To my loving and supportive husband and family
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EFFECTS OF ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITY ON BRAND LOYALTY: A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS PERSPECTIVE

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Major: Advertising

The exponential growth of the Internet has enabled us to have various communication tools including an online brand community. While numerous virtual communities have appeared online and become a powerful socio-economic phenomenon, few research studies have empirically explained the effect of online brand communities on brand loyalty.

This study investigates how online brand community characteristics affect online brand community loyalty, brand loyalty, and purchase intention by employing a uses and gratifications perspective.

The research found that interactivity, convenience of use, reliability of information, and reward for activity significantly influence online brand community loyalty. The results of the analyses also showed that emotive needs and contextual needs in using an online brand community moderate the relationship between online brand community characteristics and online brand community loyalty, while functional needs did not show a significant moderating effect. Furthermore, this study found that online brand community loyalty increases brand loyalty, and brand loyalty increases purchase intention consequently. Other interpretations and implications of the findings are also discussed.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the growth of the Internet has been exponential. It has grown considerably in terms of both quantity and quality. A Nielsen report revealed that the number of Internet users has doubled in the last seven years. In 2007, the percentage of Internet users rose more than 25%, which meant that 70% of the population of the United States considered themselves Internet users (internetworldstats, 2007). This proliferation of the Internet enables people to meet their needs for communication, information, and entertainment. Moreover, the advent of this new media provides more opportunities and applications for advertisers and marketers in their strategy development because of its distinctive characteristics such as interactivity, low setup costs, global coverage, and so forth (Pavlik, 1996).

Especially in the case of interactivity, the unique nature of online media gives consumers various ways of assessing information, making price and quality comparisons, and interacting with companies and with other consumers in many different ways (Negroponte & Maes, 1996). These interactions are conducted via e-mail, instant messaging, homepages, blogs, forums, online communities, newsgroups, chat rooms, hate sites, review sites, and social networking sites (Goldsmith, 2007).

This kind of stream has led to the establishment of a variety of online communities (Jang, Ko, & Koh, 2007). Rheingold (1993) defined a virtual community as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on public discussion long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (p. 10). Electronic virtual communities on the Internet meet the following four types of consumer needs: transaction, interest, fantasy, and relationship (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996). As a result, the word
“community” no longer refers only to social groups bound together by geography (Shang et al., 2006; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2002).

Virtual communities can be divided into two types: commercial (brand community) and non-commercial (Leimeister et al., 2004). Non-commercial communities (Thorbjornsen et al., 2002), are operated or founded by people or a third-party for the purpose of information exchange (Shang et al., 2006). And, according to Muniz and O’Guinn (2001), brand community is “a specialized, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (p. 412). Consumers are now sharing their personal experiences and impressions about the brand or products on the Internet. Previous research has suggested that the online brand community has become a powerful socio-economic phenomenon (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Because of the advantages of the Internet such as two-way interaction, virtual communities not only have become important to consumers, but also have become an important tool in marketing and branding through the evolution of online brand communities. A brand community makes and develops a relationship between the customer and brand (McAlexander & Schouten, 2002). From the consumers’ standpoint, online brand communities provide the chance to interact with others, including the company; from the marketer’s standpoint, new and deeper relationships with their consumers can be built (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996). In order to build a strong relationship with the consumers, marketers should know and understand the consumers’ needs and develop their online brand community strategies to specifically meet those needs. This new type of community exhibits four characteristics, different from a traditional community: interactivity, convenience of use, reliability of information, and reward for activity (Jang et al., 2007).
Finally, the question of why people participate and use online brand communities must be addressed. Consumers look to meet their needs through online brand communities in a way that they have not been met through other communication channels. Therefore, a uses and gratifications approach will be used to develop and answer research hypotheses and draw implications. When an online brand community’s characteristics meet consumer needs, it will enhance the effect, especially in terms of gratifications, on both consumers as participants and marketers.

This study explained the effect of an online brand community on brand community loyalty. In line with this purpose, this paper attempts to elucidate the following aspects: definition of community, virtual communities and an online brand community, the uses and gratifications theory with virtual communities, key characteristics of an online brand community, and the influence of communities’ characteristics and users’ needs on community loyalty, attitude toward brand, and purchase intention. The data for this study will be collected via an online survey with self-administered questionnaires to measure variables. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, structural equation modeling will be the best way to see the relationship among variables. However, due to a relatively small sample size to do the structural equation modeling, multiple regressions will be conducted to test the hypotheses. In addition, the results will provide practical implications for advertisers and marketers with the effectiveness of online brand communities.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Community

Community has been defined as an organization of individuals or small groups that have the intention of coming together with a sense of responsibility for others (Rheingold, 2000). According to Muniz and O’Guinn (2002), at least three core components of community have been identified: consciousness of kind, the presence of shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. First, consciousness of kind is the intrinsic connection which members feel with the other members of the group and the collective sense of difference from others who are not in the community with them. The second component is the presence of shared rituals and traditions. Rituals and traditions are developed by the community’s shared history, culture, and consciousness. The third component of community is a sense of moral responsibility that is a kind of felt senses of duty or obligation to the community as a whole and to its individual members.

Initially, community was thought of as a place. However, throughout the twentieth century the idea of community continued to widen (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2002), due to new technologies (e.g. telephones and World Wide Web).

Virtual Community

Virtual communities as a new type of community on the Internet have received widespread attention during the past decade (Shang et al., 2006). The ubiquity of the internet and the human desire for connection, knowledge and information, have combined to create new social forms such as an online community. According to Amstrong and Hagel (1996), an online community is a group of people gathered by their own interest and needs on the Internet. An
online community is the social aggregation of people who desire to make a relationship through public discussion with affiliation in cyber space (Rheingold, 1993).

Jones (1997) describes online communities as a group of people who want to create a relationship through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). In an online community, people who share common interests get together regularly and electronically. In other words, people communicate in-person and through the Internet, and agree on the benefits they receive through their actions (Jang et al., 2007). Online communities provide the integration of communication with content developed by community members to either groups or individuals who engage in online interactions through virtual spaces.

**Brand Community**

In the category of community, a new concept, brand community, has come into being. In reference to Kotler (2001), brand is a tangible and intangible equity of company that is a kind of name, symbol, or design to distinguish the company’s product and services. A brand community is a community based on the brand. A brand community starts with its core asset, that is, the brand itself, and continues to build relationships among members interested in the brand (Jang et al., 2007). A brand community is the term that describes like-minded consumers who identify with a particular brand and share significant traits (Kalman, 2005). It is “a specialized, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412). This kind of a brand community has three components. First, it is centered on the brand. Second, it fosters relationships between members who share a common interest in the brand, and finally, there is the community. Examples of brand communities include Apple and Mac communities, Harley-Davidson community, and Jeep owners’ community.
The importance of a brand community has been studied by McWilliam (2000), who found that an online brand community is one of the ways to develop a brand. The purpose of McWilliam’s study was to enhance company sales and brand image through developing a brand community. The study showed that consumers organize into these communities to share their experiences of a brand (Kalman, 2005).

