ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOMES OF BRAND LOVE EMBEDDED IN ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITY

Kanyawee Pornsrimate[1]

Pensri Jaroenwanit[2]

Abstract

In light of growing social media network trends, it has inevitably given rise to develop a strong brand strategy and online marketing techniques in order to engage with customers online. Building online brand community and brand love represents highly valuable customer relationship management instruments for firms. For this reason, this study proposes a conceptual model to further understand the effect of sense of online community, brand community identification and brand anthropomorphism on brand love leading to brand advocacy which incorporates word-of-mouth and brand acceptance among admirers in social networks. The investigation of these issues is critical due to the fact that the advantages of social networks and brand community strategies are crucial tools to enhance the feeling of love, customer behaviours and also a successful long-term relationship with customers.

Keywords: *Brand love, Brand anthropomorphism, Sense of online brand community, Brand community identification, Brand advocacy*

Introduction

Attention to the power of brand has been surging within companies since the mid-80s (Heding, Knudtzen, & Bjerre, 2009), when the researchers discover the various relationships between consumers and branded products such as brand trust, brand commitment, brand sensitivity, and brand loyalty (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008). The reality that companies have to confront is that brand is a key strategy which creates the opportunities for companies in order to differentiate from rival firms (Chernatony & Riley, 1998; Kotler & Keller, 2012) and identify its product (Heding, Knudtzen, & Bjerre, 2009). With the

---

[1] Business Administration Doctoral Programs, Faculty of Business Administration and Accountancy, Khon Kaen University

E-mail: kanyawee.ps@gmail.com

[2] Marketing Discipline, Faculty of Business Administration and Accountancy, Khon Kaen University

intensification of brand strategies in the context of company, have put unavoidably pressure on firms to be given a significant increase to the researches on brand management.

Furthermore, it can be seen that communities have become a crucial issue in business sectors over century (Zaglia, 2013). Due to the fact that interactive communications between consumers within community affect not only consumers' relationships towards the brand (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Zaglia, 2013) but also a long-term relationship success (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). For this reason, marketers are increasingly investigated in using brand community to communicate with customers and establish long-term relationships with them (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002) including online community in social network (Relling, Schnittka, Ringle, Sattler, & Johnen, 2016; Zaglia, 2013).

As the growth of online social networks increased significantly over recent decade, this issue has been gaining increasing momentum within both the researchers and marketers in order to explore and build effective brand strategies for firms, especially global brand (Zaglia, 2013). For example, the actual number of daily active Facebook users stood at 1.37 billion in September, 2017 (Facebook.com, 2018a). Noticeably, Coca-cola had the biggest online community on Facebook, which featured more than 107 million in January, 2018. (Facebook.com, 2018b). While a number of people who follow Starbuck's twitter represents over 11 millions of followers in 2018 (Twitter, 2018). This trend has inevitably given increase to researchers focusing on the influence of online community on building brand and behavioural intentions among members in social network. Accordingly, it is imperative for companies in order to develop an effective marketing programs and build a strong brand community (Algesheimar, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005).

It can be argued that consumption plays a significant role in the maintenance of sense of identity among consumers (Ahuvia, 2005). People are more likely to love a brand that allows members express themselves on online brand community (Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony, 2014). In this respect, companies should embark on meaningful campaigns where members can express their feelings and ideas about the brand to gain deeper emotional connections (Simon, Brexendorf, & Fassnacht, 2016) and greater company profitability (Popp & Woratschek, 2016).

Over the recent decade, researchers have investigated the feeling of love towards brand which refers to the degree of passion that consumers attached to a particular trade name (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi (2012) highlighted that consumers love a brand because a brand helps in reflecting who they truly are. Besides, love and passion are main categories of consumer brand relationships driving

positive word-of-mouth (Wallace, Buil, & De Chernatony, 2012; Wallace, Buil, & De Chernatony, 2014) and leading to brand loyalty (Fournier, 1998).

Although valuable researches has accumulated in the field of online community towards the brand, more research is necessary to address critical issues in various perspectives. One important issue is the role of online community among admirers enhancing the feeling of love towards brand. While prior research highlighted that sense of community directly and indirectly affects brand love (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010), little attention has been specifically paid to the role of online community for building brand love.

For this reason, a greater exposure to the effect of online community on brand love is needed. Part of these studies aim to fill this void in online community research by testing the feeling of love for a brand in the sector of online community among brand admirers. The research has taken four major directions including: firstly, the effect of sense of online community on brand love; secondly, the influence of brand community identification on brand love; thirdly, the impact of anthropomorphism on brand love; fourthly the effect of brand love driving brand advocacy which includes word-of-mouth and brand acceptance among admirers in social network.

