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Online brand community engagement and brand evangelism: the role of age, gender and membership number

Min Prasad Bhandari (Teesside University International Business School, Teesside University, Middlesbrough, UK)

Charan Bhattarai (Essex Business School, University of Essex, Colchester, UK)

Gary Mulholland (Business School, AFG College with the University of Aberdeen, Doha, Qatar)

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Online brand community engagement and brand evangelism; the role of age, gender, and membership number

Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the critical role of online brand community (OBC) engagement in fostering brand evangelism, and the moderating role of age, gender, and online brand community (OBC) membership number, on social media.

Design/methodology/approach: To achieve the study's objective, 303 active Facebook online brand community (OBC) users were surveyed. The AMOS structural equation modelling (SEM) is used to test the hypothesised model.

Findings: The results indicate that OBC engagement improves brand evangelism. Specifically, the results show that age, gender, and OBC membership number moderate the relationship between OBC engagement and brand evangelism. Interestingly, this study found that female, younger, and low-OBC follower consumers more significantly contribute to nourishing brand evangelism than male, older, and high-OBC follower counterparts.

Originality/value: OBC engagement is validated as a key brand evangelism driver, further substantiating its role as a crucial strategic metric. Moreover, age, gender, and OBC membership number as moderating factors in the association between OBC engagement and brand evangelism (word of mouth referral, brand defence, and future purchases) have been verified. Although the findings suggest that improved OBC engagement contributes to evangelism, this effect transpires more significantly among female, younger, and low-OBC followers than male, older, and high-OBC followers.

Keywords: Consumer engagement; Brand evangelism; Online brand community; Social media

Type of paper: Research paper

Introduction

Online brand community (OBC) engagement in social media has been recognised as an important feature of brand evangelism (Sharma *et al.*, 2022). OBC engagement in social media refers to the act members perform when using a brand community (Santos *et al.*, 2022). OBC engagement, a subsection of brand community interactivity, pertains to the interaction between consumer-consumer and consumer-brand, which is believed to impact consumers' behavioural intentions (Kumar, 2021). In this sense, OBC engagement serves as a fundamental competency that contributes to the development of strong relationships with influential groups of users in social media via the reciprocal communications between social media tools (e.g. brand community) and the users, leading them to become brand evangelists (Sharma *et al.*, 2022).

Scholars refer to brand evangelists as the most influential brand communicators (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013) who are committed and engaged brand fans (Cooper *et al.*, 2019). They go beyond spreading positive opinions on buying a brand, disparaging rival brands by defending the preferred brand against critics, and denigrating rival brands (Mvondo *et al.*, 2022). The literature agrees on the crucial role of consumer engagement in such brand evangelical behaviours (Cooper *et al.*, 2019; Sharma *et al.*, 2022). Consumer engagement, for example, has been regarded as a pre-requisite for brand evangelism (Cooper *et al.*, 2019; Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020; Sharma *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, the literature exhibits that the more the consumer engagement, the more likely that there will be brand evangelism (Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020; Sharma *et al.*, 2022).

Although a growing body of research has been concerned with consumer engagement and its potential effect on brand evangelism (Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020), there remains limited research on how OBC engagement influences brand evangelism

behaviours (Sharma *et al.*, 2022). Specifically, research on the boundary conditions of the relationship between OBC engagement and evangelism behaviour is scarce. Particularly, recent literature using a service-dominant (SD) logic perspective (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019) compares consumer engagement with interaction and describes how consumers and brand interactively co-create value and develop deeper relationships via collaborative, experiential and interactive activities (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2016) in social media brand community engagement (Zhang *et al.*, 2017).

Highly interactive consumers, as described by SD logic, may indeed have advantages for the brand, such as increased value creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) via word of mouth (Kumar and Pansari, 2016), brand defence (Harrigan *et al.*, 2021) and future purchase (Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020). Scholars Islam and Rahman (2017), Rather and Hollebeek (2021) and Ye *et al.* (2018) argue that engagement implies the influence of personal characteristics on brand evangelism. They may include boundary conditions such as consumers' age, gender, and OBC membership.

Due to the pervasive usage of social media, personal and demographic characteristics in OBCs have become a critical factor for brand communication and elaboration of brand information among the fans of brands (Kamboj and Rahman, 2016). Research has suggested that consumer age, gender, and single and multiple brand loyalty influence their behavioural intentions (Arifine *et al.*, 2019; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019; Kamboj and Rahman, 2016; Rialti *et al.*, 2017; Ye *et al.*, 2019). Hence, in the case of OBC, the prospective impact of OBC engagement on brand evangelism may not fully materialise unless consumers' characteristics, such as age, gender, and OBC membership number, are understood. In particular, whether the strength of the influence on brand evangelism of consumer engagement in OBC on social media (Cooper *et al.*, 2019; Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Sharma *et al.*, 2022) varies by their personal and demographic characteristics is yet unclear.