Moreover, on the marketers’ side, a brand community not only provides companies with an additional communication channel but also allows the possibility of establishing linkages to devoted users (Andersen, 2005). Brand communities carry out important functions on behalf of the brand itself and provide assistance to both consumers and companies (Shang et al., 2006).

In addition to, a brand community can be grouped largely into two major groups based on the criterion of the community initiators (Jang et al., 2007). First, the brand community that is “a consumer initiated community voluntarily built by community members,” second, “the company initiated community built by the company with ownership in the brand,” in order to establish a relationship with consumers and to induce productive feedback from consumers (Kang, 2004).

Past research has shown that there are unique qualities of brand communities which differ from more traditional communities. First, brand communities have no geographical limitation (Jang et al., 2007). Second, brand communities are commercial. This means the brand community is built on a brand, which is the commercialized feature. A brand community is a virtual community that is established on interest in the brand. Third, it is relatively safe because of a sense of moral responsibility and common goal or consciousness, and members of brand communities feel some a sense of duty or obligation to the community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Fourth, Consumers gather together in a brand community based on their own needs and interests; therefore, it “encourages the members’ voluntary interpretation of the brand” (Jang et
al., 2007, p 3). Fifth, brand community members earn a high level of identity with brand (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

**Online Brand Community**

Recently there are some studies that explain the effectiveness and importance of online brand community. First of all, Kim, Choi, Qualls, and Han (2008) described that online brand community participants have stronger brand commitment than consumers who are not members of the community. Based on Kim and his colleagues’ study, among online brand community members, brand commitment is enhanced for both active brand users and non-users. They confirmed that online community commitment is a key influence on brand commitment.

Casalo’, Flavián and Guinaliu’s study (2008) analyzed the effect of participation in a virtual brand community on consumer commitment. According to their study, participation in a virtual brand community has a positive influence on consumer commitment to the brand. Also, they found that satisfaction with previous interactions and the level of communication increase the level of trust in a virtual community, and this trust in a virtual community had a positive effect on members’ participation in the virtual community activities.

**A Uses and Gratifications Theory and Virtual Communities**

A uses and gratifications theory is founded on the premise that media users are active and goal directed in their consumption of media content (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Rubin & Perse, 1987). According to this theory, audiences use media to meet their needs and fulfill their personal gratification. Traditionally, most studies apply a uses and gratifications approach while attempting to explain the use of mass media, especially television. Rubin (1987) classified television news audiences into two groups: ritualized and instrumental audiences. According to his study, ritual audiences focus more on the medium than content, while instrumental audiences are more intentional and selective to specific contents.
The growing population of Internet users has led to a number of studies on uses and gratifications theory and use of the Internet. The Internet is different from the traditional media in terms of its characteristics and users’ motivation for use. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) suggested five different motives for using the Internet, including interpersonal utility, passing time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment, and they distinguish between instrumental and ritualized internet use. According to Papacharissi and Rubin, instrumental use is more goal-oriented in seeking information. Conversely, ritualized use is more habitual and less goal-oriented usage of the Internet such as time consuming. Ferguson and Perse (2000) also distinguished four motives of using the Internet such as entertainment, passing time, relaxation, and social information. Ebersole (2000) conducted a survey among college students and found eight motives for visiting websites. These included research/learning, easy access to entertainment, something to do when bored, access to material otherwise unavailable, communication/social interaction, product info/tech support, games/sexually explicit sites, and consumer transactions.

The motivations of participants of virtual communities are varied. Several researchers have attempted to identify consumers’ reasons for participating in virtual communities (Dholakia et al., 2004; Mathwick, 2006; Sicilia & Palazón, 2008; Sunanda, 2005). According to Sicilia and Palazón (2008), the gratification of individual needs in a virtual community depends on the perceived value of being a member. There are three categories of values: functional, social, and entertainment values. First, functional value (e.g. advice and information giving and seeking) describes the motive of participating in a virtual community as “the value derived from accomplished some pre-determined instrumental purpose” (Dholakia et al., 2004). Virtual communities offer individuals the opportunity to give and receive information they may be
interested in. Second, social value implies friendship, emotional support, self-esteem, social status, and social enhancement (Sicilia & Palazón, 2008). According to Mathwick (2006), the virtual community delivers the consumer the value of interpersonal connectivity. The affiliation with virtual community presents a social benefit to consumers by offering them identification and social integration (McWilliam, 2000). Finally, entertainment value represents fun and relaxation derived from playing or interacting with others (Dholakia et al., 2004).

Characteristics of an Online Brand Community

According to previous studies, there are four distinctive characteristics of brand community compared with traditional communities: interactivity, convenience of use, reliability of information, and reward for activity (Jang et al., 2007; Seo, 2005).

1) Interactivity

Before the development of the Internet, the meaning of interactivity was limited to interpersonal communication (Morris & Organ, 1996). The Internet has changed the way that people relate to one another by becoming a major vehicle of communication. Several different points of view on interactivity have resulted.

Some studies focus on the website as a medium. In reference to Rice (1987), interactivity is the speed, structure, and context of the communication between sender and receiver based on Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). According to Neuman (1991), under the increased control system by sender and receiver of information, interactivity is one of the characteristics of web-based electronic communication. Both studies put emphasis on interactivity as a user controlled activity.

Other studies have focused on interactivity as a process of interchange of communication. Alba et al. (1997) defined interactivity as the nature of the inter-communication between seller and buyer, and focused on two dimensions such as response time and response contingency. In
In this case, interactivity is the responsiveness. Lee (2000) argued that understanding interactivity depends on how the individual understands, recognizes and uses interactivity, rather than the analysis of process or measuring the characteristic of the communication. Newhagen et al. (1995) gave a definition of interactivity as the sense of self-efficacy and sense of system efficacy. Self-efficacy is the ability to navigate on an Internet website. In other words, users may know where they are and where they should go to get the right information they want in cyberspace (Lee, 2000). System efficacy is the response to the system, which means the proper response of the website toward user activity (Choi et al., 2000).

2) Convenience of Use

The meaning of convenience of use indicates that customers believe that certain systems are easy to use (Michael & Segev, 1996). Differing from the offline communities, online communities ubiquitously acquire information from various sources. Norris (1997) described convenience of use as the functional convenience that helps consumers easily find product information and purchase, finally use the product. Moreover, Norris (1997) explained its importance in satisfying various needs and expectations of today’s consumers. If a website provides a well-organized structure of information that helps consumers understand information and make decisions, it would be a huge asset of online brand communities (Choi et al., 2000).

3) Reliability of Information

Reliability has been mentioned in many research studies. Reliability is a firm expectation that something is related to oneself (Choi et al., 2000). In reference to Lewis (1999), if the operator of a website provides valuable information to consumers, then consumers will begin to trust the information they receive from the website. Raymond and Matthew (1999) indicated that accurate, opportune, and useful information influences reliability in electronic commerce.
4) Reward for Activity

Williams and Hazer (1986) explained that when companies acknowledge consumers’ contributions to its brand, consumers’ devotion to the brand increases. Consumers feel a stronger connection with a company when they are provided with positive feedback. Berry and Parasuraman (1991) described ways to build a strong connection with consumers and increase their satisfaction to the company and brand, asserting that the company should provide financial and social rewards to consumers. Financial rewards, for example, include mileage programs initiated by airline companies and monetary rewards, such as prizes or discounts. With social rewards such as interaction among community members, community manager and marketers cultivate strong relationships between consumers and companies. These kinds of rewards give value to consumers.

