. Therefore, we hypothesize that brand commitment has a positive effect on consumer happiness in ambassador programs (H3).

4. Survey Overview

4-1. Survey Participants and Methodology

With the cooperation of Food Company A, we conducted a nationwide survey targeting fans who participated in an ambassador program (brand community) for the company's products. The survey was conducted from July 5 to August 12, 2024, during which time survey requests were sent and data were collected. Patients with incomplete samples were excluded. As a result, out of 628 responses, 261 valid responses were obtained and analyzed.

Existing research directly surveying actual participants in brand community studies is scarce. This

is primarily because of the cooperation of the operating company. Considering the current trend of outsourcing such surveys to online research firms, this study is valuable.

4-2. Survey Items

The measurement scales adopted were those whose reliability and validity were verified in previous studies. The survey items are as follows: Brand commitment was measured using three items from Coulter et al. (2003), word-of-mouth using three items from Zeithaml et al. (1996), and brand loyalty using four items from Kim et al. (2008). Consumer happiness was measured using two items from Van & Gilovich (2003). All questions were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "not at all" to 7 = "very much").

5. Analysis Results

5-1. Respondent Attributes and Descriptive Statistics

The sex distribution of respondents was 90.8% female, 8.0% male, and 1.2% did not specify. The age distribution was as follows: 18.4%, 30.3%, 36.8%, and 14.5% of participants were 39 years old or younger, 40– 49, 50– 59, and 60 years old or older, respectively.

Descriptive statistics were calculated to assess the skewness of the distribution of each item on the 7-point scale used in the analysis (Figure 3). Regarding ceiling and floor effects, as all items in Figure 3 were rated on a 7-point scale, a ceiling effect was determined if the sum of the mean and standard deviation (M+SD) exceeded 7. Furthermore, a floor effect was determined if the difference between the mean and standard deviation (M-SD) was less than 1.

Figure 3: Results of statistical calculations

| 構成概念		項目	Frequency	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance	M+SD	M-SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Brand Commitment	BC1	I am really attached to the brands of X that	261	1	7	5.954	1.010	1.021	6.964	4.944	-1.035	1.934
	BC2	I use I stick with my usual brands of X because I know they are best for me	261	1	7	5.759	1.147	1.315	6.905	4.612	-0.735	0.237
	BC3	I am committed to my brands of X	261	3	7	6.126	0.934	0.872	7.060	5.192	-0.883	0.146
Word-of-Mouth Communications	WOM1	Say positive things about XYZ to other people	261	2	7	5.912	1.043	1.088	6.955	4.869	-0.724	0.012
	WOM2	Recommend XYZ to someone who seeks your advice	261	2	7	5.858	1.041	1.084	6.899	4.817	-0.785	0.516
	WOM3	Encourage friends and relatives to do business with XYZ	261	1	7	5.720	1.148	1.318	6.868	4.572	-0.896	1.130
Brand Loyalty	BL1	I am loyal to only one brand of XXX	261	1	7	5.433	1.304	1.700	6.737	4.129	-0.749	0.356
	BL2	I always buy the same brand of XXX	261	1	7	5.636	1.241	1.540	6.877	4.395	-0.814	0.563
	BL3	Usually, I buy the same brand of XXX	261	1	7	5.793	1.142	1.303	6.935	4.652	-0.884	0.788
	BL4	The brand name is the first thing I'm looking at for the purchase of this product category	261	1	7	5.778	1.217	1.481	6.995	4.561	-0.882	0.436
Consumer Happiness	CH1	Using XXX products contributes greatly to my happiness in life	261	1	7	5.743	1.056	1.115	6.799	4.688	-0.597	-0.853
	CH2	Thinking about using XXX products makes me very happy.	261	1	7	5.693	1.133	1.283	6.826	4.561	-0.720	-0.110

(Source) the author.

Additionally, skewness is considered close to a normal distribution if the absolute value is less than 3, and kurtosis is considered close to a normal distribution if the absolute value is less than 10

(Kline, 1998). As shown in Figure 3, a ceiling effect was observed for one item (BC3) on brand commitment. However, for the items where a ceiling effect was observed, the skewness and kurtosis were within the criteria indicated by Kline (1998). Therefore, while distribution skewness was confirmed, it was judged to be within an acceptable range.

5-3. Verification of construct concepts through confirmatory factor analysis

To construct and validate the model using structural equation modeling, we first verified the validity of the four construct concepts used in this study: "brand commitment," "word-of-mouth," "brand loyalty," and "consumer happiness." This verification was conducted using confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood estimation in IBM SPSS Amos 20.0.