The existing literature assumes that consumer engagement produces increasingly favourable consumer loyalty (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Kumar and Kumar, 2020) and positive brand communication (Kumar, 2021; Kumar and Pansari, 2016). It is also assumed that consumers' personal and demographic characteristics may influence these effects. For example, scholars suggest that the relationship between consumer engagement and brand-related intentions has different results for different age groups (Rather and Hollebeek, 2021). However, our understanding of how the effect of consumers' age affects the relationship between their online brand community and brand evangelism is still underdeveloped due to a lack of empirical studies. Similarly, some scholars argue that in the online environment atmosphere, men and women behave differently in web-based interactions (Lim *et al.*, 2021). However, research on the role of gender in the marketing domain in an online environment is scarce (Gupta *et al.*, 2023; Ladhari and Leclerc, 2013), and the findings are controversial (Islam and Rahman, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2017; Nadeem *et al.*, 2015).

Likewise, regarding consumer loyalty to single or multiple brands, some scholars argue that consumers can be loyal to multiple brands (Arifine *et al.*, 2019), and satisfied consumers have multiple experiences with OBC (Haverila *et al.*, 2023). Others, e.g. Dwivedi *et al.* (2019) argue for single brand loyalty in a social media context. Due to such conflicting literature, our understanding of the role of age, gender, and OBC membership number in the relationship between OBC engagement and brand evangelism is underdeveloped.

To address this research gap, employing the SD logic perspective (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019) and analysing a sample of 303 participants in Amazon mechanical Turk (MTurk) using structural equation modelling, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. Does OBC engagement enhance brand evangelism?

RQ2. Does gender moderate the effect of OBC engagement on brand evangelism?

RQ3. Does age moderate the effect of OBC engagement on brand evangelism?

RQ4. Does OBC membership number moderate the effect of OBC engagement on brand evangelism?

This study will have four main theoretical implications. First, this study explores whether the boundary of current literature and theory on consumer engagement and brand evangelism should be extended from certain sectors, mainly hospitality, to OBC in social media. By so doing, this study also contributes to filling the gap in empirical research on the relationship between OBC engagement and brand evangelism, particularly in the context of the Facebook brand community in social media. This group was selected for the current study as it gives an interesting angle from which to understand OBC engagement processes in such brand communities and how they could benefit brands from their engagements. Some current discussions explored consumers' engagements, experiences, and brand evangelism in the hospitality sectors (Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Mvondo *et al.*, 2022). However, research on what drives brand evangelism in social media brand communities and its variations in consumer evangelical tendencies remains scant (Cooper *et al.*, 2019; Sharma *et al.*, 2022).

Second, this paper aims to contribute to the current social media OBC engagement literature through the SD logic lens in value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2016) to foster brand evangelism (Harrigan *et al.*, 2021). Third, by investigating the moderating role of age, gender, and OBC membership number, we clarify how OBC engagement influences brand evangelism. Finally, this study significantly contributes to both OBC engagement (Zhang *et al.*, 2017) and brand evangelism, which are relatively emergent topics in social media OBC literature (Sharma *et al.*, 2022), and there are theoretical and empirical deficits in their development processes and effects (Mvondo *et al.*, 2022; Sharma *et al.*, 2022; Zhang *et al.*, 2017).

This study will also have some managerial implications. The findings of this study guide brand community managers as to whether they should target consumers of particular age, gender, and number of OBC followers to foster brand community engagement and brand evangelism in social media.

Literature review and Hypothesis development

SD logic and Online Brand Community (OBC) engagement

S-D logic defines service ecosystems as “systems of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional logics - rules, norms and beliefs that enable and constrain action, and make social life predictable and meaningful” (Vargo and Lusch, 2016: p. 6), and “mutual value creation through service exchange” (Vargo and Akaka, 2012: p. 207). A service ecosystem is dynamic, self-contained, and self-adjusting; the value co-creation process will extend to the next circulation with the actors’ intention of future co-creation instead of being terminated after service encounters (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). In addition, Lusch and Vargo (2010) suggest that particular interactive and co-created customer experiences may be regarded as the performance “engaging.” Engaged consumers exhibit behaviours that transcend traditional transactions and consumption (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). In this sense, consumer engagement is rooted in and consistent with this service ecosystem. It highlights the importance of sustained interactive, co-creative, and experiential customer relationships and their behavioural intentions (Cheung *et al.*, 2021; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019).

OBC describes the nature of a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among users of a brand” (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412). They are structured around a brand, shared by its members, and have a collaborative attitude in social media (Hajli *et al.*, 2017). Scholars apply the service ecosystem in the OBC context (Zhang *et al.*, 2017). They reveal that OBCs can be seen as appropriate

platforms for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of social interaction. By being in the same community (institutional logic), OBC members in social media share values, norms, and beliefs towards the brand community (Sharma *et al.*, 2022; Zhou *et al.*, 2022). The platform enables consumers to interact, create and share content with the brands and other community members (Dessart *et al.*, 2015, 2016). It offers consumers multiple experiences (Santos *et al.*, 2022) via community events, workshops, and games (Kumar and Kumar, 2020) and creates a social tie with the community (Zagila, 2013). Consumers feel encouraged to interact and co-create, which results in a high level of OBC engagement (Wong and Hung, 2023) Engaged consumers, through individual and collaborative effort, co-create value for themselves, other consumers, and/or organisations (Hsieh *et al.*, 2022). They develop into engaged brand fans (Cooper *et al.*, 2019). Such true fans rise as brand warriors at a time, for example, when a sports team faces a crisis, and the whole community reacts with support and solidarity (Jackson and Thaker, 2021).