Brand Community Loyalty

According to Kotler et al. (1989), loyalty can be defined as individuals’ personal feelings of attachment to certain brands and companies. Companies can acquire competitive advantages in marketing, such as reducing corporate marketing and transactional costs and increasing sales, if their consumers have strong brand loyalty. Arker (1991) defined brand loyalty as the degree of consumers’ emotional attachment towards a brand. He reported brand loyalty as six different aspects such as consumer willingness to repurchase, price premium, satisfaction rate, switching cost, preference over brand, and commitment to brand.

Brand communities directly influence the factors associated with brand equity, such as brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets (Aaker, 1991). Therefore, well-formed brand communities will not only affect brand loyalty and brand commitment but also fortify the brand itself (Keller, 1993).
Unfortunately, few research studies describe and measure online brand community loyalty. Choi et al. (2000) connected brand community loyalty with visit frequency, visit length, and the intention to recommend the community to others. Jang and colleagues investigated the relationship between an online community and the online brand in South Korea (2007). They examined how an online brand community characteristic’s (e.g. information quality, system quality, interaction, and reward) affect community commitment and brand loyalty. Through the survey, they found that both interaction and reward for the activities significantly influence the community commitment. This study will follow the methods used in Jang et al.’s study to examine the purpose of the study.

**Hypotheses**

Previous literature reviews indicate that communities and consumers’ characteristics are the main factors affecting attitudes toward the brand community. Based on this assumption, the following hypotheses are proposed in this research:

This study addresses four major characteristics of the online brand community: interactivity, convenience of use, reliability of information, and reward for activity. Based on these characteristics, the current study develops the following hypotheses:

Interactivity refers to the degree of interaction among members of an online brand community (McWilliam, 2000; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2000). Interactivity can be defined by the degree of exhibition of new context, the degree of inquiry and response speed, and the degree of information exchange and activity among members.

**H1a**: Interactivity in an online brand community positively affects online brand community loyalty.

Convenience of use implies that consumers tend to like something is easy to use. According to previous research conducted by Michael and Segev (1996) and Norris (1997),
convenience of use indicates fast and easy information searching and well organized content on the web page. For example, a web page which is organized and designed well and which is easy to navigate will produce convenience of use.

**H1b:** Convenience of use in an online brand community positively affects online brand community loyalty.

According to Lewis (1999), if the operator of a website provides valuable information, then consumers will begin to trust the information they receive from the website. Based on Lewis study, in this research the reliability of information shows the quality of information provided through an online brand community. This can be investigated by determining the accuracy of information and whether the information is kept current.

**H1c:** Reliability of information in an online brand community positively affects online brand community loyalty.

Berry and Parasuraman (1991) described that one of the ways to build a strong connection with consumers and increase their satisfaction to the company and brand is that the company should provide financial and social reward to consumer. For this study, reward for activity refers to the tangible and intangible rewards for active members in the online brand community. Activity can be investigated by following reward-related activity: tangible reward (e.g. monetary rewards, mileage, and prizes) and intangible reward (e.g. availability to the online community, such as reading the context or using the information).

**H1d:** Reward for activity in an online brand community positively affects online brand community loyalty.

Based on a uses and gratifications theory in virtual communities, gratification would vary with individual needs such as functional, social, and entertainment in a virtual community
Also Sunanda (2005) investigated the motivating needs that persuade users to become members of a virtual community. She identified three key needs for virtual community use: functional, emotive and contextual.

Virtual community users’ functional needs are satisfied with the quality and quantity of content received from virtual community (Sunanda, 2005). Therefore, for this study, functional needs refer to the users’ needs to have sufficient and believable information from an online brand community.

**H2a:** Functional needs in using an online brand community will moderate the relationship between online brand community characteristics and online brand community loyalty.

Emotive needs are social interaction, personal uses and self expression through an online brand community. According to Sunanda (2005), “these intrinsic and extrinsic needs are fulfilled by acceptance of relationship building through interaction and communication in virtual community” (p. 7).

**H2b:** Emotive needs in using an online brand community will moderate the relationship between online brand community characteristics and online brand community loyalty.

Contextual needs relate to individual user-specific expectations and experiences (Sunanda, 2005). In this study, host organizations of online community or offline activities for entertainment can be applied to this.

**H2c:** Contextual needs in using an online brand community will moderate the relationship between online brand community characteristics and online brand community loyalty.

Generally, positive attitudes toward the brand community developed by the brand community characteristics will create brand community loyalty. In other words, customers intend to visit the brand community frequently and, simultaneously, develop a commitment to the
community. Additionally, the effects of an online brand community on consumer outcomes (e.g. attitude toward the brand, brand loyalty, purchase intention) have recently become part of marketers’ concerns. Companies want consumer loyalty toward the brand, but have rarely been able to cultivate one-on-one relationships with their customers (Armstrong & Hagel, 1997). According to Casalo´ and colleagues’ study (2008), online brand communities help marketers to understand consumer needs and to promote brand loyalty and involvement. Therefore, once online brand community loyalty has been established, it is expected to form brand loyalty as a consequence.

**H3:** Online brand community loyalty positively affects on brand loyalty.

Moreover, if loyalty is defined in terms of repeat purchases, or “coming back for more,” communities can be a one of the vehicles for increasing loyalty to a vendor's products (Casalo´ et al., 2008).

**H4:** Attitude toward the brand positively relates to purchase intention.

A following model is developed by the researcher in reference to Jang and colleagues’ model.
Figure 2-1. Overview of the study

Users’ Needs
- Functional Needs
- Emotive Needs
- Contextual Needs

Online brand community Characteristics

Interactivity
System Quality
Reliability of Information
Reward for Activities

Moderating Role

Online brand community Loyalty

Brand Loyalty

Purchase Intention
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

The purpose of this research is to describe how online brand community characteristics and consumers’ needs affect the consumers’ attitude toward the community and brand, (i.e., brand community loyalty & brand loyalty) and also how the consumer’s attitudes toward brand community affects their behavioral intention (i.e., purchase intention). The data for this study were collected via an online survey with self-administered questionnaires to measure variables. According to Babbie (2007), surveys may be used for descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory purpose. In reference to Floyd (2002), the purpose of the survey was “to produce statistics, that is, quantitative or numerical descriptions about some aspects of the study population” (p. 153). Survey research is “the best method available to the social researcher who is interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly” (Babbie, 2007, p 244). The primary means of collecting information is by asking people questions and using their answers constitute the data to be analyzed (Floyd, 2002).

Research Design

An online survey was employed in the current research, and was conducted from February 10, 2009 to February 28, 2009. During this time period, participants received an invitation for the online survey or visited the announcement that was posted on the online brand community’s website. They were asked to click a link which led them to the questionnaire for this study.

