Examining the role of social media based brand communities on enhancement of brand loyalty using Customer Centric Model of Brand Communities: MOBINNET WIMAX case study

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Abstract: Since a long time ago the importance of the committed and loyal customers have been apparent well on the activists of marketing area and the organizations. However, in the recent years the growth of popularity and expansion of the use of web-based social media in the modern societies has attracted the attention of the researchers and activists of this field to find ways to profit from the advantages of this media. In this research using Customer centric model which is provided by Mc Alexander andhis colleagues in 2002 the role of building social mediabased brand communities will be examined. In order to collect data, the research questionnaire was distributed in MOBIN NET fan pages in Facebook and members were asked to answer 28 questions online. The results of structural equation modeling of the 204 respondents suggests that although among 9 hypotheses, 2 have not been confirmed, but the suggested model is statistically well stablished, That is, the social media based brand community can positively affect customerloyalty. Meanwhile, the mediating role of brand trust in converting the effects ofenhanced relationships in brand community to brand loyalty is also examined.

Key Words: social media based brand community, customer loyalty, brand trust, Customer centric model.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's business environment competition to serve and please customers is signified more than any time for the organizations, senior marketing managers are certainly sure that social mediacan influence their sale, customer's brand awareness and loyalty to the brand, therefore organizations are spending too much to understand and recognizethis concept and to achieve practical solutions to strengthen it (Haeilen et al., 2007). Some attractions including shortening the product life cycle, reducingtime and cost of looking fornew customers and variety of customer's needs have prompted the manufacturers to pay more attention to their relationship with customers, to keep their customers and tocreate loyalty in them. According to experts, the strong loyalty of customers toward the brand is may result inlucrative success for the organization and this relation between the customers' perception and the positive financial implications for the organization leads the organizations to the emphasis on brand management and customer oriented approaches more than any time before (CHAUDHURI& HOLBROOK, 2001, p. 81). Consumers who are less satisfied will complain more and with higher chance, will tend towards changing their current supplier; oppositely, a satisfied customer has a strong desire to comment on service and or product and as a result can be considered a loyalty customer.

On the other hand, after more than two decades from the advent of first social network, albeit this phenomenon have already left behind its infancy, the easy access (due to use of smart phones and improvement of mobile data

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internet services) has caused theses media to become more and more popular with a very considerable speed, which results in introduction of new ways to communicate others, connect to favorite brands and get informed of world's latest's news. Even a very quick look at people's daily lives in the modern era, can help us easily understand the role of data obtained from the social media on the decisions that consumers make each day. According to the experts, the realm of the social media is not only anevanescent fashion which marketers are absorbed to. In 2014 about 77% of the 500 FORTUNE's business pioneers took benefit of social media in their business (Jamie Turner &Reshma Shah, 2014). The social media as a new component (of market) have made the purchasing process more complex.Where the purchasing tastes and preferences do not impressed only through traditional channels but also spreads to online platforms spaces in which word of mouth is not limited to people you know or connected, the decision making will happen under the influence of inputs and information provided some sectors which cannot be controlled by marketers like: the peer review, the references, the blogs, the social networks and the other forms of content production. Therefore, a group of activists and scholars of the marketing area see this topic as a new tool for marketing which provided organizations the opportunity to establish and maintain relationships with customers.

In this research using Mc Alexander's consumer centric model, we will study how social media based brand communities affect customers' loyalty. The research data is collected through online distribution ofthe research questionnaire in MOBINNET fan pages in the Facebook. According what is mentioned before, since the purpose of research is to examine the impact of the being active in virtual environments on creation and maintaining customer'sloyalty, it will be classified in field of brand and customer behavior studies.

2. IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT

Despite the rapid growth in popularity of social media among people in the society and the expansion of the availability of brands and the commercial names in these virtual spaces and also the importance of branding, few studies have been done in this context, also among those already conducted, most of studies are descriptive scholars presenting definitions and introducing characteristics of social media and finally provide some recommendations and strategies for the marketers to take advantage of opportunities available in social media to overcome market's newchallenges. Among all, studies of (Edelman, 2010; Hanna et al., 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010;Kietzmann,Hermkens & Mc Carthy, 2013) can be mentioned.Therefore the need to examine the effects of branding in such media and how influences marketing variables is obvious.