On the one hand, engaged brand fans interact with other members and a brand in the community, spend time, show interest, and participate in the co-creation of unique experiences within actor-actor and actor-firm interaction. The open nature of social media enables interactions among multiple entities to transcend beyond the customer-firm dyad (Brodie *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, consumers in OBC on social media transform themselves from passive beneficiaries to active participants (Hsieh *et al.*, 2022). This transformation to engaged fans aligns with the service ecosystem, which redefines actors' roles and reframes resources (Koskela-Huotari *et al.*, 2016). Engaged fans are actively involved in brand evangelical activities of brand advocacy and loyalty intentions (Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020). They unconditionally initiate and continue value co-creation into their engagement behaviours. Therefore, consumer engagement in OBCs on social media captures cognitive, affective, behavioural, and collaborative activities (Dessart *et al.*, 2016).

Brand evangelism

The concept of brand evangelism has got much attention recently (Mvondo *et al.*, 2022; Sharma *et al.*, 2022) because marketing literature has yet to have a common definition for this, despite the widespread use of it. Most of the definitions focused either on brand communication (brand advocacy) (Matzler *et al.*, 2007) or consumption (purchase) (Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020). Although brand evangelism has been used as a vehicle for brand building, researchers and practitioners still discuss the conceptual definition, especially its operationalisation (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). In marketing literature, ‘evangelism’ definitions can be found using a diversity of foci, such as brand, organisation, community, destination, or online evangelism (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Mvondo *et al.*, 2022; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020; Sharma *et al.*, 2022). The common point of these definitions is that brand evangelism involves a multidimensional approach based on the consumer’s behavioural support for a particular brand, including purchasing it, convincing others about it, and recommending it to others (Mvondo *et al.*, 2022). A definition proposed by Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) summarises evangelism perspectives, stating that “brand evangelism is an intense form of supportive brand-related behaviours that includes purchasing the brand, providing positive referrals regarding the brand, and issuing disparaging comments about opposing brands” (2013, p 374).

Recently, others have begun to specifically study brand evangelism in brand communities on social media (Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Sharma *et al.*, 2022). The technological capabilities of this environment allow fans to become actively committed and engaged, supporting different behavioural possibilities with the community, and over time, more and more fans interact and collaborate, generating different types of evangelical tendencies. Scarpi (2010) revealed brand evangelism tendencies with positive word of mouth communication, and Harrigan *et al.* (2021) described it as involving advocacy and defence against critics.

In line with former perspectives, but having two foci in mind (the brand, and other participants in social media), Mvondo *et al.* (2022) extended the concept of brand evangelism beyond positive word of mouth because the tendencies used by brand evangelists surpass spreading positive views on buying a brand and disparaging rival brands. Mvondo *et al.* (2022) focused their perspective on participants' value creation process in the interaction between brand and participants in social media (Facebook) in their empirical study, and showed that brand evangelism transcended word of mouth and presented an operationalisation of brand evangelism in social media based on three dimensions:

1. Brand purchase intention – a consumer's plan to buy a brand's products in future.
2. Positive brand referrals - brand support behaviours via propagating favourable opinions about the brand and its recommendations and convincing others to engage with the same brand.
3. Oppositional brand referrals - pro-brand directed behaviour by defending the preferred brand against critics, and disparaging rival brands.

This definition supports a broader vision, reflecting the current social media environment: fans available to show consumption and communicative co-creation behaviours on platforms like those used in this study.

Online brand community (OBC) engagement and brand evangelism

Consumer engagement in OBC on social media results from consumers' cognitive, affective, behavioural, and collaborative activities (Dessart *et al.*, 2016), and consumers' interactive and co-creative experiences are linked to their engagement performances (Lusch and Vargo, 2010). Therefore, consumer investment in thought, emotion, and activation (Hollebeek, 2014), and co-creative capacity, are most important (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019). Investing and interacting with consumer time and energy, feeling and enthusiasm and experience, and feedback for preferred OBC are very difficult without consumer engagement, but are perhaps the most

critical tasks (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Santos *et al.*, 2022; Vivek *et al.*, 2012); they can thus be regarded as the prerequisites for brand evangelical behaviours in OBCs (Scarpi, 2010; Sharma *et al.*, 2022).

Brand evangelism as a central antecedent of evangelical activity has been investigated intensively (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Haverila *et al.*, 2023; Mvondo *et al.*, 2022; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020; Scarpi, 2010; Sharma *et al.*, 2022). This critically depends on several factors such as trust and identification (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013), satisfaction (Haverila *et al.*, 2023; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020), and essential customers' ability to interact and leverage necessary behavioural investments for the desired brand, and wherefore research should better integrate engagement considerations and brand evangelism (Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the extant literature supports a strong relationship between consumer engagement and several positive intentions, including commitment, loyalty, brand advocacy, and brand defence (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Islam *et al.*, 2019; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020), which support brand evangelism (Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020; Scarpi, 2010; Sharma *et al.*, 2022).