Five latent constructs were examined throughout this online survey: participants’ needs for using online brand communities (functional, emotive, and contextual), an online brand community’s characteristics (interactivity, convenience of use, reliability of information, and reward for activities), online brand community loyalty, brand loyalty, and purchase intention.
Participants

The survey was conducted on-line with purposive sampling. The purposive sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling whereby the respondents are selected, in part or in whole, at the convenience of the researcher on the basis of the researcher’s judgment of which ones will be the most useful or representative (Babbie, 2007). This survey was conducted based on convenient sampling, because this research focuses on consumers who are active member of an online brand community. Therefore, participants of this research needed to be people who use the internet in their daily life, and who are members of certain online brand communities and participate in the activity on that website. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, a total of 154 of respondents at least 18 years of age were chosen to participate in the survey.

Data Collection and Procedure

In order to recruit people who had some experience with online brand communities, participants were recruited through an online brand community and a social networking site. Researcher contacted several online brand communities’ administrators to get permission to conduct the online survey. However, only one online brand community, iLounge.com, showed interest in this study and allowed to do the research. The administrator posted the invitation to participate in the study at the main page of iLounge. After 10 days, participation rate was very low (a result that was expected considering that there were no incentives for participation) so the researcher invited participation to members of different social networking sites using a snowball sampling. The online survey was created in Surveymonkey website (www.surveymonkey.com) which is a tool to create and publish custom surveys on the Internet.

First of all, among survey participants, some of the subjects were registered members of www.iLounge.com, which is one of the largest online brand communities in the United States. This website offers news, information, discussion forum, and some tips and tricks relevant to all

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models of iPod including iPhone. To begin, the researcher obtained the approval of a chief administrator of iLounge community for the survey, and asked him to post the announcement to its members. In the announcement, an introduction and short description of this study were provided with a link to the online survey to induce members’ voluntary participation.

The other participants were registered members of Facebook, which is the biggest social networking site in the US. Survey participants were selected by snowball sampling from the researcher’s acquaintance with others. They were given an invitation with survey-related information. In the notification for the survey, the researcher introduced herself and explained the purpose and a nature of the study, and also notified the participants that the all information and responses will be for confidential use by the researcher for this study, not for the sales or marketing.

Measures and Instrument

The questionnaire (Appendix A) shows the online survey. The questionnaire for this online survey consisted of five main sections. The measurements included were: internet usage and consumer interest in brand communities, needs for using online brand communities, attitude toward the online brand community according to the brand community characteristics, brand community loyalty, brand loyalty, purchase intention, and demographic variables. Besides the initial screening question and demographic, all questionnaires were measured using scales that Jang and his colleagues (2007) and Sunanda (2005) employed in their studies.

Generally, research focuses on the causal relations, which contain the variables. Variables are classified by their location in the causal relationship (Neuman, 2006). Generally, a basic causal relationship has two variables, i.e., an independent variable and dependent variable. A more complex causal relationship has additional variables, i.e., an intervening variable and a moderator variable.
Basically in this study, the hypotheses are tested based on a three-variable relationship: to test H1, the online brand community characteristics (independent variable) affect brand community loyalty (dependent variable). To test H2, participants’ needs for using an online brand community (moderator variable) will also affect the result of H1.

**Independent Variable**

An independent variable is presumed to cause or determine a dependent variable in a causal relationship (Babbie, 2007; Neuman, 2006). Online brand community characteristics are employed as an independent variable to test hypotheses. And, online brand community characteristics are composed of four major dimensions (i.e., interactivity, convenience of use, reliability of information, and reward for activity) that accurately portray the nature of the online brand community. The brand community characteristics were measured using a 29-item scale adopted from Jang et al. (2007). Since the original study was carried out in South Korea, the items were carefully translated by a graduate student bilingual in Korean and English. For all the variables, the respondents were asked to describe their feelings about an online brand community using a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

‘Interactivity’ was measured by ten items (Cronbach α = .81): (1) This community’s concept matches my interest; (2) The other members of this community have the same interests as I do; (3) This community provides proper communication channels among members; (4) Other members respond quickly to my inquiries; (5) The community managers respond quickly to members’ inquiries; (6) This community provides off-line meetings for members; (7) If there are off-line meetings with community members, I would like to participate in them; (8) This community manager sends messages or newsletters to each member individually; (9) The community manager sends messages to the members on a regular basis; and (10) This community accept/apply any request or recommendation from members.
For ‘convenience of use,’ four items were used (Cronbach \( \alpha = .77 \)). The questions are (1) I can easily find the information that I need; (2) The website is well designed; (3) The page loads up quickly; and (4) This community is generally easy to search for information.

‘Reliability of information’ shows the quality of information that is provided through the online brand community (Cronbach \( \alpha = .91 \)). For this characteristic, six items were included. The survey used the following items: (1) I can believe the information in this community; (2) This community has diverse information that I need about the brand; (3) This community has interesting up-to-date information; (4) This community has a lot of information about the brand; (5) This community has valuable information about the brand and product; and (6) This community provides enough information that I need to know.

Finally, there are nine items used for ‘reward for activity’ (Cronbach \( \alpha = .89 \)): (1) This community offers monetary rewards, such as mileage, to proactive members; (2) This community recognizes members activities on the website (i.e. choosing the best user/member of the month, etc.); (3) This community provides product coupons for its members; (4) My status in the community can be upgraded/downgraded based on my degree of activity in the community; (5) Sharing my own experience/opinion in this community is enjoyable; (6) Managers or members of this community appreciate my activities or participation; (7) Managers or members of this community believe each other’s information and knowledge; (8) I am known as an information giver in this community; and (9) I have an ability to give information about this brand and product that other members want.

**Dependent Variable**

Three dependent variables were measured in this study: online brand community loyalty, brand loyalty, and purchase intention. The set of items for each variable were also borrowed from Jang and his colleagues’ study (2007). For this study, the wording of scale items was
modified to appropriately fit in the context of the current study. These variables were measured using seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

To measure online brand community loyalty, the respondents were asked to describe their feelings about the community itself. In this study, commitment toward the online brand community was used as the indicator to measure online brand community loyalty. Staw (1980) classified commitment into two types: attitudinal and behavioral. Attitudinal refers to emotional attachment towards a community, while behavioral means more than emotional—it could lead to actual behavior beyond that. In this study, both attitudinal and behavioral commitments were measured using six items (Cronbach α = .92): (1) I feel loyalty to this community; (2) I feel any problem that this community is faced with is the same as my own problems; (3) I often talk about this community to my family and friends; (4) If this community offered an opportunity to work for the community, I would do it; (5) I would like to help any member in this community if they had either an online or offline problem; and (6) I feel empty when I do not use this community website for more than a week.

Brand loyalty (Cronbach α = .86) was measured using three item scales: (1) I think this brand is the best compared to others in the same category, (2) I would like to introduce this brand to others; and (3) I would choose this brand even if there were disadvantages to the product.

Purchase intention was measured using 2-item scales: (1) If I buy a product in the brand’s product category, I will choose this brand; and (2) I would consistently choose to use this brand’s product.

**Moderator Variable**

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a moderator variable is “a qualitative (e.g. sex, race, class) or quantitative (e.g. level of reward) variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between an independent or predictor variable and a dependent or criterion variable (p.
1174).” In this study, the consumers’ needs to use an online brand community were considered as a moderator variable which can affect the result of testing the hypotheses. Consumer needs were measured using a 23-item scale adopted from Sunanda’s study (2005). Sunanda divided the consumers need into three: functional needs, emotive needs, and contextual needs.

