

The Effects of Social Media Marketing In the Hotel Industry: Conceptual Model for Development of an Effective Online Community

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Abstract: *Hotel industry can use social media to engage customers and clients in dialogue and recognize their needs. Through these networking sites, hotel industry can interact with consumers before, during, and after the vacation experience. Social media is relatively new and the advantages are abundance such as it is affordable, it is viral and has the potential to spread brand awareness quickly and far and it is said to be able to develop link baits, attention and massive amounts of traffic. The purpose of this study was to investigate benefit factors of member participation and the relationships between community participation and brand commitment in hotel online communities.*

The present study identified five benefit factors (functional, hedonic, monetary, and social and psychological benefits) as the predictors of member participation in hotel Facebook fan pages. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the conceptual model. Based on the results of SEM, the results indicated that four benefit factors (functional, hedonic, social and psychological benefits) positively influenced member's community participation.

The findings of this study provide significant insights for the researchers and marketers. From the theoretical perspective, this is the first empirical research that investigated consumer benefits and responses (i.e., community participation and brand commitment) in online communities managed by hotel sector. Thus, the study contributes to the understanding of consumer behavior in social media. From the practical perspective, the study suggests some strategies to effectively design hotel Facebook fan pages, which can strengthen the relationships with current consumers and attract potential consumers.

I. Introduction

Social media has recently been adopted by a small group of organization's integrated marketing plans. There by infusing a mix of advertisement, public relations, their sales promotion to produce a customer focused message. With the evolution of platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, we have the opportunity for exceptional access to the guest (Lanz et al., 2010). Since social media is so available to anyone with an internet connection, it should be a platform that can be recommended to the hotel industry to increase their brand awareness and facilitate direct feedback from their customers. Alhaddad (2015) found that advertising awareness has positive effect on brand equity on social media. A business that understands the advantage of social media is well aware that social media is essential in developing new business in the current competitive and online driven marketplace.

The majority of marketers would agree that the operation of a successful online community is now highly relevant to successful marketing activities for many companies, yet studies regarding online communities have been rarely conducted in the hotel industry. For this reason, the present study proposes the necessity of identifying and understanding the factors that attract consumers to online communities for hotels, and investigating the relationships between consumer participation and commitment to brands. From a theoretical perspective, this research provides an enhanced understanding of consumer's motives for online social exchanges (e.g., Internet-based social gatherings with other consumers and with a company) and of their cognitive processes during the development of commitment to a particular brand. From a practical perspective, online marketers can establish sustainable marketing strategies to keep online communities active, identify what benefits community members look for in participating, and retain members who are willing to be involved in a long-term relationship with the community.

II. Literature Review

2.1. Characteristics of an Online Community

Wang et al. (2002) considered the sociological aspects of online communities, with particular regard to the question of whether people apply the same social roles and governance as those of physical communities. From theoretical and operational perspectives, Wang et al. (2002) specific functions and features of online travel communities are described in Figure1. The theoretical characteristics are place, symbols, and virtual. Place

involves more than communication technologies; rather, it is a physical community that exists in members' minds. Symbols refer to the meanings and identities given to community members. Virtual characteristics represent computer systems that influence how people form communities. Wang et al. (2002)'s operational characteristics of an online community include (a) people, who are the core of the community and actively perform activities; (b) the purpose(s) shared by members and used to attract potential members, (c) the policies that direct member's online behaviors; and (d) the computer system that makes this phenomenon feasible in cyberspace.

2.2. Online Community Participation

Participation in online communities can be characterized as passive or active. Active community members are those who interact with other members as opposed to those who merely observe information (Madupu, 2006). Passive members browse online