Research objectives

In this study, the research aims to propose a model which demonstrates the antecedents and outcomes of brand love by testing three antecedents including brand community identification, sense of communication and anthropomorphized brands in the context of online brand community. Although Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen (2010) have empirically proven the effect of brand community identification and sense of community on brand love, the investigation of this issue is continuously critical due to: (1) in recent years, the growing involvement in online brand community significantly enhances customers' engagement including positive word-of-mouth and recommendation (Wirtz et al., 2013); (2) companies are able to cultivate consumers' interaction and brand community faster (Zaglia, 2013); (3) online community is clearly offer worthy strategies for companies and sponsorships leading to economic potential (Popp & Woratschek, 2016).

Furthermore, it is clear that anthropomorphism enhances favourable evaluation of product which therefore influence several dimensions of brand love (Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014). However, there were few researches which investigated the role of anthropomorphism towards brand love. For this reason, it would be useful to consider the effect of anthropomorphism on brand love in order to develop and reinforce relationships with customers.

Briefly, this conceptual model can be used to predict brand advocacy in an online brand community context base on their experience for being a member in particular online community. Furthermore, a model could be a useful guide to marketers in their online marketing strategies in order to attract and improve brand community in social networks. More important, the research can be adopted to risk management in the context of reputation risk in social media for boosting the reputation by the power of brand love.

Conceptual Framework

Amid the growth of concerns, marketing communication, public relation towards social media (Aula, 2010), social media activities and online brand community play essential roles in the business sector all over the world. In addition, as strong love for brand leads to a positive word-of-mouth (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012) and question to negative comments for the brand (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Heinrich, Albrecht, & Bauer, 2012), it is important for firm to find the effective approach increasing the feeling of love among consumers. In order to capture the effect of drivers and consequences of brand love, a conceptual framework consisting of five key sets of construct is developed (see Fig.1). Accordingly, the conceptual model was formulated and all the propositions are elaborated in the following subsections.
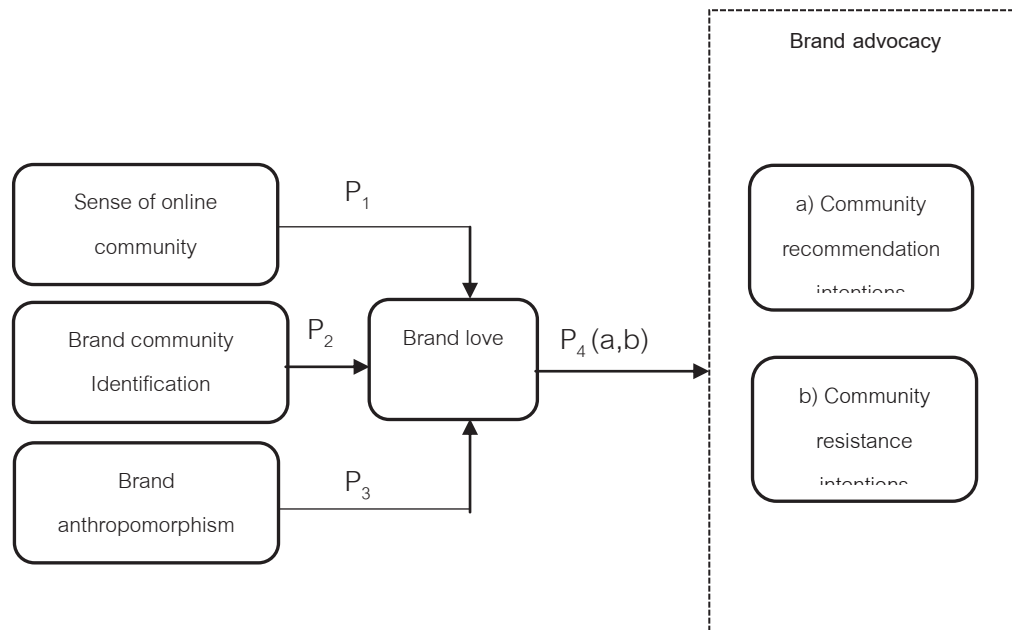

Figure 1. Conceptual framework to examine the antecedents and outcomes of brand love.

Drivers of brand love

The role of brand love is noticeably applied to companies (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012) in order to consider the level of

attachment with brand, which lead to a strong relationship between customers and branded products (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008; Fournier, 1998). Rauschnabel & Ahuvia (2014) also suggested that love is the relationship which involve a broad range of emotions and establish long-term experience.