Functional needs (Cronbach α = .79) were measured by using 6-item scales including objective information, information of high value, information for my exact needs, expert information, information from opinion leaders, and trust information for investments.

Emotive needs have three dimensions (social interaction, personal uses, and self expression uses) which were measured by 12-item scales. First, social interaction (Cronbach α = .76) was measured by visit threads, enjoyment of discussion and participation, enjoyment of virtual companionship, interaction with people, and large number of membership. Second, personal uses (Cronbach α = .67) were measured with items such as meeting peer group, easy to find people in a community, and meeting industry leaders and influential people. Third, self expression uses (Cronbach α = .66) were examined by items such as expresses my knowledge, reader and a contributor, moderation of content, and community as extension of me.

Finally, contextual needs were divided into two dimensions: entertainment and host. Entertainment (Cronbach α = .63) were measured using 3-item scales: chat groups, the site surfing and navigation, and offline expert seminars are useful. Host (Cronbach α = .47) will be measured by rules and regulations, and posting from CEO.

A revision for the all questionnaires was conducted from November 10, 2008 to November 13, 2008 to refine and clarify the survey questionnaire. First of all, all survey items were double checked by translators, two graduate students who can speak both Korean and English. After that, five graduate students majoring in Advertising at a southeastern American university participated.
in this revision process. Some of students reported that given words needed more specific definitions or examples. Based on their reports, some examples for content of community, communication channel, and reward for activity were added for the actual survey.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Data Analysis

Sample Profile

A total of 154 subjects participated in the online survey. Because of the unique nature of this study, which focuses on only online brand community users’ experiences with their communities, 21 subjects who did not have any experience with an online brand community or who dropped the survey at the very beginning were eliminated in the data analysis. As a result, the total valid sample was 133. Table 4-1 shows the descriptive statistics of the sample characteristics. Among the respondents, 47.6% were male and 52.4% were female. The subjects’ age ranged from 18 to 60 years old, but the majority of participants were between 18 to 30 (65.1%) years old. Of the total respondents, 62.1% had a 4-year college degree or higher education. This indicates that online brand community users are relatively young with a high education background. Furthermore, most of the respondents were Asian and Pacific Islander (35%) and White and Caucasian (35%).

An Online Brand Community Use and the Internet Usage

As Table 4-2 shows, 33.6% were iLounge members, while 66.4% were members of other online brand communities. In the case of the number of an online brand community membership, most of respondents (79.4%) were members of 1 to 3 online brand communities. The result also illustrates that 43.5% of respondents answered that they visit an online brand community more than 7 times in a month. Most respondents (81.7%) said the amount of time they spent on an average daily spending time on online brand communities was less than 1 hour. Also, most respondents, 79.4%, use the Internet every day, and 17.6% use the Internet 4 to 6 days in a week.
Table 4-3 shows the mean score comparison between iLounge members and other online brand communities’ members for all variables. Generally, iLounge members’ mean scores are higher than other an online brand community members for all variables, including interactivity (M = 4.94), convenience of use (M = 5.49), reliability of information (M = 6.01), reward for activities (M = 4.80), functional needs (M = 5.52), emotive needs (M = 4.72), contextual needs (M = 4.21), online brand community loyalty (M = 4.73), brand loyalty (M = 5.46), and purchase intention (M = 5.63). However, ANOVA results indicate neither group of respondents showed a significant difference between two means in every variable, except reliability of information \([M_{iLounge} = 6.01, M_{Mothers} = 5.36, F_{1, 113} = 7.10, p < .01]\) and functional needs \([M_{iLounge} = 5.52, M_{Mothers} = 4.80, F_{1, 113} = 9.39, p < .01]\).

Reliability Test

To ensure the reliability of the measures, a reliability analysis was conducted on each of the variables. The results showed that the scales used in the study were reliable according to Nunally’s study (1978), which recommends that instruments used in basic research have a reliability of about .70 or better. In this study, all values were above the .70 minimum to ensure reliability. As shown in Table 4-4, reliability measures suggested high internal consistency for independent variables: interactivity (Cronbach’s alpha = .92), convenience of use (Cronbach’s alpha = .87), reliability of information (Cronbach’s alpha = .94), and reward for activity (Cronbach’s alpha = .91). Cronbach’s alpha for dependent variables, online brand community loyalty, brand loyalty, and purchase intention, were above .90 to ensure the reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .92, .92, and .94 respectively). Participants’ needs to use an online brand community as a moderating variable, functional needs (Cronbach’s alpha = .89), emotive needs (Cronbach’s alpha = .94), and contextual needs (Cronbach’s alpha = .88), also had high internal consistency.
**Hypotheses Testing**

The main goal of the study is to explore the relationship among four online brand characteristics, online brand community loyalty, brand loyalty, and purchase intention. In order to achieve the goal of this study, structural equation modeling will be needed to see relationships among variables. However, the sample size was not large enough to conduct structural equation modeling. Therefore, in this study series of multiple regressions were performed to test the hypotheses. After scale validation, further analyses were performed to test the hypotheses of this study.

**Effect of Online Brand Community Characteristics on Online Brand Community Loyalty**

H1 expected that online brand characteristics positively influence online brand community loyalty. Multiple regressions were conducted to test H1, with four online brand community characteristics as independent variables, and one dependent variable, online brand community loyalty. Multiple regression analysis is used to measure the linear association among variables (Hair et al., 2006). As shown in Table 4-5, Interactivity and reward for activity are found to be more significant predictors of online brand loyalty. In this study, we have two statistical significant coefficients for interactivity and reward for activity (\(t = 4.12\) and 3.39 respectively, \(p < .01\)). The percentage of variance in the online brand community loyalty, 74% was explained by online brand community characteristics. This percentage shows that the more respondents believe interactivity and reward for activity is important in using online brand communities, the greater their loyalty toward their online brand communities. The model was statistically significant [\(F (4, 88) = 61.80, p < .01\)].

**Interaction Effect**

Consumers’ needs in using an online brand community were expected to moderate the relationship between online brand community characteristics and online brand community
loyalty. In order to investigate the relationship between the main effect (four major online brand community characteristics and online brand community loyalty) and moderating effect (users’ needs: functional, emotive, and contextual), multiple regressions were conducted to test H2. After a series of multiple regressions, different sets of analyses were done to illustrate the interaction effects more specifically.

First of all, multiple regressions were conducted to reveal a relationship between online brand community characteristics and online brand loyalty as a main effect and functional needs as an interaction effect. The model with online brand characteristics and online brand community loyalty was statistically significant \[ F (5, 87) = 49.89, p < .01 \]. However, adding the interaction, the F-value dropped significantly from 61.8 to 49.8. This reduced the power of significance of the main effect. Therefore, functional needs do not moderate the relationship between online brand community characteristics and online brand community loyalty.

Second, interaction effect of emotive needs was added to the multiple regression analysis to see how emotive needs moderate the relationship between online brand community characteristics and online brand community loyalty. As shown in Table 4-6, after adding interaction effect, the F-value increased from 61.8 to 76.04, and there was a significant interaction effect \( p < .01 \). At this time, only one interaction term (convenience of use*emotive needs) was significant \( t = 5.97 \). This interaction effect indicates that emotive needs in using an online brand community positively affect the relationship between convenience of use and online brand community loyalty.