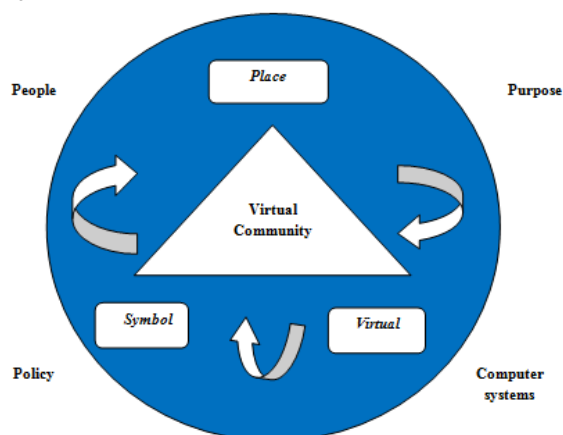


Figure 1 Concepts of the virtual community
(Source: Wang et al., 2002, p. 410)

communities but rarely become involved in community activities. Such members are referred to as lurkers or free riders (Preece, et al., 2004). Because lurkers generate traffic and increase Website hits, if online communities have a large number of members (i.e., both passive and active members), they tend to be successful. However, the numbers of lurkers in an online community does not guarantee the community's success, given that these members do not contribute to community activities. Rather, lurkers tend to pursue their own goals and merely take.

In contrast, active members are highly motivated to participate in online communities and thus they are likely to share information and knowledge, contribute to fast dissemination of valuable content to other members, and provide emotional support to other members (Casaló et al., 2007). For instance, the popularity of YouTube is due to active members' considerable contributions to the community (Casaló et al., 2007). As community members actively post product information and share experiences, the community acquires substantial information that can attract new consumers and maintain strong relationships with existing members. Furthermore, member's active participation enhances their knowledge regarding brands and products (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and thus enables them to offer suggestions to solve problems with product usage and help each other make purchasing decisions (Flavián & Guinalú, 2006). Active member participation is the key predictor of determining community growth and ensuring the community's long-term survival (Koh & Kim, 2004).

2.3. Participation Benefits

In order to build successful online communities, community marketers must attract participants and encourage them to remain loyal to the community. In online tourism community, members seek to accomplish a variety of travel-related tasks such as gathering travel information, making transactions (e.g., booking travel packages) and anticipating new relationships with people in remote and international places (Wang et al., 2002). According to Wang and Fesenmaier (2004a), these can be considered as tourist's fundamental needs (i.e., human needs), and they have been generally accepted and classified into four categories: functional, social, psychological, and hedonic.

Wang and Fesenmaier's (2004a) framework is employed in the present study because hospitality-related communities have features similar to travel communities. Members of a hotel or restaurant community are likely to be involved with activities such as searching for information about a property (e.g., the ambience of hotel or restaurant and the quality of service), sharing service experiences with other members, and communicating with the service provider.

In addition to the four benefits identified by Wang and Fesenmaier (2004a), the present study considers consumer desire for economic advantages from building a relationship with a service provider (Harris et al., 2003). The term “monetary benefit” is adopted from Gwinner et al. (1998); this benefit can significantly influence the extent of member's participation in online communities. Based on the discussion above, the present study proposes that members hope to gain five specific types of benefits from participation in the online community: **functional, social, psychological, hedonic, and monetary.**

2.3.1. Functional benefits:

According to Peter et al. (1999) a functional benefit is one that increases the ease and/or efficiency of completing transactions (i.e., purchasing products and services) and exchanging information (i.e., information gathering and sharing). One of the functional benefits of an online community is that interaction with other community members can facilitate purchasing decisions (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996). Information exchange is one of the major reasons for online community participation (Arsal et al., 2008).

The relationship between functional benefits and community participation has been well documented but inconsistent in tourism research. Wang and Fesenmaier (2004a) found that functional benefits have a negative impact on member's participation. One reason for this negative relationship may be that members enjoy the fun and interactive parts of the community activities more than the task-oriented ones. Hwang and Cho's (2005) study revealed no significant relationship between functional benefits and members' community activities. In contrast, Chung and Buhalis (2008) found a positive relationship between members' information acquisition and their participation. Although members might not have specific plans for travel or dining out, they can still collect and share information about destinations, hotels, and the best restaurants in the area. If members can achieve their specific goals, such as acquiring information quickly, they are more likely to visit their online community.

Based on the above discussion, the present study posits that the relationship between functional benefits and community participation can vary depending on what community users want to gain from the community (i.e., whether they focus on entertainment or information acquisition). However, the present study postulates that members in specifically hospitality-related communities have explicit needs to obtain information with regard to hotel facilities, room rates, restaurants, and tourism information, especially when they are actively planning a trip. They will also share their experiences with others, offering suggestions or responding to questions. Thus, the following hypothesis, indicating a positive relationship to stimuli members' active participation, is proposed:

H1: Functional benefits have a positive influence on online community participation.