This study argues that OBC engagement may result in three main potential brand evangelism behaviours: (1) that the greater the OBC engagement (e.g. evaluation of cognitive, affective, behavioural, and collaborative consumer experiences), the stronger the related word-of-mouth behaviours will be; (2) the stronger the related brand defence will be and (3) the stronger the related brand purchase behaviour will be. The nature of OBC engagement on social media is thus multi-faceted: it is a detailed pattern of consumers' cognitive, affective, behavioural, and collaborative activities (Dessart *et al.*, 2016), and an interactive experience exchange process between a brand and its consumer, and between consumers themselves (Brodie *et al.*, 2013), which may have positive anticipated consequences for brands (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019). The greater the consumers' cognitive, affective, behavioural, collaborative,

experiential, and interactive experiences, the more likely brands will perceive it as a positive brand communication (e.g. word of mouth and brand defence) and consumption (e.g. repurchase) opportunity, and will thus be willing to encourage consumers towards OBC engagement. This leads us to postulate a positive relationship between OBC engagement and brand evangelism.

H1: The greater the OBC engagement, the greater the likelihood of brand evangelism.

Gender as a moderator

According to gender schema theory, men and women generally form distinctive value sets resulting in different decision-making processes when absorbing information (Lim *et al.*, 2021). Men generally demonstrate a strong result-oriented propensity, whereas women typically display an obvious society-oriented inclination (Li and Wei, 2021). In addition, men tend to understand meanings via clearly revealed clues, whereas women are inclined to do the same via comprehensive clues (Li and Wei, 2021; Lim *et al.*, 2021). Men are more task-oriented, whereas women are more relationship-oriented, which has several implications regarding how each gender processes, evaluates, and retrieves information and makes judgement (Kim *et al.*, 2010). Men are likely to make quick decisions relying on only available information, whereas women make use of multiple sources of information before deciding (Putrevu, 2001).

Richard *et al.* (2010) finds similarities and disparities between men and women in how their internet experience and web atmospherics influence their web navigation behaviour, website attitudes, and prepurchase evaluations. Men engage in less exploratory behaviour and develop less website involvement than women (Richard *et al.*, 2010). Women are described as

comprehensive information processors, and men are categorised as heuristic processors (Putrevu, 2001). Driven by relationship-oriented communal goals, women are more likely to consider all message claims since they are interested in the message's overall impact (Lim *et al.*, 2021). Hence, men have been found to undertake item-specific processing, and women to engage in relational processing (Putrevu, 2001). Therefore, gender affects customers' internet usage behaviours (Chae *et al.*, 2018), OBC engagement behaviours (Gupta *et al.*, 2023) and consumer brand behaviours (Islam *et al.*, 2019), such as loyalty and word of mouth (Rialti *et al.*, 2017).

Engagement literature implicitly assumes that gender can moderate personal characteristics and consumer engagement (Islam and Rahman, 2017; Lim *et al.*, 2021) in OBC (Gupta *et al.*, 2023). Females usually value relationships more than males and tend to use social media as interaction tools (Kim *et al.*, 2010) and exhibit stronger interpersonal relationships such as information, feelings, and experience sharing and communications (Chae *et al.*, 2018). While gender effects have been examined in previous marketing research (Kamboj and Rahman, 2016), little is known regarding the existence of potential gender effects with respect to its relationship with consumer engagement, including in OBCs (Islam *et al.*, 2019; Ladhari and Leclerc, 2013; Gupta *et al.*, 2023).

H2: The positive effects of OBC engagement on brand evangelism are stronger with females than males.

Age as a moderator

Age is another salient and relevant demographic variable in consumer behaviour research in OBC (Khan *et al.*, 2020) and online user behaviour (Kamboj and Rahman, 2016). During their lives, individuals may value other people, objects, and services differently (Loureiro and

Roschk, 2014). Different age groups of consumers are likely to be different in terms of their different brand experiences, and these differences tend to greatly impact their behaviour (Ye *et al.*, 2019). Age can affect how consumers perceive brand experiences and respond to marketing strategies (Rather and Hollebeek, 2021) and brand-related intentions (Pedeliento *et al.*, 2020). Consumers' need for products, mindsets, responses to and perception of marketing, and /or brand-related stimuli changes as they shift from one stage to another in their life cycle (Ye *et al.*, 2019), which may change their interactions and experiences, shared preferences (Khan, *et al.*, 2020) and their engagement with the brand community (Kamboj and Rahman, 2016). Despite the significance of age as a demographic variable, brand community literature shows a lack of academic research with age as a moderator (Kamboj and Rahman, 2016; Pedeliento *et al.*, 2020). Studies suggest that age should be considered as a moderator, not only as a predictor variable for engagement and brand-related behaviour (Rather and Hollebeek, 2021).