The term "Brand Love" is attracting considerable attention within academic sector due to the fact that the feeling of love plays a crucial factor in consumer's consumption (Ahuvia, 2005; Richins, 1997) and builds consumer brand relationships (Fournier, 1998). For this reason, there are several researches developed brand love scale in order to measure brand love precisely (Sternberg, 1997; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Bagozzi, Batra, & Ahuvia, 2016). Furthermore, other researches then focus mainly on the relationship between brand love and consumer brand relationship (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 2008).

Primarily, it can be seen that the investigation about love has firstly emerged in 1986 with the triangle theory of love (Sternberg, 1997). The triangle theory of love has been fundamentally utilised as a model to identify scales of brand love (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Bagozzi, Batra, & Ahuvia, 2016). According to triangle theory of love (Sternberg, 1997), love can be broadly described in terms of three constructs including intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. However, there has been much research argued that the feeling of love towards brand is deeper, and more enduring (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Fournier, 1998). This limitation leads to the development of higher-order representations of brand love (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Bagozzi, Batra, & Ahuvia, 2016). Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi (2012) classified brand love into seven dimensions including passion-driven behaviour, self-related cognition, emotional connections with brand, satisfaction, long term relationship, attitude strength and loyalty.

The model incorporates three antecedent constructs influencing brand love, namely sense of online community, brand community identification and brand anthropomorphism.

1. Brand Community Identification

As the definition of consumers' identification with a brand can be explained by the theoretical roots of social identity concept (Tuskej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013), which firstly emerged in 1972 (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Social identity can be defined as the categories that people classify themselves and others into diverse social categories (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) in order to create their own place in society (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Another past researches pointed out that participations of brand community among consumers can drive centre-social identity of brand and create brand relationships with consumers (He, Li, & Harris, 2012; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Social identity concept is clearly related to three antecedent

constructs of brand love, namely online brand community, brand community identification and sense of online community, which are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

The potential of brand community identification can be described from a set of cognitive and affective components (Algesheimar, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). Firstly, cognitive components refer to a self-awareness of membership within brand community that memberships can define themselves as a part of this community distinguishing them from other communities (Algesheimar, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). Secondly, affective components refer to the emotional involvement towards community including the acceptance of community's norms, traditions, rituals, and objectives. (Algesheimar, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn, 1995). To support this evidence, empirical findings showed the positive effect of strong brand community identity of European car enhancing community engagement and increasing normative community, which then affect behavioural intentions among memberships (Algesheimar, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005).

It can be argued that brand community identification is the closeness between self-image of customers and brand's image (Algesheimar, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). For example, brand community members will classify themselves into different sub-group based on differences (Zaglia, 2013). In addition, brand community identification also positively relates to brand love (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010) and influences member behaviours (Yeh & Choi, 2011).

2. Sense of community

Sense of community can be defined as the degree to which customers feel relate to other members within brand community (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). The significant key of participation in brand community is not only the passion for a brand, but also social relation to other members (Zaglia, 2013). Furthermore, Carlson, Sutar, & Brown (2008) propose a model of sense of psychological brand community leading to brand commitment. Sense of psychological brand community refers to the perception of relational bonds between consumer and other users in brand community (Carlson, Sutar, & Brown, 2008).

Particularly, empirical findings from the previous research conducting on Australian students demonstrated a positive association between sense of community, brand love, and brand loyalty (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). For this reason, it would be useful for firm to develop and create sense of community among consumers, for instance, launching effective advertising or event sponsorship (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010).

3. Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism can be defined as "anthropomorphic thinking that is, perceiving a product, brand or other object as having human characteristics" (Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014, p.375). Nowadays, successful marketing companies use anthropomorphism as a key marketing strategy, in which brand or products give uniquely human characteristics in order to endow with human emotions (Aggarwal & McGill, 2011; Gabrielli & Baghi, 2016) and build memorable experience such as the hourglass form of the Coke bottle (Aggarwal & McGill, 2011). In the same vein, one study found the closest relationships between customers and brand arose when company applies anthropomorphism in marketing, which influences several dimensions of brand love including: (1) category-level evaluation; (2) cognitive fluency; (3) cognitive consistency; (4) self-extension; and (5) self-congruence (Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014).

Moreover, marketers are increasingly use the anthropomorphism to represent what they stand for and create memorable experience (Aggarwal & McGill, 2011). When people categorized objects into human category, people will analyse based on category membership leading to the favourable evaluation of product, which significantly influences several dimensions of brand love (Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014).

Based on the above statement, it therefore assumes that sense of online community, brand community identification, and anthropomorphism are antecedents of brand love.

P_1 Sense of online community positively influences brand love.

P_2 Brand community identification positively influences brand love.