2.3.2. Social benefits:

Social benefits are the various kinds of help and support that members provide for each other (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). Community members help and support each other by exchanging ideas and opinions of interest, answering other member's questions, and introducing new topics for discussion (Dholakia et al., 2009). Previous studies have indicated that social benefits significantly influence member's attitude toward an online community (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). Coon (1998) found that the primary reason people choose to participate in online communities is to build friendships with others who have similar interests or purposes. Online community members tend to increase the number and length of visits to online communities, and to actively participate in online community activities, when they recognize that they share mutual interests with other members (Hwang & Cho, 2005). Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social benefits have a positive influence on online community participation.

2.3.3. Psychological benefits:

Psychological benefits are derived from feeling connected to community members, and include identity expression through the community, a sense of belonging to the community, and a sense of affiliation with other members (Bressler & Grantham, 2000). Bressler and Grantham (2000) indicated that psychological benefits are a starting point for joining an online community due to an individual's need for a fulfilling sense of belonging to a community.

Previous studies show that psychological benefits have a positive influence on online community participation than not (Dholakia et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2004). Consumers may increase their level of participation in order to express their preferences, which lead to the formation of an emotional attachment with other members and the community (Lee, 2005). A sense of community enables consumers to share experiences and solve problems

related to consumption (Bakos, 1998). This is an effective way to allure new consumers and retain them as loyal consumers (Kim et al., 2004). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: *Psychological benefits have a positive influence on online community participation.*

2.3.4. Hedonic benefits

Hedonic benefits include positive emotional states, such as feeling entertained and amused and experiencing enjoyment that occurs when participating in community activities (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). According to Armstrong & Hagel (1995) in online communities, members are likely to engage in activities that not only provide valued information but also elicit positive emotions (e.g., happiness, excitement, and enthusiasm).

For some online community members, hedonic benefits are more important than other benefits (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Participation in an online community is influenced by hedonic benefits that members gain from discussion forums, electronic bulletin boards, and features for sharing pictures and videos (Dholakia et al., 2004). If participating in an online community is perceived as fun or entertaining, members are more likely to visit the community and to spend more time visiting it. Therefore, the following hypothesis regarding hedonic benefits and community participation is proposed:

H4: *Hedonic benefits have a positive influence on online community participation.*

2.3.5. Monetary benefits:

Consumers seek to receive economic advantages from a relationship with a service provider, which can be referred to as monetary savings (Gwinner et al., 1998). Monetary savings (i.e., discounts or special price breaks) is a primary reason for a consumer to develop a relationship with a company (Harris et al., 2003; Peterson, 1995). Gwinner et al. (1998) illustrated the importance of monetary benefits when developing a relationship with a service company.

In hospitality research, monetary benefits have been considered a part of individualized services that fulfill consumers' specific needs (i.e., special treatment benefits) (Lee, et al., 2008). Han and Kim (2009) found that special treatment benefits (e.g., gift certificates) had a positive effect on the way that consumers felt about a restaurant. A similar process is likely to occur in online communities for hotels (Kozinets, 1999). That is, offering monetary benefits is likely to have as positive an effect on online community members as it does on actual patrons of a hotels (Kozinets, 1999). These businesses tend to offer special promotions and coupons to attract new members and benefit online community members (Treadaway & Smith, 2010). For example, community events and contests that provide winners with something of monetary value (e.g., coupons, information about sales) may encourage member participation and entice nonmembers to register with the community. Thus, monetary benefits attract new members and maintain existing relationships. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed regarding the relationship between economic benefits and community participation:

H5: *Monetary benefits have a positive influence on online community participation.*

2.4. Outcomes of Online Community Participation

In this section, the relationships between online community participation, and brand commitment are explored and hypotheses are developed. Through participation in online communities, members provide helps to others and receive helps when they need it. Because hospitality products and services cannot be evaluated without consumption, consumers can be significantly influenced by others who had experiences with those products and services. Once consumers find information provided by other people to be trustworthy, they learn to rely on these opinions (Paris et al., 2010). A high level of trust fosters emotional attachments among members of online communities (Hess & Story, 2005); it also increases their level of commitment to a particular brand (Casaló et al., 2007).