Third, Table 4-7 shows the result of multiple regressions with online brand community characteristics, online brand community loyalty, and contextual needs. Adding the interaction, the F-value increased from 61.8 to 103.23, and it was statistically significant \( p < .01 \). In this
case, only one interaction term between convenience of use and contextual needs was statistically significant ($t = 8.45$). Therefore, contextual needs in using an online brand community are positively associated with the relationship between convenience of use and online brand community loyalty.

In sum, the results indicated that there were significant interaction effects between online brand community characteristics and emotive needs and contextual needs, respectively, in using an online brand community on online brand community loyalty. In addition, previous investigation has shown no significant interaction effect between online brand community characteristics and functional needs on online brand community loyalty. Therefore, H2 was partially supported.

For a detailed explanation of the significant interaction effects, the interaction term was explored by conducting two-way ANOVA analyses for convenience of use and emotive needs, and convenience of use and contextual needs, separately, in terms of online brand community loyalty. Subjects were categorized by a median split to see interaction effects visually.

As shown in Table 4-8 and Table 4-9, there is a statistically significant main effect of emotive needs and convenience of use ($p < .01$) on online brand community loyalty. People who use an online brand community because of their emotive needs are likely to express more online brand community loyalty ($M = 5.83$, $SD = .79$) than those who do not ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.27$), and individuals who think convenience of use is important in using an online brand community ($M = 5.44$, $SD = 1.29$) showed more online brand community loyalty compared with people who do not think convenience of use is important ($M = 4.01$, $SD = .1.64$). However, there is no statistically significant interaction effect. In other words, effect of convenience of use is not influenced by emotive needs (Figure 4-1).
Table 4-10 and Table 4-11 show that there is a statistically significant main effect of contextual needs and convenience of use ($p < .01$). The result shows that people use an online brand community based on their contextual needs are likely to have more online brand community loyalty ($M = 5.81, SD = .80$) than they use without contextual needs ($M = 3.28, SD = 1.29$). However, there is no significant interaction effect of these two variables. The effect of convenience of use is not influenced by contextual needs (Figure 4-2).

Effect of Online Brand Community Loyalty on Brand Loyalty

To inspect the relationship between online brand community loyalty and brand loyalty, a bivariate regression was conducted. As the results show in Table 4-12, 58% of variance in brand loyalty was explained by online brand community loyalty. This result was statistically significant [$F (1, 91) = 123.91, p < .01$]. Thus, online brand community loyalty positively enhanced brand loyalty.

Effect of Brand Loyalty on Purchase Intention

H4 expected that brand loyalty positively relates to purchase intention. A simple regression was performed to test H4 (Table 4-13). Brand loyalty explained 74% of variance in purchase intention, and the result was statistically significant [$F (1, 91) = 264.03, p < .01$].
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>22-25</td>
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<td>26-30</td>
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<td>31-40</td>
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<td>41-50</td>
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<td>5.8</td>
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<td>51-60</td>
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<tr>
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<td>High School/GED</td>
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<td>10.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
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<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
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<td>35.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
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N=133
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<th>Characteristics</th>
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<th>Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>OBC membership</td>
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<tr>
<td>iLounge</td>
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<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visit OBC in a month</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-3 times</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>4-6 times</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>7-9 times</td>
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<td>8.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 10 times</td>
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<td>35.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hours of using OBC</td>
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<td>33.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-less than 3 hours</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-less than 5 hours</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 5 hours</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
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<td>17.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-3 days</td>
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<td>3-less than 5 hours</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 5 hours</td>
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<td>16.8</td>
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N=133
Table 4-3. Descriptive statistics for measures and result of ANOVA

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OBC membership</th>
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<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<td>.40</td>
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<td>Convenience of use</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td>5.03</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of information</td>
<td>iLounge</td>
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<td>6.01</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>.01*</td>
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<td>Reward for activity</td>
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<td>1.38</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Functional Needs</td>
<td>iLounge</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>9.39</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotive Needs</td>
<td>iLounge</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual Needs</td>
<td>iLounge</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBC loyalty</td>
<td>iLounge</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand loyalty</td>
<td>iLounge</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intention</td>
<td>iLounge</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All items were measured on a 7 – point scale (*p<.01)

Table 4-4. Means and Reliability check for each variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variable</strong> Online brand community Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Interactivity</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Convenience of use</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reliability of Information</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reward for activity</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variables</strong> Online brand community loyalty</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intention</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderating variable</strong> Needs to use online brand community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Functional Needs</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Emotive Needs</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal use</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self expression use</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=133
Table 4-5. Online brand community characteristics – Online brand community loyalty (H1), result of multiple regressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-.57</td>
<td>-1.26</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience of use</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of information</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward for activity</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Online brand community loyalty
N=93, R=.86, R²=.74, F(4, 88)=61.80*, *p<.01

Table 4-6. Online brand community characteristics-Emotive needs-Online brand community loyalty (H2_2), result of multiple regressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-.52</td>
<td>-1.36</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience of use</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>-4.12</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of information</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward for activity</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience of use-Emotive Needs</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Online brand community loyalty
Excluded Variables: Reliability of information-EN, Convenience of use-EN, Interactivity-EN
N=93, R=.90, R²=.81, R Adj=.80, F(5,87)=76.04*, *p<.01

Table 4-7. Online brand community characteristics-Contextual needs-Online brand community loyalty (H2_3), result of multiple regressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience of use</td>
<td>-.60</td>
<td>-.43</td>
<td>-5.38</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of information</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward for activity</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience of use-Contextual Needs</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Online brand community loyalty
Excluded Variables: Reliability of information-CN, Convenience of use-CN, Interactivity-CN
N=93, R=.93, R²=.86, R Adj=.85, F(5,87)=103.23*, *p<.01
Table 4-8. Descriptive statistics for measures: Convenience of use vs. Emotive Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotive Needs (EN)</th>
<th>Convenience of use (CU)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use OBC not because of EN</td>
<td>CU is not important</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CU is important</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use OBC because of EN</td>
<td>CU is not important</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CU is important</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>CU is not important</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CU is important</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-9. Two-way ANOVA: Convenience of use (CU) vs. Emotive Needs (EN)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EN</td>
<td>108.37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>108.37</td>
<td>110.73</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONV</td>
<td>9.99</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.99</td>
<td>10.21</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN* CONV</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>87.11</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.01

Table 4-10. Descriptive statistics for measures: Convenience of use vs. Contextual Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual Needs (CN)</th>
<th>Convenience of use (CU)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use OBC not because of CN</td>
<td>CU is not important</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CU is important</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use OBC because of CN</td>
<td>CU is not important</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CU is important</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>CU is not important</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CU is important</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-11. Two-way ANOVA: Convenience of use (CU) vs. Contextual Needs (CN)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CN</td>
<td>110.02</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>110.02</td>
<td>112.52</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONV</td>
<td>13.50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13.50</td>
<td>13.80</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CN * CONV</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>87.01</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.01
Table 4-12. OBC loyalty-Brand loyalty (H3), result of bivariate linear regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBC loyalty</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>11.13</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Brand loyalty
N=93, R=.76, R²=.58, F(1, 91)=123.91*, *p<.01

Table 4-13. Brand loyalty-Purchase Intention (H4), result of bivariate linear regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand loyalty</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>16.23</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention
N=93, R=.86, R²=.74, F(1, 91)=264.03*, *p<.01
Figure 4-1. Interaction effect (Convenience of use × Emotive Needs) on OBC loyalty
Estimated Marginal Means of Online Brand Community Loyalty

Figure 4-2. Interaction effect (Convenience of use × Contextual Needs) on OBC loyalty
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

This study was designed for the purpose of understanding how online brand community characteristics affect online brand community loyalty. In addition, by adapting a uses and gratifications theory, the study also examined why consumers use online brand communities and how their needs affect the relationships between online brand community characteristics and their loyalty toward communities. Based on Sunanda’s study (2005), three key motivations for an online brand community use (functional, emotive, and contextual) were used in this study.