Importantly, the impact of age as a moderator is explained in several studies; for instance, older consumers are less likely to strive for new information while processing information because of restricted information-processing capabilities (Homburg and Giering, 2001). Older consumers have higher maturity and emotional control than younger people in changing their emotions (Rather and Hollebeek, 2021). In addition, age influences internet usage behaviours and computer adoption - for instance, searching, sharing, messaging, downloading, liking, purchasing, and interactivity with OBCs (Kamboj and Rahman, 2016; Khan *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, technology adoption is associated with age differences, and younger users are more open to adopting new technology than older users because older persons tend to be more concerned about the complexities and difficulties, and they may have reservations towards adopting new techniques (Lee and Coughlin, 2015). Younger consumers display higher interactivity, loyalty, and commitment than older consumers, yielding

behavioural brand-related activity (Homburg and Giering, 2001; Rather and Hollebeek, 2021).

Thus, this leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: The positive effects of OBC engagement on brand evangelism are stronger with the young than with the old.

Online brand community (OBC) membership number as a moderator

Research on the phenomenon of consumer loyalty to single or multiple brands has yet to be conclusive in marketing literature as it presents two camps (single and multi-brand) as to how consumers prefer their brand choices (Arifine *et al.*, 2019).

On the one hand, the multi-brand camp argues that many consumers appear to be committed to more than one brand, which is the result of their satisfaction, commitment, or trust for the preferred brand (Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil, 2018; Arifine *et al.*, 2019; Quoquab *et al.*, 2014) and brand community (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002). For example, many users subscribe to multiple mobile phone service providers (Quoquab *et al.*, 2014), many smokers appear to be loyal to more than one brand (Dawes, 2014), many tourists are loyal to more than one destination (Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil, 2018) and many consumers are loyal to more than one brand community (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002). In OBCs on social media, Haverila *et al.* (2023), drawing on satisfaction and consumer experience, argue that consumers gain experiential benefits because of their satisfaction in belonging to multiple brand communities.

On the other hand, the single-brand camp argues that the logical outcome of deep emotional attachment is extreme brand loyalty-repurchase, despite situational incentives and enticements aimed at inducing switching (Oliver, 1999) and greater single-brand loyalty (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019). In a similar vein, Rabbanee *et al.* (2020) pinpoint that some consumers may trigger impulsive engagement behaviour, which could be strongest for their preferred

brand to which they are highly attached, but weakest for the brand they are less attached to within social network brands (Ahluwalia *et al.*, 2000; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019; Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020). They are motivated to expand their resources, such as time and effort, to maintain proximity to others through interaction and experience sharing, particularly with their preferred brand (Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020). When a consumer is attached to the brand, he/ she is more likely to support the preferred brand through advocacy (Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020; Thomson *et al.*, 2005) and loyalty (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019), and resist negative information and choose to focus more on the positive information about the preferred brand within the network (Ahluwalia *et al.*, 2000).

Following the attachment theory (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019) applied to the OBC context, this paper argues that highly attached consumers in OBCs may spend more resources, such as time and effort, to share experiences and values. Passionate feelings towards the brand could lead to affective identification with a brand community consisting of the same brand adorners (Santos *et al.*, 2022). However, the consumer could be attached to multiple brands (Thomson *et al.*, 2005), identify multiple OBCs, and join multiple OBCs (Thompson and Sinha, 2008). The more the OBC memberships, the more expansion of his/her resources, such as experience sharing (Haverila *et al.*, 2023), value, and passionate feelings for multiple OBCs in such platforms (social media). With the above logic, the less the OBCs membership, the more resources contribution (time, efforts, and experiences shared) and proximity to the attached OBCs. Thus, this leads to the following hypothesis.

H4: The positive effect of OBC engagement on brand evangelism is stronger with low OBC membership numbers than with high OBC membership numbers.

Figure 1 shows the structural relationship among variables and hypothesis of the model.

***{Figure 1 goes about here} ***

Methodology

Sample and data collection

To collect data, this study developed an online questionnaire survey. The choice of the online survey aligns with the context of this study as the population of interest for this research are Facebook OBC members. Following Baldus *et al.* (2015), this study set inclusion and exclusion criteria. To qualify for the survey, participants who self-identified as current members of Facebook and at least one Facebook-based brand community served as respondents for the past three months. As one of the biggest social networking sites worldwide, with over 2.89 billion active monthly users (Statista, 2021), OBCs on Facebook result from fans' responses to their preferred brand (Zaglia, 2013).

The participants (workers) were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), one of the largest online survey websites in the world. MTurk is widely used for researching user behaviours (Baldus *et al.*, 2015; Mason and Suri, 2012) and marketing research (Antonetti and Maklan, 2017). A HIT (Human Intelligence Task) was generated and posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk to invite participants to complete the survey. To maintain data quality, participants took part in a task that included a measure of attentiveness to instructions (an instrumental manipulation check: IMC). Only participants (workers) on MTurk with 99 percent approval scores (Matherly, 2019) and 5,000 HITs (the number a worker has successfully completed since they registered for MTurk) approved and over were selected. Following Dalman *et al.* (2019), the survey completion time was monitored for the participants to maintain the data quality. Each participant took approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey, which is considered excellent compared to the 4-5 minutes average time spent on each task. ID numbers were checked before they were compensated \$1.50. *Table 1* presents an overview of the respondents' demographic profile.