2.5. Brand commitment of online community members

An online community often constitutes a group of committed consumers because the group consists of people who share common interests and purposes (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Members are likely to discuss how to use products, and ask other members for product repair and maintenance information (Casaló et al., 2007). As members frequently and actively participate in online communities, they become more familiar with the brand, and thus develop expertise on products and brands. These members also are likely to help other members within the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Information or content posted by these members contains positive messages in support of their favorite brands, which protects their attitudinal positions about those brands (Raju et al., 2009).

Being highly involved in community activities (e.g., participating in discussions and posting positive messages about a brand) positively affects commitment and emotional attachment to a brand (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Consumer's emotional ties toward particular brands can develop as a result of active participation in online communities (Casaló et al., 2007). For example, when consumers discuss common issues related to their favorite brands, they are more likely to create emotional ties with each other, and they reach agreement more easily. Active participation increases member's commitment to particular brands because members who share similar interests in those brands can communicate and interact with each other through community discussion boards. When they experience shared sympathy on specific issues related to their preferred brands or consumption experiences, positive attitude toward those brands can be enhanced (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). Therefore, the level of participation positively affects commitment to a brand. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: *Online community participation has a positive influence on brand commitment.*

III. Research Model

Based on the above discussion, the present study proposes a conceptual research model of relationships: (a) the relationships between community participation and participation benefits, and (b) the relationship between community participation and brand commitment shown in Figure 2. The present study investigates hotel brand's Facebook pages. These group was selected because it is the most important segment of the hospitality industry. Many Facebook pages for hotels have incorporated unique features (e.g., promotions) in order to encourage member participation. Among the numerous fan pages on the site, four hotel's Facebook pages was chosen from the list of 7 Awesome Hotel Facebook Pages to Like. The successfulness of these Facebook pages was based on a high number of fans as well as a high number of postings by members (Preece et al., 2004). Facebook pages for five stars hotels in Damascus that meet both criteria were chosen.

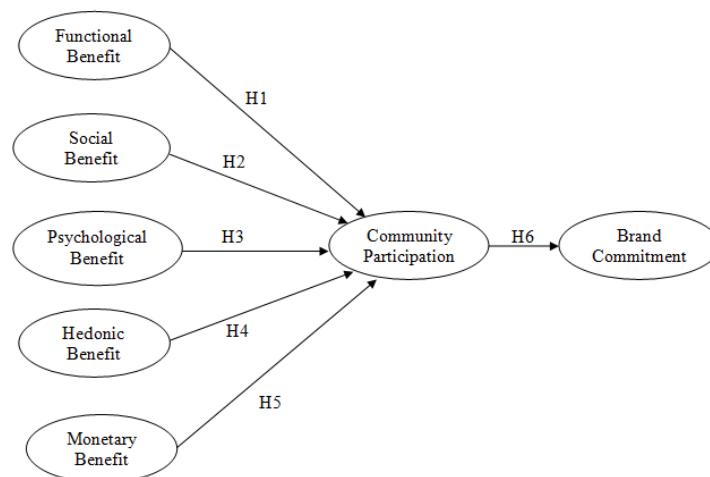


Figure 2 Proposed conceptual model for development of an effective online community

IV. Research Methodology

4.1. Selection of Online Communities in Facebook

4.1.1. Sample

The sample for the present study consisted of fans of the hotel brand's Facebook pages. An online survey was developed and distributed to potential respondents, both male and female, of at least 18 years of age. The advantages of online surveys are their (a) low cost, (b) interactivity, (c) high accessibility to the respondent without time and space constraints, and (d) convenience for data entry and checking (Stopher et al., 2004).

4.1.2. Survey Instrument

The survey consisted of four sections: (1) participation benefits; (2) community participation, and brand commitment; (3) demographic information and (4) manipulation checking. Prior to starting the first part of the survey, participants were asked whether they had ever joined either hotel or restaurant brand's Facebook pages. Only those who had confirmed that they have been or currently were a member of a Facebook page operated by a hospitality company were eligible to complete the survey.