P_3 Brand anthropomorphism positively influences brand love.

Impacts of brand love on brand advocacy

Brand advocacy can be referred to emotional bonds between brand and consumer (Wallace, Buil, & De Chernatony, 2012) which incorporates word-of mouth and forgive a brand for wrong doing (Wallace, Buil, & De Chernatony, 2014). Due to the fact that brand love has a positive relationship with behavioural intentions among customers (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll, & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 2008), it has been noted that the feeling of love towards brand increases favourable behavioural intentions among customers including positive word-of-mouth comments (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll, & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 2008), willingness to pay more for branded products (Albert & Merunka, 2013), and resistance to negative comments (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012).

Consider the impact of brand love regarding online brand community on brand advocacy. Two aspects of brand advocacy are investigated: firstly, the intentions to recommend this online brand community

to non-members (Algesheimar, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2011); secondly, the intentions to resistance negative information about the brand (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). As a consequence, it can propose the following propositions.

P_{4a} Brand love leads to stronger community recommendation intentions.

P_{4b} Brand love leads to stronger community resistance intentions.

Conceptual model consists of four key constructs to analysed brand advocacy towards members in online community. It begins with anthropomorphism, sense of online community and brand community identification, which are important in influencing brand love dimension. This feeling of love for the brand subsequently affects important construct, namely brand advocacy.

Conclusion

Summary of proposed model

A number of literature reviews can be drawn from this paper including the theory of social identity and the theory of triangle love. In brief, it is clear that strong online brand community identification, sense of online brand community and brand anthropomorphism play an important role to build brand love among members in social networks. A proposed model then represents the link between brand love and brand advocacy which includes the intentions to recommend this online brand community to non-members (Algesheimar, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2011) and the intentions to resistance negative information about the brand (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). The findings will uncover the power of strong online brand community building the feeling of love and maintaining the relationship between customers and brand over time.

Contributions of the model

There are potential benefits of this conceptual model. Firstly, the reality that social media can be characterized as a smart communication hub for providing the effective corporate communication strategy due to its numerous advantages including: (1) easy searching; (2) open participation; (3) a minimal publishing threshold; (4) dialogue; (5) community; (6) networking; (7) the rapid and wide spread of information and contents; (8) a broad range of feedback and networking system (Aula, 2010). Reflecting this scope of the power of social media has experienced a serious shift, from emphasizing more traditional commercial information about directly promoting your products and promotion to introducing more amazing

contents and developing relationships with online influencers (Chang, Yu, & Lu, 2015; Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015).

Secondly, more researches are needed to explore new relational constructs enhancing brand love in order to develop effective brand strategy for firms. As the win-win of consumer-brand relationship becomes a critical issue for company, company therefore shifted its marketing strategy to satisfy customers and respond to customer needs in the digital world (Chappuis, Gaffey, & Parvizi, 2011; Hudson, Huang, Roth & Madden, 2016). For this reason, it is crucial for company to develop strategy tools enhancing the feeling of love towards a brand such as brand anthropomorphism, brand community identification and sense of online brand community.

References

Aggarwal, P., & McGill, A. L. (2011). When brands seem human, do humans act like brands? Automatic behavioral priming effects of brand anthropomorphism. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *39*(2), 307-323.

Ahuvia, A. C. (2005). Beyond the extended self: Loved objects and consumers' identity narratives. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *32*(1), 171-184.

Albert, N., & Merunka, D. (2013). The role of brand love in consumer-brand relationships. *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 30*(3), 258-266.

Albert, N., Merunka, D., & Valette-Florence, P. (2008). When consumers love their brands:Exploring the concept and its dimensions. *Journal of Business Research, 61*(10), 1062-1075.

Algesheimar, R., Dholakia, U.M., &Herrmann, A. (2005). The Social Influence of Brand Community: Evidence from European Car Clubs. *Journal of Marketing, 69*(3), 19-34.

Ashforth, B.E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social Identity Theory and the Organization. *Academy of Management Review, 14*(1), 20-39.

Aula, P. (2010). Social media, reputation risk and ambient publicity management. *Strategy & Leadership*, *38*(6), 43-49.

Batra, R., Ahuvia, A., & Bagozzi, R.P. (2012). Brand love. *Journal of Marketing, 76*(2), 1-16.

Bagozzi, R. P., Batra, R., & Ahuvia, A. (2016). Brand love: development and validation of a practical scale. *Marketing Letters*, 1-14.

Bergkvist, L., & Bech-Larsen, T. (2010). Two studies of consequences and actionable antecedents of brand love. *Journal of Brand management, 17*(7), 504-518.