{Table 1 goes about here}

Measures

This study's constructs were gauged by drawing on well-established scales that were administered on seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). Minor modifications (as relevant) were made to ensure the scales fitted in our chosen study context. To measure consumer engagement as customers' psychological behavioural and co-creative interactions and responses to the desired brand, engagement items were sourced (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). To measure brand evangelism as customers' intense behavioural responses that included future purchase intention, positive word of mouth referrals, and brand defence (Cooper *et al.*, 2019; Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Matzler *et al.*, 2007), items of word of mouth (adopted from Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996), purchase intentions (adopted from Becerra and Korgaonkar, 2011), and brand defence were recorded (adopted from Dalman *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the brand evangelism constructs are created as second order constructs. Each first-order construct is measured with recognised scale items from the literature: word of mouth (2), purchase intentions (2) and brand defence (2), respectively, after EFA. *Table 2* presents an overview of scale items, EFA results, and scale validity and reliability.

Moderators

This study argued personal characteristics, such as age, gender, and brand memberships as moderators between the OBC engagement and brand evangelism relationship. Following Khan *et al.* (2020), this study categorises participants between young (18-40) and old (41-above), according to their ages. Scholars agree that consumer age and gender (male vs. female) are crucial in relationship engagement and brand-related behaviours (Khan *et al.*, 2020; Rather and Hollebeek, 2021). Similarly, consumers' propensity to engage in brand activity also depends on their loyalty to single (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019) and multiple brands (Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil, 2018). This study groups single and multiple OBC membership numbers as (low vs. high).

***{Table 2 goes about here} ***

Analysis

To access the proposed model, this study used exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to find the underlying pattern from the data, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and covariance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyse data and create appropriate results. SPSS software was used to analyse demographic variables, and AMOS software was used to test the model. *Table 1* (sample/demographic characteristics) presents participants' age, gender, and OBC membership numbers.

Empirical analysis and results

This study used exploratory analysis (EFA) and examined the structure of the constructs. To run the EFA, it applied the maximum probability for extraction and Promax for rotation from the database. The EFA process presented four factors to indicate the underlying variables of the model. The EFA results for the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling (0.8-1.0) showed as adequate and Barlett's test of sphericity (< 0.05) was within the recommended scores. The Eigenvalue was greater than one, and the total variance explained for all four factors exceeded (60%) the accepted threshold (Hair *et al.*, 2019). The EFA identified four constructs. To meet the reliability condition of constructs (e.g., the 0.7 thresholds for Cronbach's alpha coefficient), the scale items with the lowest factor loading score (below 0.5) removed align with Hair *et al.* (2010); see *Table 2*. The reduction in adopted indicators from the established literature is acceptable if some indicators fail to meet the essential cut-off point for factor loadings (Dalman *et al.*, 2019).

A second-order CFA construct confirmed the factor structure of EFA due to the inclusion of a higher-order construct (brand evangelism with its three first-order dimensions). To validate a second-order CFA, each construct is treated as a separate but reflective measure in a measurement model. The measurement model showed a good fit with data as the goodness

of fit indices for the measurement model is within the recommended ranges, such as chi-square (X^2) = 227.53, degrees of freedom (df) = 109, and $p=0.000$. The ratio of X^2 value to degrees of freedom ($X^2/df = 2.13$) met the recommended range (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Other important fit indices also showed a good fit between the model and data, such as CFI =, GFI =, TLI =, RMSEA =, and SRMR =) (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The effect size results (f^2) are small (0.056, 0.062) and medium (0.345) aligns with (Cohen, 1988); *see Table 4*.

All the constructs used in this study achieved reliability and validity. The composite reliability for all variables and Cronbach's alpha of all the constructs are above 0.7, demonstrating acceptable psychometric properties. The convergent validity of the scales was supported, as the AVE of all the constructs is above 0.5, providing greater internal consistency and adequate item reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Discriminant validity was achieved by applying Fornell Larcker's criterion, shared variance, and HTMT score (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2011; Hair Jr *et al.*, 2021). The squared root of the AVE of each variable extracted was higher than its correlations with other variables, and HTMT scores (0.68) are adequate, achieving discriminant validity of the constructs in the measurement model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2011; Hair Jr *et al.*, 2021), presented in *Table 3*.