The first part of the survey measured five categories of member benefits (exogenous variables): functional, social, psychological, hedonic, and monetary benefits, using five-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*not*

important at all) to 5 (extremely important). Five benefit variables (functional, social, psychological, hedonic and monetary) were adapted from Wang & Fesenmaier (2004a), Gwinner et al. (1998) and Lee et al. (2008); these have been successfully used in a number of studies of online communities. The second part of the survey examined levels of community participation and brand commitment (i.e., endogenous variables). To measure community participation, four items were adapted from Koh & Kim (2004) and Casaló et al. (2007). To measure brand commitment, three items were adapted from Ahluwalia (2000). All items in the second part were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The third part of the survey elicited demographic information such as education, gender, and age. Table (1) show items of the survey .

In the last part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked about the perceived success of the Facebook page as a manipulation check: “ The interaction between the company and other members is active”, “The hotel brand’s Facebook page is successful”, and “I like visiting the hotel brand’s Facebook page”. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

A pilot test was undertaken by distributing the survey to a total of 15 graduate students majoring in marketing to determine whether wording changes were needed to enhance clarity. Based on the feedback gathered, minor changes were made to ensure that participants would have no difficulty understanding or answering questions.

4.1.3. Data Collection

The data were collected between February 25 and April 5, 2016. An email invitation was sent to potential participants, along with a link to the online questionnaire. A total of 500 invitations were sent to the alumni of Arab International University list. From the 500 alumni, 250 responses were received with the response rate of (50 %).

4.1.4. Data Analysis

In the data analysis process, descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used for demographic data. The present study employed the two-step structural equation modeling (SEM) approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988).

Table 1 Constructs and items of the survey

Construct	Measurement items
Functional benefits	Obtaining up-to-date information Ease/convenience of communicating with others Efficiency of online communication Sharing experiences
Social benefits	Having trust in the community Seeking self-identity Communicating with other members Getting involved with other members
Psychological benefits	Seeking a sense of affiliation in the community Seeking a sense of belonging Establishing and maintaining relationships with other members
Hedonic benefits	To be entertained by other members To have fun To seek enjoyment To be entertained
Monetary benefits	Obtaining discounts or special deals that most consumers don't get Obtaining better prices than most consumers Receiving free coupons for hotel stays by becoming a member of this community
Community participation	I take an active part in the hotel brand’s Facebook page I usually provide useful information to other members in the hotel brand’s Facebook page In general, I post messages and responses in the hotel brand’s Facebook page with great enthusiasm and frequency I do my best to stimulate the hotel brand.

Brand commitment	<p>If the hotel brand were not available for reservations (e.g., rooms), it would make little difference to me if I had to make reservations at other hotel/restaurant brand.</p> <p>I consider myself to be highly loyal to the hotel brand.</p> <p>When another brand has a special deal (e.g., lower room rate), I generally stay at the hotel/visit the restaurant with the better deal rather than the hotel brand.</p>
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The first step involved confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to validate the scales for the measurement of specific constructs proposed in the research model (Hair et al., 1998). The second step involved examination of the structural model through SEM in order to evaluate the validity of the proposed model and hypotheses. The maximum likelihood procedure was used to estimate the measurement model and structural model (Namkung & Jang, 2007) in Amos (18).

V. Results

This section reports the results of the analysis, which include demographic characteristics of the sample and measurement and structural equation model tests.

5.1. Demographic Characteristics

A total of 250 questionnaires were collected, The data were screened to control response bias. Responses that included one or more unanswered sections and those with extreme answers were removed. After deleting 43 invalid surveys, 207 responses were kept for further analysis. Table (2) present the demographic profile of the hotel and respondents. In addition to demographic characteristics such as biological gender, age, and education, tables include respondent's information regarding duration of membership and average time spent on hotel brand's Facebook pages per week.

5.2. Brand Profile and Manipulation Check

To check the successfulness of Facebook pages operated by the hospitality companies named by the respondents, the mean values for the three items related to the perceived successfulness of the Facebook page were calculated for each brand (Table 3). All of the mean values were above 3.0, which indicated that participants generally perceived the Facebook pages to be actively managed, successful, and they liked visiting the brand's pages. Accordingly, the respondents created an appropriate sample for the present study due to their strong interest and concern for Facebook page brand's related to the hotel and restaurant establishments.