Bhattacharya, C.B., Rao, H., & Glynn, M.A. (1995). Understanding the Bond of Identification: An investigation of Its Correlates Among Art Museum Members. *Journal of Marketing, 59*(4), 46–57.

Brodie, R. J., Ilic, A., Juric, B., & Hollebeek, L. (2013). Consumer engagement in a virtual Brand community: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Business Research, 66*(1), 105-114.

Carlson, B. D., Suter, T. A., & Brown, T. J. (2008). Social versus psychological brand community: The role of psychological sense of brand community. *Journal of Business Research*, *61*(4), 284-291.

Carroll, B.A., & Ahuvia, A.C. (2006). Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love. *Marketing Letters, 17*(2), 79–89.

Chang, Y. T., Yu, H., & Lu, H. P. (2015). Persuasive messages, popularity cohesion, and message diffusion in social media marketing. *Journal of Business Research, 68*(4), 777-782.

Chernatony, L., & Riley, F.C. (1998). Defining A "Brand": Beyond The Literature with Experts' Interpretations. *Journal of Marketing Management, 14*(5), 417-443.

Dijkmans, C., Kerkhof, P., & Beukeboom, C. J. (2015). A stage to engage: Social media use and corporate reputation. *Tourism Management*, *47*, 58-67.

Facebook.com (2018a). Statistics. accessed 30/01/2018, URL: http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/Facebook.com (2018b). Coca-Cola Fan Page. accessed 30/01/2018, URL: https://www.facebook.com/cocacolaTH/

Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research, 24*(4), 343-373.

Gabrielli, V., & Baghi, I. (2016). Online brand community within the integrated marketing communication system: When chocolate becomes seductive like a person. *Journal of Marketing communications*, *22*(4), 385-402.

He, H., Li, Y., & Harris, L. (2012). Social identity perspective on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research, 65(5*), 648-657.

Heding, T., Knudtzen, C.F. & Bjerre, M. (2009). *Brand management*. New York: Routledge.

Heinrich, D., Albrecht, C. M., & Bauer, H. H. (2012). Love actually? Measuring and exploring consumers' brand love. *Consumer-Brand Relationships–Theory and Practice. London: Routledge*, 137-150.

Hogg, M.A., & Terry, D.J. (2000). Social Identity and self-categorization process in organizational contexts. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(1), 121-140.

Kotler, P. & Keller, K.L. (2012). *Marketing Management*. 14th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education.

McAlexander, J.M., Schouten, J.W., & Koenig, H.F. (2002). Building brand community. *Journal of Marketing, 66*(1), 38-54.

Popp, B., & Woratschek, H. (2016). Introducing branded communities in sport for building strong brand relations in social media. *Sport Management Review*, *19*(2), 183-197.

Rauschnabel, P. A., & Ahuvia, A. C. (2014). You're so lovable: Anthropomorphism and brand love. *Journal of Brand Management*, *21*(5), 372-395.

Relling, M., Schnittka, O., Ringle, C. M., Sattler, H., & Johnen, M. (2016). Community Members' Perception of Brand Community Character: Construction and Validation of a New Scale. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *36*, 107-120.

Richins, M. L. (1997). Measuring emotions in the consumption experience. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *24*(2), 127-146.

Simon, C., Brexendorf, T. O., & Fassnacht, M. (2016). The impact of external social and internal personal forces on consumers' brand community engagement on Facebook. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *25*(5), 409-423.

Sternberg, R.J. (1997). Construct validation of a triangular love scale. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 27*(3), 313-335.

Tuškej, U., Golob, U., & Podnar, K. (2013). The role of consumer–brand identification in building brand relationships. *Journal of Business Research*,*66*(1), 53-59.

Twitter.com (2018). Starbucks. accessed 30/01/2018, URL: https://twitter.com/starbucks

Wallace, E., Buil, I., & De Chernatony, L. (2012). Facebook 'friendship'and brand advocacy. *Journal of Brand Management*, *20*(2), 128-146.

Wallace, E., Buil, I., & de Chernatony, L. (2014). Consumer engagement with self-expressive brands: brand love and WOM outcomes. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *23*(1), 33-42.

Wirtz, J., den Ambtman, A., Bloemer, J., Horváth, C., Ramaseshan, B., van de Klundert, J., ... & Kandampully, J. (2013). Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities. *Journal of Service Management*, *24*(3), 223-244.

Yeh, Y. H., & Choi, S. M. (2011). MINI-lovers, maxi-mouths: An investigation of antecedents to eWOM intention among brand community members. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *17*(3), 145-162.

Zaglia, M. E. (2013). Brand communities embedded in social networks. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(2), 216-223.