{Table 3 goes about here}

Before using SEM, a regression model was formulated with brand evangelism intentions as a dependent variable and three dimensions of consumer engagement with OBCs as an independent variable to ensure that the data is clean and has no multicollinearity and common method bias. Following Lindell and Whitney (2001), the multicollinearity test revealed that the inner value of (OBC engagement and brand evangelism) variance inflation factors (VIF) (2.892) was in line with the recommended level (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

Further, this study used self-administered online surveys in MTurk to collect data, and each respondent was requested to answer questions about independent and dependent variables in the same questionnaire, which could risk common method bias in their responses (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Following Krishnan *et al.* (2006), this study attempted to reduce the risk of common method bias to guarantee respondents' anonymity to answer the questions freely and honestly. Besides, it also spread out the questions for dependent and independent variables in the questionnaire so that the respondents could not easily perceive a relationship between the variables and deterred them from manipulating their responses. Although the measures mentioned above are instrumental, common method bias could still exist in responses. This study performed Harman's single factor to test the common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The test result shows that the variance explained by the single factor is below 50% and confirmed no significant level of common method bias in this study (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

Structural model and hypothesis testing

A structural equation model (SEM) tests the proposed hypothesis. The overall fit of the proposed model is found satisfactory (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Islam *et al.*, 2019): $X^2 (233) = 370.440$ ($p < 0.001$), $df=1.563$ CFI=0.978 NFI=0.940, CFI=0.932, RMSEA=0.036, SRMR=0.0356 provide convincing evidence. The effect of OBC engagement on brand evangelism intentions is found significant (H1: ($\beta= 0.21$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that respondents considered engagement in OBCs a crucial factor in determining their brand evangelism behaviours. Hence, H1 is supported.

Tests of moderating effects: multi-group analysis

This study applied multi-group SEM analysis to test the moderation effect of gender (males vs. females), age (young vs. old), and OBC membership number (low vs. high) proposed in the conceptual model. Following Khan *et al.* (2020), this study compared parameter estimates of both subsample groups. Before testing moderating effects, an invariance test is also performed between the two subsample groups to confirm that scales measure identical traits in both groups. The invariance tests involve configural invariance, error variance invariance, metric and factor variance, and covariance invariance tests. Results established invariance tests, which supported the proposed model in both groups and correctly pooled the distinct types.

{Table 4 goes about here}

Results of moderation analysis suggest that gender has a significant moderation effect on proposed relations in H2 (see *Table 4*). Gender moderates H2, the relationship between OBC engagement and brand evangelism ($X^2 = 12.26^*$). OBC engagement's effect on brand evangelism intentions becomes more prominent when a consumer is female ($\beta = 0.53^*$) than a male ($\beta = 0.20^*$). Likewise, the effect of OBC engagement on brand evangelism also varies across ages ($X^2 = 8.21^*$). Results indicate that the effect of OBC engagement becomes stronger when there is a younger consumer ($\beta = 0.42^*$) than with an older consumer ($\beta = 0.17^*$). Further, the relationship between OBC engagement and brand evangelism is also contingent upon OBC membership numbers ($X^2 = 6.54^*$), indicating that the effect of OBC engagement on brand evangelism is significant when a consumer follows fewer OBCs ($\beta = 0.34^*$), but insignificant when a customer follows more OBCs ($\beta = 0.16$). Thus, results partially supported H4.

Discussion and theoretical contributions

This study offers several main contributions. First, this study advances brand evangelism literature by extending the knowledge about how OBC engagement relates to brand evangelism in social media. Specifically, this extends the boundary condition of consumer engagement and brand evangelism paradigm (Dalman *et al.*, 2019; Mvondo *et al.*, 2022; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020; Scarpi, 2010) into social media online brand communities (Cooper *et al.*, 2019; Sharma *et al.*, 2022). More specifically, this study enriches general research on the formation of brand evangelism behaviours (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Mvondo *et al.*, 2022) by showing that demographic characteristics and membership of this study's primary relationship enhance or impede brand evangelism.

Second, this study explored the moderating role of personal characteristics, for example, age, gender, and OBC membership number, in the proposed relationship framework, thereby offering more refined insight. This study finds that female participants showed stronger evangelism intentions when they were highly engaged, compared to males. The result indicates that OBC engagement is more important to female than male participants. A plausible reason might be that females value relationships more than males and tend to use social media tools (Kim *et al.*, 2010), such as OBCs, and exhibit stronger information, feelings, and experience sharing (Khan *et al.*, 2020) in such platforms. In addition, female consumers are more emotionally attached to their favourite brands than information seeker male counterparts, and show higher brand-related intentions (Ye *et al.*, 2018) through OBC engagement and brand evangelism.

On the other hand, the result for gender indicates that compared to older consumers, younger consumers showed stronger brand evangelism. Age may influence internet usage behaviours, such as searching, sharing, messaging, purchasing, and interacting (Kamboj and Rahman, 2016; Khan *et al.*, 2020). However, younger users are more open to adopting new technology and tend to adopt new technologies better than older users (Lee and Coughlin,

2015). In addition, this may be because older consumers' brand evaluations are already formed, whereas younger consumers are still not shaped (Homburg and Giering, 2001). Likewise, the result for several brand communities' numbers indicates that the lower the number of brand communities' membership, the stronger the evangelism behaviours. A plausible reason for that finding might be that brand attachment (passionate feeling for a preferred brand) (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019) leads consumers to believe that brand community identity, such as values, experience, and symbols, is their own. As a result, they may tend to actively engage their resources with the preferred OBC to whom they are more attached, and differentiate outside their network. In this sense, their brand-related behaviours for chosen OBCs within their network are stronger than multi-brands.