Regarding the study hypotheses, Hypothesis 1 was supported. The findings from the previous chapter showed that there is a relationship between four major characteristics of online brand communities (interactivity, convenience of use, reliability of information, and reward for activity) and online brand community loyalty. This finding supports Jang and colleagues’ study (2007) that interactivity and reward for activity significantly affect community commitment. According to their study, information quality and system quality exert a greater influence upon community commitment. Based on the results of this study, because of the unique nature of the online community, users seemed to have more loyalty toward their online brand community if it offers a way of interaction among users and administrators, is well designed and easy-to-use website, has believable and useful content, and includes monetary or emotional rewards for activities.

In H2, this study attempted to explain how motivations of online brand community users moderate the effectiveness of online brand community characteristics on online brand community loyalty. Online brand community users might have their own needs and motivations for using it such as information acquisition or entertainments. The more an online brand
community fulfills its members’ needs with its own successful characteristics, the more loyal their members will feel. After conducting separate multiple regression analyses by consumer needs such as functional, emotional, and contextual, H2 was partially supported. The results indicated that there were significant interaction effects between online brand community characteristics and emotive needs, and online brand community characteristics and contextual needs on online brand community loyalty. However, the interaction effect of functional needs was not supported. The results imply that online brand community characteristics and functional needs do not have a direct effect on online brand community loyalty.

This result may be explained by sample characteristics which were collected from not only one online brand community but from many other random communities. If the samples were collected from one online brand community, then users’ motivations for use might be relevant. For example, an electronic product community may be built around users interested in useful information about their products or contents such as mp3 files. Based on this assumption, if an online brand community offers believable information and useful content, the users’ commitment or loyalty toward community might be positively affected. However, in this study, samples that come from various online brand communities might be comprised of different levels of motivations. And this may affect the result of this hypothesis testing.

Based on the results, H3, online brand community loyalty predicts brand loyalty, was supported. There was a positive effect of online brand community loyalty on brand loyalty which is consistent with Jang and colleagues’ study (2007).

Finally, H4 was also supported. The study results revealed that positive brand loyalty can subsequently affect online brand community users’ purchase intentions. It shows that increasing brand loyalty through an online brand community can benefit the company after all.
Implications

These days, there are various types of virtual communities on the Internet. One of the major benefits of virtual community is interactivity among community members. Rheingold (1993) describes virtual communities as having “a sufficient human feeling to form webs of personal relationships” (p.14). With this consideration, online brand communities are providing new opportunities for interaction between marketers/advertisers and consumers, and among consumers themselves. Especially for marketers, an online brand community can be a powerful vehicle through which to deepen and broaden their relationships with people who are interested in their brand and who also actually buy their goods and services. In this respect, this study improves our understanding of how online brand community characteristics influence users’ positive feeling toward community and brand through online brand community loyalty, brand loyalty and purchase intention.

In practice, the findings of this study suggest that creating a well organized online brand community can benefit a company in terms of improving financial performance. An online brand community can be a new marketing communication tool which allows for interaction among existing customers, who already own the brand and are already strongly attached to it, and potential customers as well. Therefore, by understanding existing and potential customers’ characteristics and their needs, marketers should strive to provide believable information about a brand and its products, a well designed and systemized website, a proper way of interaction with customers and among customers themselves, and tangible or intangible rewards such as monetary reward or upgrade membership program.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that mostly relate to sampling issues. First of all, not enough samples were collected due to the unique nature of this study. The aim of this study was
to seek knowledge of online brand community users. Hence, data should be collected among online brand community users. Online community is non-geographically bound community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Therefore, in this study, an online survey was inevitability used for collecting valid data. However, because of the nature of online survey, there were many respondents who dropped out of the survey right after the informed consent form or in the middle of the survey. A larger sample would be expected to show more significant results and is, therefore, recommended for future research.

Second, it is a limitation that large portion of samples were drawn from one online brand community. Among the total sample, about 35% were from iLounge, which is one of the biggest iPhone and iPod communities. This has the potential to skew the results of this study due to the unique character of this community. Therefore, future examination should recruit a more balanced sample to see if this model can be projected into in the real world.

Third, participants who were recruited from iLounge chose to participate in this online survey themselves, since this survey was posted on the website with an announcement requesting participation. There is a high possibility that people who decided to participate in the survey already have a high interest or loyalty toward community or brand. Therefore, the results may have been different had more general members from the population been recruited in the sample. For future study, more updated recruiting method will be needed.

Forth, the scale for each variable has the potential be another limitation in this study. This study examined the interaction effect of consumers needs by applying a uses and gratification theoretical framework to an online brand community. In this study, Sunanda’s scales (2005) that were used to examine the relationship between consumers’ motivation and virtual community in general were adopted. However, there is a need for further study on the relationship between an
online brand community and consumers’ motivation with an appropriate scale. In future studies, it would be valuable to have a more precise scale to measure each variable.
APPENDIX A
ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Your responses to the following questions or statements should reflect your experience in online brand communities. Please respond to the following questions.

Section 1:
This section is asking you about your internet usage and your interest on brand community. Please choose one answer.

1-1. How often do you use the Internet in an average week?
(e.g. online shopping, game, online newspapers, e-mail, chatting, Google, Social Network Site such as Facebook, MySpace, etc.)

- Everyday
- 4 - 6 days
- 1-3 days
- None

1-2. How many hours on average do you use the Internet per day?

- Less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes – Less than 1 hour
- 1 – Less than 3 hours
- 3 – Less than 5 hours
- Over 5 hours

An online brand community is the specialized, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relationships among interest of a brand. (e.g. “I love Starbucks,” “Harley-Davidson Club,” and “Nike+”)

1-3. How many online brand communities have you participated in (including iLounge)?

- 1 an online brand community
- 2 online brand communities
- 3 online brand communities
- 4 online brand communities
- 5 or more online brand communities

1-4. How long have you been a member of iLounge?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 month – less than 1 year
- 1 year – less than 2 years
- 2 – less than 3 years
- More than 3 years
1-5. How many times do you visit online brand communities in a month?
   □ 1 – 3 times
   □ 4 – 6 times
   □ 7 – 9 times
   □ Over 10 times

1-6. On a daily basis, approximately, how much time on average do you spend with online brand communities?
   □ Less than 30 minutes
   □ 30 minutes – less than 1 hour
   □ 1 hour – less than 3 hours
   □ 3 hours – less than 5 hours
   □ More than 5 hours

Section 2:

The following questions ask about your use of and participation in iLounge community. Please rate the following statements according to your own opinion.