VI. Measurement Model

6.1. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to empirically test the measurement model. Multiple tests on construct validity and reliability were performed.

Construct reliability was assessed using Cronbach's α , composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) using CFA. As the α -values (Table 4) for all the constructs are greater than the guideline of 0.70, it can be concluded that the scales can be applied for the analysis with acceptable reliability (Saunders et al., 2003). CR and AVE were calculated from model estimates using the CR formula and AVE formula given by Fornell and Larcker (1981). In the measurement model, all constructs had a CR over the cut-off of 0.70 and the AVE for all exceeded the recommended level of 0.5 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Based on these assessments, measures used within this study were within the acceptable levels supporting the reliability of the constructs (Table 4).

Content validity was verified by expert judgment and by a careful literature review, To assess the discriminant validity, Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion, that square root of the AVE for each construct should be greater than the correlation between constructs, was used. Table (5) shows the values of the square root of the AVE are all greater than the inter-construct correlations.

Table 2 Demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	106	51.2
	Female	101	48.8
Age	18-20 Years old	10	4.8
	21-30	59	28.5
	31-40	50	24.2
	41-55	63	30.4

	Over 55	25	12
Education	Under graduate	190	91.7
	Post graduate	17	8.3
Duration of membership	Less than 12 months	152	73.5
	12-24 months	50	24.1
	25-36 months	5	2.4
	Over 36 months	0	0
Average hour spent per week on facebook pages	Less than 1 hour	60	29
	1-5 hours	136	65.7
	6-10 hours	8	3.9
	More than 10 hours	3	1.4

Table 3 Perceived success of Facebook pages

Hotel (n = 207)	Mean	SD
There is active participation between the hotel and members.	3.84	.81
The hotel brand's Facebook page is successful.	3.72	.83
I like visiting the hotel brand's Facebook page.	3.94	.82

Table 4 Result for the Measurement Model

Construct	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α
Functional benefits	0.954	0.742	0.954
Social benefits	0.974	0.902	0.973
Psychological benefits	0.945	0.850	0.944
Hedonic benefits	0.959	0.855	0.959
Monetary benefits	0.948	0.858	0.947
Community participation	0.920	0.742	0.918
Brand commitment	0.901	0.752	0.898

Table 5 Correlation and average variance extracted

	Community participation	Functional benefits	Social benefits	Psychological benefits	Hedonic benefits	Monetary benefits	Brand commitment
Community participation	0.861						
Functional benefits	0.690	0.915					
Social benefits	0.575	0.541	0.950				
Psychological benefits	0.441	0.494	0.389	0.922			
Hedonic benefits	0.692	0.585	0.525	0.279	0.925		
Monetary benefits	0.042	0.008	-0.091	-0.010	0.054	0.926	
Brand commitment	0.144	0.070	0.081	0.134	0.026	0.128	0.867

Eight common model-fit measures were used to assess the model's overall goodness of fit. As shown in Table (6), all the model-fit indices exceeded the respective common acceptance levels suggested by previous research (Kim et al., 2004), demonstrating that the measurement model exhibited a good fit with the data collected.

Table 6 Measurement Model Fit Indices

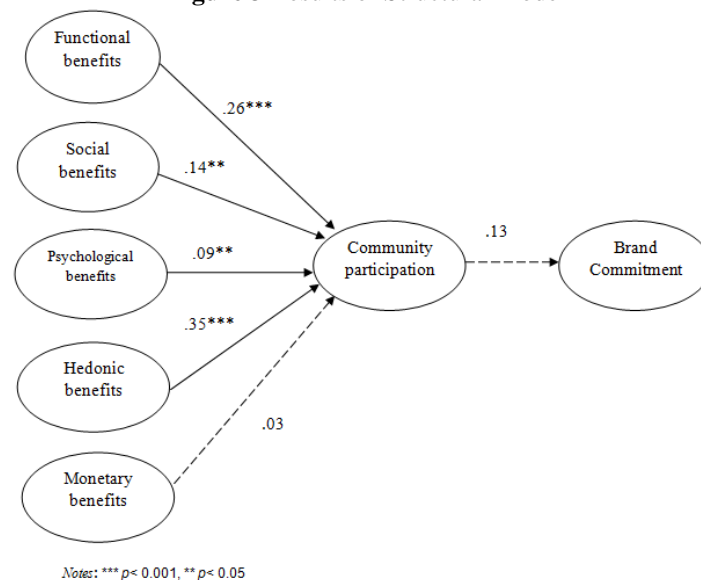
Fit index	Recommended value	Indices values
Chi-square / (df)	≤ 3.00	1.94
GFI	≥ 0.80	0.87
AGFI	≥ 0.80	0.83
NFI	≥ 0.90	0.93
IFI	≥ 0.90	0.97
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.97
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.97
RMSEA	0.05 to 0.08	0.05