Third, this study adds engagement with brand community literature about the potential advantage of SD logic in value creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2016) by empirical findings that consumer engagement with the brand communities fosters the formation of brand evangelism when consumers show their co-creative engagement behaviours. This complements existing findings that greater consumer engagement can encourage word-of-mouth referral, defending negative information about brand and brand purchase intentions (Cooper *et al.*, 2019; Kumar and Pansari, 2016), and further highlights the importance of consumer engagement in social media online brand communities when the service-dominant nature of the evangelical process is studied (Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020).

Finally, this study significantly contributes to the emergent area of OBC engagement and brand evangelism in social media. Particularly, it tries to fill the theoretical and empirical deficits on their development processes and effects (Mvondo *et al.*, 2022; Sharma *et al.*, 2022; Zhang *et al.*, 2017).

Managerial implications

This study is of practical value. As engagement in OBCs enhances brand evangelism, marketing and brand managers should focus on encouraging and motivating consumers to join OBCs. Specifically, managers should focus on developing and implementing strategies that help consumers spend more time, keep interest, and actively participate in such platforms. Marketers could organise quiz contests, events, and fangames to attract current and potential consumers to join more OBCs. For example, an event such as, for example, My Starbucks Ideas, has enabled consumers to become actively engaged through discussions and new information shared in the community (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021) and, thus, encourages fostering their evangelical behaviours. Likewise, brand managers' investment in OBCs (e.g. the Lego Ideas consumer platform) has captured, managed, and exploited opportunities' interest with the community and brand-related interactions to serve specific consumer needs, wants, or preferences better (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021), and may enhance brand behaviours, evangelising their preferred brand.

OBCs in social media are a platform for consumers to share their brand experiences and show their interest in like-minded people and the brand. Personal characteristics become crucial for their engagement and brand-related behaviours. This study found that consumer characteristics vary; marketers must understand the nature of strategy and target specific audiences. Younger consumers look for interactivity of content on such platforms and respond better to interactive than informative content (Kang *et al.*, 2021). They could target young consumers with interactive and live streaming more than preloaded content, to encourage engagement and their brand behaviours in social media OBCs.

Moreover, marketers could particularly target female consumers more than their male counterparts. Females could engage more than males through their reviews, comments, and experience shared on such platforms. Similarly, marketers could focus on consumers' brand attachments so that they could join OBCs of such brands and use their resources with their

preferred brands. Marketers could use user-generated content and encourage users to generate and share content which can foster a sense of community and attachment for the particular brand. For example, Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign attracted many consumers to share their personalised Coke bottles, enhancing brand connections and evangelism.

Finally, marketers, in particular, should be aware that focusing on engagement mainly for positive brand communications may actually miss out on consumers' propensity to purchase and defend negative information. In this context, this paper suggests an open discussion of consumers' word of mouth, brand defence, purchase intentions, and expectations, whether implicit or explicit.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Notwithstanding the contributions of this study, it needs to note a few limitations, which, at the same time, also open up promising future research avenues. First, this study investigates behaviours, but not intentions. Naturally, not all potential behaviours will lead to actual behaviour; thus, we cannot be fully sure whether all consumers who exhibit brand evangelism will actually repurchase, recommend, and defend the brand in the future.

However, a strong link between intentions and behaviours certainly exists (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). This study believes that the brand evangelism behaviours variable is reliable because when consumers indicate that they are aiming at repurchasing and advocating their preferred brand, they normally have already begun gathering relevant information and should thus have a realistic idea of what is to come and remain true to their behaviour. Nevertheless, future research using longitudinal data that allow the extension of this study's model to actual behaviour is welcome, which also addresses the limitation that this study cannot derive valid conclusions with regard to causality because of the cross-sectional

nature of survey data. However, this study's theorising leads us to believe that causality exists as expected.

This research attempts to consider the important moderator variables, i.e. gender, age, and OBC membership number, but future research could use other possible moderator variables, such as consumer-generated vs company-generated OBCs, among others. At least, this study does not find the importance of brand websites and social media consumer engagement with industry-specific brands (e.g. Apple). Future research can apply experimental design to re-confirm this issue. Likewise, this study focuses on Facebook-based brand communities and members' responses. However, social media-based brand communities are dominated by lurkers, i.e. users who patronise a community but may not necessarily actively participate. Future research could see if the results extend to particular OBC type, such as retail, fashion, technology etc.

This study also notes that existing research needs to be more conclusive about how consumer engagement and personal characteristics affect the performance of brands (Islam *et al.*, 2019). Scholars could thus investigate how consumer engagement across other types of OBC results on Twitter, Instagram, etc., and the moderating effects of personal characteristics affect its long-term success. This study acknowledges that there were significantly more female respondents than males. Future research could consist of equal numbers of male and female participants, to analyse if there are changes in the results. To conclude, this study offers unique and novel insights that advance existing knowledge in numerous ways, and this study hopes that it will spark promising and fruitful future research efforts.

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