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From Connections to Advocacy: Examining Relationship Marketing's Influence on Brand Advocacy Among Malaysian Facebook Users

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ABSTRACT

Individuals forge and nurture relationships through social media platforms, engaging actively with content and connections in the digital landscape. Understanding user behaviour on these platforms is pivotal for organisations, facilitating consumer bonding and potentially enhancing brand advocacy. Leveraging social media, businesses in Malaysia bolster online visibility, broaden audience reach, and foster engagement, thereby strengthening relationships and promoting brand advocacy. With Malaysian users predominantly engaging with businesses on Facebook, this examines how relationship marketing influences brand advocacy within this context. Amidst limited research on relationship marketing and brand advocacy, this study scrutinises the relationship among Malaysian Facebook users. Data from 159 users interacting with various brand pages on Facebook were analysed using the partial least square method of structural equation modelling (SEM-PLS). The analysis revealed that commitment and consumer engagement significantly influence brand advocacy. This study illuminates the pivotal role of establishing and nurturing connections on social media to amplify brand advocacy. In conclusion, it delves into the dynamics of consumer-brand relationships among Malaysian Facebook users, advocating for future comparative studies across diverse social media platforms and recommending the utilisation of PLS-MGA analysis in forthcoming research endeavours.

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INTRODUCTION

It is noted that the consumption of social media across the globe has led to increased interest in organisations' marketing

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activities, especially in the demand that businesses need to address the most effective and appropriate techniques to communicate and, thus, build relationships with consumers. Relationship marketing is based on the assumption that developing and maintaining strong customer relationships will benefit the organisation, such as increased customer loyalty or brand advocacy. Customers with a strong sense of connection and engagement with a brand can actively endorse and promote it (Bilro et al., 2018). This study examines relationship marketing, which is increasingly common in social media. The novelty of this paper mostly lies in the unique contribution of brand advocacy conceptualisation in the context of social media research.

When consumers trust a company, they spread the word about it. Satisfied consumers are more likely to become advocates for the company and spread favourable word-of-mouth among new customers. Research indicates that consumer advocacy is a significant outcome of commitment (Bhati & Verma, 2020). Similar to commitment, consumer-perceived values improve their experience with a brand, particularly with intense interaction. Interaction in social media can enhance consumer engagement by maintaining existing relationships and culminating brand advocacy. The associations between relationship marketing and brand advocacy led to the development of five hypotheses for our study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The measurement items are adapted from the previous studies. An online survey was used in this study to assess the research hypotheses. A pre-test was conducted with a small group of experts (content validation) and target users (face validation). A pilot test was conducted with Facebook users who liked and followed brands that met the study's inclusion criteria. Out of 331 Facebook users approached 164 completed questionnaires were received for this study. Nonetheless, only 159 responses were used in the final data analysis due to sample outliers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One hundred fifty-nine (159) datasets were cleaned and tested for missing values, normality, and multicollinearity. The datasets were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The measurement model was tested for reliability and validity (Hair et al., 2022). All indicators were at least at 0.708 and higher. Composite reliability for all constructs greater than the minimum cut-off value 0.7 ranged from 0.937 to 0.953. The average variance extracted (AVE) ranged between 0.672 and 0.773, indicating convergent validity. The discriminant validity of the measures was evaluated using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), where the values were less than 0.90 for all constructs except trust and satisfaction (0.905) (Henseler et al., 2015). Thus, HTMT inference is applied. Discriminant validity is demonstrated in

the measurement model since HTMT's 95% bootstrap confidence interval is less than 1, confirming discriminant validity.

The hypothesis was tested using a bootstrapping approach with a 10,000 resampling rate to generate t-values, p-values, and confidence intervals. The results are presented in Table 1. Two of the five predictors of brand advocacy had a significant relationship. Commitment ($\beta = 0.223$, $t = 2.133$, $p < 0.05$, [.054, .397]) and consumer engagement ($\beta = 0.316$, $t = 2.927$, $p < 0.01$, [.129, .484]) had positive relationship with brand advocacy. Trust, satisfaction and perceived values were not significantly related to brand advocacy. The brand advocacy model is substantial, as indicated by the coefficient of determination (R^2 value) of 0.664. It was found that commitment's effect over brand advocacy (f2 =0.039) and consumer engagement over brand advocacy (f2 =0.078) was minimal. Additionally, as Shmueli et al. (2019) suggested, the PLS-Predict with a five-fold test was used to assess the model's predictive power. The present study used the commonly used default Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE), and if indicator differences (PLS-LM) are lower for all indicators, the model shows high predictive power.

Table 1
Structural model

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Dev	t-value	p-value	PCI LL	PCI UL	f^2	VIF	Supported
H1	**TRU -> BA**	0.145	0.115	1.264	0.103	-0.043	0.333	0.015	4.081	NO
H2	**SAT -> BA**	0.136	0.109	1.247	0.106	-0.042	0.313	0.012	4.482	NO
H3	**COMM -> BA**	0.223	0.105	2.133	0.016	0.054	0.397	0.039	3.793	YES
H4	**PV -> BA**	0.103	0.108	0.957	0.169	-0.075	0.281	0.009	3.527	NO
H5	**CE -> BA**	0.316	0.108	2.927	0.002	0.129	0.484	0.078	3.805	YES

The study confirms that consumer engagement and commitment are important factors in influencing brand advocacy. Customers who commit to a brand they like and follow on social media can positively influence brand advocacy by going above and beyond their regular role to ensure the success of the organisation. Companies that use social media to connect with their customers are more likely to implement tailored marketing strategies to strengthen their relationships. However, trust, satisfaction, and perceived values do not significantly relate to brand advocacy. One possible explanation for this result could be cultural differences between countries that affected the mindset and behaviours of social media users. This study contributed to the marketing literature by identifying the factors that promote brand advocacy. Malaysia's research on brand advocacy is limited so that this study could contribute to the field of studies. Practically, this study gives practitioners

insight into the critical role of establishing and nurturing connections on social media in amplifying brand advocacy. Further research should look into social media users on other platforms. PLS-MGA analysis can analyse more than two groups at a time. It is recommended that organisations uphold a high standard of relationship management to maintain enduring customer relationships.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings highlight the significance of relationship marketing in the digital world and offer insightful information on the factors that influence brand advocacy among Facebook users in Malaysia. The results emphasise that companies must actively interact with their online audience, establish enduring relationships, and cultivate a sense of commitment to promote their brands and generate good word-of-mouth.

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