Regarding the hypothesis test as shown in Table (7), functional benefit showed a positive effect on community participation ($\beta = 0.263$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, *H1* confirmed. In addition social, psychological and hedonic benefits had a positive effect on community participation ($\beta = 0.143$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.094$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.348$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, *H2*, *H3* and *H4* are supported. But, monetary benefit not effect on community participation ($\beta = 0.029$, $p > 0.05$). indicating that *H5* was rejected. The path coefficient from community participation to brand commitment is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.127$, $p > 0.05$). These *H6* was not supported. Figure (3) shows the Results of structural model.

Table 7 Results of testing

Structural equations	Coefficients (β)	t-values	P	Result
Functional benefits → Community participation	0.263	4.512	***	Supported
Social benefits → Community participation	0.143	2.502	**	Supported
Psychological benefits → Community participation	0.094	1.980	**	Supported
Hedonic benefits → Community participation	0.348	5.833	***	Supported
Monetary benefits → Community participation	0.029	0.710	0.478	Rejected
Community participation → Brand Commitment	0.127	1.858	0.064	Rejected

Figure 3 Results of Structural Model



VII. Discussion Of Finding

The result demonstrate that functional, social, psychological and hedonic benefits (*H1*, *H2*, *H3* and *H4*) from hotel brand's Facebook page members were found positively influence community participation. Monetary benefits were found to be a non-significant factor in community participation (*H5*).

The positive relationship between functional benefits and community participation for hotel pages (*H1*) is consistent with the findings of Chung and Buhalis (2008) and Hwang and Cho (2005), who indicated that functional benefits as the most influential factors affecting the level of member's participation in online travel communities. In relation to functional benefits, members of hotel brand's Facebook pages in the present study desired efficiency and convenience of communicating with others online, and desired sharing information about

their service experiences with the hotel brands. To fulfill these desires, members appeared to visit the site frequently to gather information and communicate with others regarding the hotel and its services. Accordingly, the findings of the present study identified functional benefits as a significant element that increased member participation in the hotel brand's Facebook pages.

Hedonic benefits were found to be a significant motivating factor for community participation in the hotel pages (H4). This supports previous findings that indicate that members participate in community activities because they perceive these to be relaxing and entertaining (Ridings & Gefen, 2004; Wasko & Faraj, 2000). Members are likely to spend more time, especially when hotel brands' pages incorporate unique features that are geared toward members' interests and that give members another way to interact (Dholakia et al., 2004).

The significant relationship between social benefit, psychological benefit and community participation in this present study also confirms the findings of previous studies (e.g., Ahuja & Galvin, 2003; Langerak et al., 2003). These social and psychological benefits may also enhance the perceptions of community attractiveness and lead to useful feedback about community service (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997).

Monetary benefit was a new construct added that extends Wang and Fesenmaier's (2004b) conceptual model. Contrary to past research looking at book clubs and airlines (Peterson, 1995), monetary benefits did not have a significant relationship with community participation for the hotel pages (H5). The present results also conflicted with the results from Treadaway and Smith (2010), Harris et al. (2003). Treadaway & Smith (2010) found that monetary benefits potentially help generate member interest about hotel and restaurant brands and encourage members to participate in community activities. Harris et al. (2003) reported monetary benefits as consumer's primary reason to begin a relationship with a company. One possible reason for the conflicting results is because the present study focused on taking part in activities rather than generating initial interest or joining the community. For this reason, monetary benefits need to be more thoroughly investigated to determine if they can stimulate potential consumers to join hotel brand's pages. In other words, monetary benefits can be an influential factor that increases the number of members, but not necessarily the level of subsequent participation.