2-1. I use this community to obtain objective information in my area of interest.
   strongly disagree   1    2      3      4      5      6     7   strongly agree

2-2. I use this community to receive highly qualified information.
   strongly disagree   1    2      3      4      5      6     7   strongly agree

2-3. I use this community to get information for exactly what I need/want to know.
   strongly disagree   1    2      3      4      5      6     7   strongly agree

2-4. I use this community to get information from experts.
   strongly disagree   1    2      3      4      5      6     7   strongly agree

2-5. I use this community to get information from opinion leaders. (Opinion leader: an individual whose ideas and behavior serve as a model to others.)
   strongly disagree   1    2      3      4      5      6     7   strongly agree

2-6. I use this community to get trust information for investments. (e.g. purchase products, investment purpose, etc.)
   strongly disagree   1    2      3      4      5      6     7   strongly agree
2-7. I use this community to visit threads.

   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

2-8. I enjoy discussion and any other participation in this community.

   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

2-9. I enjoy virtual companionship among members in this community.

   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

2-10. I use this community to interact with people.

   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

2-11. I use this community because of the large number of membership.

   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

2-12. I use this community to meet people who have same interests.

   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

2-13. I use this community because I can easily find people that I want to know from this community.

   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

2-14. I use this community to meet industry leaders and influential people.

   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

2-15. I use this community to express my knowledge.

   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

2-16. I use this community as a contributor.
   (e.g. posting the message and data about brand, brand’s product, and personal experiences)

   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

2-17. I use this community because I can share the information such as up to date data or personal experience about the brand’s product.

   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree
2-18. I think of this community as extension of myself.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

2-19. I use this community because I enjoy participating in community’s chat groups/discussion forum.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

2-20. I use this community to enjoy the site surfing and navigation.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

2-21. I use this community to participate in offline meeting with others (e.g. members and experts).

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

2-22. I use this community because I like the rules and regulations that are applied to this community.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

2-23. I use this community to read postings from the CEO of this brand.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

Section 3:
This section measures your attitude toward Apple’s iPod and iPhone. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

3-1. I can believe the information in this community.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-2. This community has diverse information that I need about the brand.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-3. This community has interesting up-to-date information.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree
3-4. This community has a lot of information about the brand.

   strongly disagree   1    2    3    4    5    6    7   strongly agree

3-5. This community has valuable information about the brand and product.

   strongly disagree   1    2    3    4    5    6    7   strongly agree

3-6. This community provides enough information that I need to know.

   strongly disagree   1    2    3    4    5    6    7   strongly agree

3-7. I can easily find the information that I need.

   strongly disagree   1    2    3    4    5    6    7   strongly agree

3-8. The website is well designed. e.g. arrangement of information and pictures, design, etc.)

   strongly disagree   1    2    3    4    5    6    7   strongly agree

3-9. The page loads up quickly.

   strongly disagree   1    2    3    4    5    6    7   strongly agree

3-10. This community is generally easy to search for information.

   strongly disagree   1    2    3    4    5    6    7   strongly agree

3-11. This community’s concept matches my interest.

   strongly disagree   1    2    3    4    5    6    7   strongly agree

3-12. The other members of this community have the same interests as I do.

   strongly disagree   1    2    3    4    5    6    7   strongly agree

3-13. This community provides proper communication channels among members.
   (e.g. Chat room and discussion forum)

   strongly disagree   1    2    3    4    5    6    7   strongly agree

3-14. Other members respond quickly to my inquiries.

   strongly disagree   1    2    3    4    5    6    7   strongly agree
3-15. The community managers respond quickly to members’ inquiries.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-16. This community provides an off-line meeting for members.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-17. If there are off-line meetings with community members, I would like to participate in them.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-18. This community manager sends messages or newsletters to each member individually.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-19. The community manager sends messages to the members on a regular basis.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-20. This community accept/apply any request or recommendation from members.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-21. This community offers monetary rewards, such as mileage, to proactive members.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-22. This community recognizes to proactive members. (i.e. choosing the best user/member of the month, etc.)

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-23. This community provides product coupons for its members.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-24. My status in the community can be upgraded/downgraded based on my degree of activity in the community. (ex. Level of membership…etc.)

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

3-25. Sharing your own experience/opinion in this community is enjoyable.

   strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree
3-26. Managers or members of this community believe your own information and knowledge.
   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

3-27. Managers or members of this community believe you own information and knowledge.
   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

3-28. You are known as an information giver in this community
   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

3-29. You have an ability to give information about this brand and product that other members want.
   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

Section 4:
The following questions ask about your loyalty to this an online brand community & brand, and finally purchase intention. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

4-1. I feel loyalty to this community.
   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

4-2. I feel any problem that this community is faced with is the same as my own problem.
   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

4-3. I often talk about this community to my family and friends.
   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

4-4. If this community offered an opportunity to work for the community, I would like to do it
   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

4-5. I would like to help any member in this community if they had either an online or offline problem.
   strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree
4-6. I feel empty when I do not use this community website for more than a week.

   strongly disagree   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

4-7. I think this brand is the best compared to others in the same category.

   strongly disagree   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

4-8. I would like to introduce this brand to others.

   strongly disagree   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

4-9. I would choose this brand even if there were disadvantages to the product.

   strongly disagree   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

4-10. If I buy a product in the brand’s product category (e.g. MP3 player, phone, etc), I will choose this brand.

   strongly disagree   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

4-11. I would consistently choose to use this brand’s product (e.g. iPod, iPhone, etc.)

   strongly disagree   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  strongly agree

Section 5:

These questions are for demographic information. Please answer the following questions by filling in the blank or checking one option.

5-1. What is your gender?

   □  Male
   □  Female

5-2. What is your age?

   □  18-21
   □  22-25
   □  26-30
   □  31-40
   □  41-50
   □  51-60
   □  61 or over
5-3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than High School
- High School/GED
- Some College
- 2-Year College Degree (Associates)
- 4-Year College Degree (BA/BS)
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Professional Degree (MD/JD)

5-4. What is your ethnicity?

- Arabic
- Asian
- Black/African American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- White/Caucasian
- Other (please write your answer here: _______________)

5-5. Do you own any product from this brand such as iPod or iPhone?

- Yes
- No (go to the question #5-7)

5-6. If yes, How many do you own?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

5-6. Below, please provide me with any comments regarding the website you browsed and the questionnaire you completed:


This is the end of the survey.

Thank you for your participation and contribution to the social research.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Kalman, M. D. (2005), Brand communities, marketing, and media. *Terrella Media,* 1-5.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jaejin Lee was born in South Korea. She completed her undergraduate study majoring in child and family studies, business administration, and English language and literature at Kyungpook National University. After graduation in 2003, she worked for Samsung Electronics for three years. She continued her master’s degree in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida in fall 2007. She will pursue her doctoral studies at University of Florida.