Figure 4: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Models for Each Construct
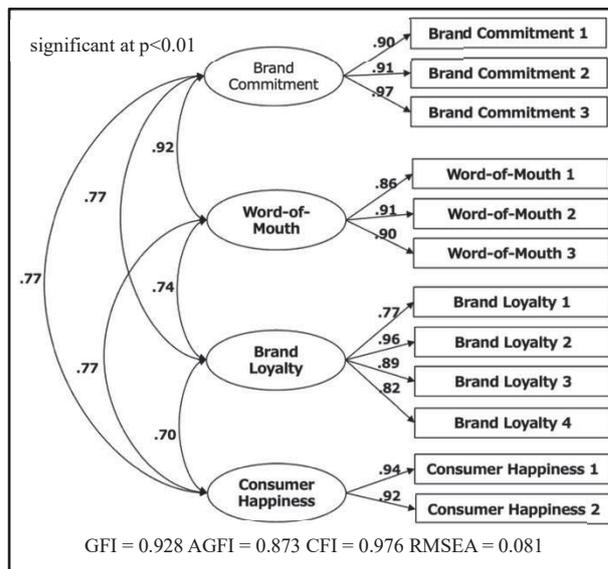
Regarding the criteria for the fit indices used to evaluate model fit, Doll, Xia & Torkzadeh (1994), Baumgartner & Homburg (1996), Bern, García-González, García-Uceda, & Múgica (2015), GFI and AGFI values of 0.90 or higher indicate an excellent model, while values of 0.80 or higher indicate a model with good fit. Additionally, according to Awang (2012), a CFI value of 0.90 or higher indicates a good model. Regarding RMSEA, according to Oshio (2008) 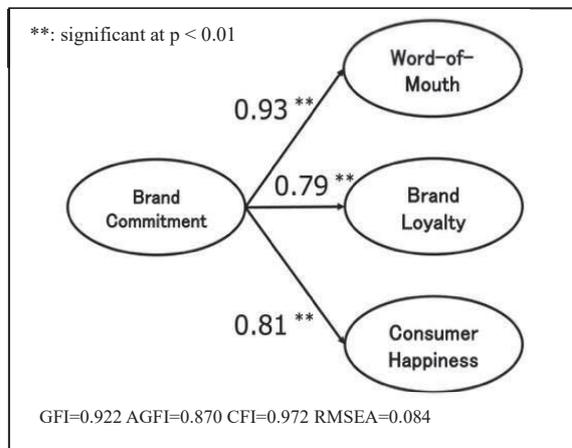and Asano, Suzuki, & Kojima (2005), values below 0.1 are considered acceptable. When analyzing the model, assuming covariance between all factors, all paths were significant at the 1% level. The fit indices were GFI = 0.928, AGFI = 0.873, CFI = 0.976, and RMSEA = 0.081, all meeting the above criteria. Thus, the confirmatory factor model was deemed valid, and no issues were identified for subsequent analysis. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis are shown in Figure 4.

5-4. Validation using structural equation modeling

Using the latent variables obtained through confirmatory factor analysis, we tested the hypotheses using structural equation modeling. The results showed that the goodness-of-fit indices were GFI = 0.922, AGFI = 0.870, CFI = 0.972, and RMSEA = 0.084, all of which were good values according to the criteria. Therefore, we used this model to test our hypotheses. All paths between factors were

significant at the 1% level. The results of the validation analysis are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Analysis results of the hypothesis model in this study

**: significant at p < 0.01

0.93 ** Word-of-Mouth

Brand Commitment

0.79 ** Brand Loyalty

0.81 ** Consumer Happiness

GFI=0.922 AGFI=0.870 CFI=0.972 RMSEA=0.084

5-5. Hypothesis verification:

This study establishes a hypothesis model based on the model proposed by Fujisaki & Katayama (2022). We analyzed the effects of brand commitment on participants of an ambassador program, which is a practical policy. The results show that brand commitment positively affects word-of-mouth, brand loyalty, and consumer happiness. Therefore, H1, H2, and H3 are supported (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Content	Results
H1	In the ambassador program, brand commitment has a positive effect on word-of-mouth.	Supported
H2	In the Ambassador Program, brand commitment has a positive impact on brand loyalty.	Supported
H3	In ambassador programs, brand commitment has a positive impact on consumer happiness.	Supported

(Source) Created by the authors

6. Summary and Future Challenges

The analysis revealed that brand commitment positively influenced word-of-mouth, brand loyalty, and consumer happiness among participants in the Ambassador Program (brand community). While Fujisaki & Katayama (2022) demonstrated that brand commitment positively influences word-of-mouth and brand loyalty, this study strengthens this framework.

As a new insight advancing brand community research, this study clarifies that brand commitment positively affects consumer happiness. Moreover, participants in the Ambassador Program felt happy, suggesting that they will continue their relationship with the community, which is also a novel contribution of this study. As participants in ambassador programs are known to generate word-of-mouth, their continued participation is expected to lead to long-term word-of-mouth creation rather than short-term effects. Furthermore, brand fans are likely to generate high-quality word-of-mouth.

The fact that participants in the ambassador program feel a sense of happiness indicates that the program not only serves as a marketing activity for the company but also provides participants with a pleasant experience. This can be seen as a win-win relationship between the company and the participants, and it may serve as a benchmark for future program operations.

One limitation of this study is the limited survey sample. In the future, we aim to expand the survey sample to include other industries and conduct further empirical research. Furthermore, we plan to

analyze the impact of consumer happiness on word-of-mouth in the future. Brand commitment as an attitude is also expected to influence other concepts; therefore, we would like to explore this aspect further in future research.

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