The relationships between community participation and brand commitment (H6) was not supported. These results indicated that community participation did not produce a positive feeling of attachment to a brand. The results for H6 are contrary to the results of Jang et al. (2008) and Casaló et al. (2010), who found a positive effect of member participation on commitment toward a brand.

One possible explanation for the behavior of hotel respondents is the amount of time dedicated to interaction between members and brands. Ellonen et al. (2010) emphasized the role of online consumer-brand interactions in strengthening consumer relationships with a particular brand. They pointed out two key influential factors of consumer-brand relationships: frequent participation and longer individual visits to online brand communities. According to Merisavo & Raulas (2004), positive emotional responses occur as consumers increase the amount of time that they spend with a brand, which enhances the relationship with the brand (Merisavo, 2008). In contrast to these findings (Merisavo & Raulas, 2004; Merisavo, 2008), member profiles of hotel respondents in the present study showed that over 70% of respondents had relatively short-term relationships with hotel brand's Facebook pages (e.g., the duration of membership was less than a year) and nearly 90% spent less than five hours per week participating in activities on hotel brand's pages. This indicates that members of hotel brand's pages have relatively low levels of interaction with hotel brands. In addition, members may intend to visit hotel brand's pages more often when they need to fulfill specific needs, such as obtaining information about hotel packages and events. Because of the goal-oriented behaviors of hotel members (pursuing specific needs for a special occasion such as a trip), the member's visits to the hotel brand's pages are inclined to be infrequent rather than consistent.

VIII. Conclusions And Implications

The present study suggests significant strategies for online community design by identifying benefit factors that encourage member participation on hotel brand's Facebook pages. The findings indicated four desired participation benefits for hotel members: functional, social, psychological, and hedonic benefits. These benefits are related to multiple consumer needs. From a managerial perspective, marketers of hotel brand's pages first need to be aware of their members characteristics and understand who their members are before developing strategies for successful Facebook pages. In addition, these benefits can be used to attract potential consumers to join the hotel brand's pages.

Hotel firms should provide communication devices with diverse formats (e.g., real-time synchronous or asynchronous communication technologies such as chat or bulletin boards, virtual product presentations) that enable members to exchange information about hotel properties/services, provide critiques of ambiance, and share service experiences. Information gathering through brand pages is the most influential element to attract potential consumers to join hotel brand's Facebook pages and to encourage current members to frequently visit the page.

Interactions and communication among consumers do not appear to help hotel brands develop consumer commitment. Marketers may need to devise methods that depend on business-to-consumer activities rather than facilitating interaction among consumers in order to build consumer commitment towards the brand. For example, direct communication via online chat features between consumer service and consumers when making reservations may be an effective approach to build consumer commitment. Through this process, hotel staff could directly identify consumer preferences (e.g., the type of pillow or room they prefer) and special requests (e.g., particular room temperature and particular newspaper they want to be delivered) (Weed, 2011). Based on the information collected through this chat feature, hotels may provide personalized service that underlines the value of staying at the hotel brand. This may enhance consumer commitment toward a hotel brand and produce loyal customers.

Finally, social media is an innovative tool by which hotel brands can take a proactive approach to manage brand relationships with their consumers. Hotel marketers can identify the most important attributes of their brands (e.g., rooms, front desk, breakfast, room rates, and cleanliness) by analyzing the consumer's posts on the brand pages. Following this analysis, marketers can take immediate actions based on both complimentary reviews and complaints about service. Particularly for uncomplimentary reviews, marketers can mitigate their potential harmful effects by effectively responding to consumers' comments. All of these efforts can assist hotel brands in creating favorable brand images and building strong relationships with their members.

IX. Limitation

The present study proposed a single final consequence of community participation, which was brand commitment. Future research may investigate other consequences of active participation such as brand loyalty, purchase intention, or brand equity. This may provide hospitality companies with specific information needed to implement marketing strategies that encourage more active member participation.

Future research may investigate demographic characteristics of community members (age and gender) as a significant potential factor in influencing member participation.

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