This research is diligent to Examining the role of social media based brand communities on enhancement of brand loyalty using Customer Centric Model of Brand Communities. For this purpose, in order to make sure that customers of the brand have access to the internet, researches have decided to study one of local internet service providers.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media based brand communities: As it comes from the name, social media based brand communities are consist of two main components: 1) the social media 2) brand communities.

The social media: In the past two decades and by expanding the popularity of social media the theorists and scholars provided several and still similar definitions and for this phenomena.

Among all definitions, in this research we rely on Kaplan &Haenlein definition of social media, that is: "a group of internet based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and it allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (KAPLEN & HAENLEIN, 2010, p61).

Brand community: Moniz and O'Guinndefine a brand community as: "a specialized non-geoghraphically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (Muniz& O' Guinn, 2001, p.412). The framework of such groups is formed based on consumption of a good or service, and like other community it is consists of its members, the relations between these people the sharing subjects (whether physical
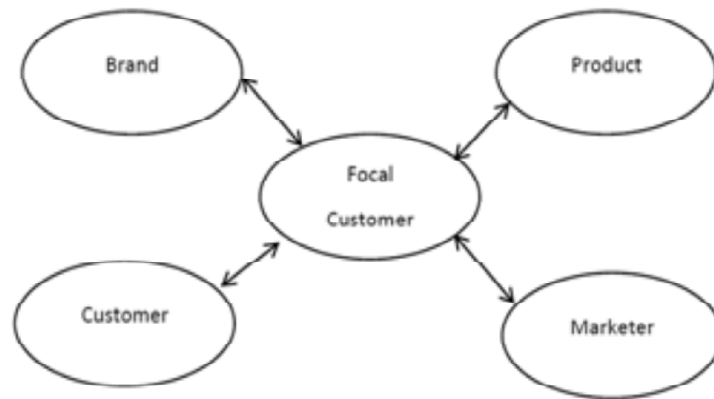
Figure 1: The central consumer model of MC ALEXANDER and his et al., 2002

or emotional) (M. Laroche et al., 2013, p. 77). Mc Alexander argue that the most important thing being shared within a brand community is the "creation and exchange of ideas." (Mc Alexander et al., 2002, p.38). Other benefits of brand communities includes facilitating share of information, cementing the history and the culture of a brand, providing assistance to consumers, and positively influencing customer's brand loyalty(Muniz & O' Guinn, 2001, p.412). Muniz and O'Guninn's model of brand community, was only comprised of the relationship between a customer with brand and with other customers. In completing their efforts, MC ALEXANDER and his colleagues, in 2002 introduced an expanded model for brand communities adding two factors of customer-organization & customer-product relationship to the model of Muniz & O' Guinn. (Figure 1).

Brand Trust: Many fields of studyincluding psychology, sociology, and economic and also other applied fields such as marketing and management have paid special attention to the issue of trust. Among various definitions in this research, Elena Delgado's definition of trust, is applicable. In her words, "Feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, that is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer." (ElenaDelado,p. 1241).

Brand loyalty: While reviewing the literature of brand, many definitions can be found for loyalty. Among all, Hawkinz defines brand loyalty as "a biased willing towards a specific brand (whether to buy or suggest others) that a person will show over time and it will make an strong feeling to choose the same brand whenever he/she is involved in a decision making or evaluation situation".Hawkinz believes that such reaction is a function of psychological and mental processes of the individual (consumer). He also adds that "brand loyalty when will be created when the customer believes that the brand reflects and strengthen some of his interpretations" (HAWKINZ & et al., translated by AHMAD ROSTA, 1385, p. 570).

4. DEVELOPING CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK & HYPOTHESES

In this research the impact of being in social media based brand communities on gaining loyal customers will be studied using Mc Alexander's customer centric model. Therefore we can say that activity in social media based brand community will be the independent variable of the current study. Figure 2 suggests the conceptual framework of the research.

As we can see in figure 2,the conceptual framework of this research is consists of 9 hypotheses. To make understanding of the model more convenient, research hypotheses are classified under 3 categories. Below we provide a glance on each category and the order in which each class of hypotheses will be investigated.

Firstly, in order to assess the effect of social media based brand communities, in the first step the impact of this item will be studied on each factor of customer centric model, including customer-product relationship (Hypothesis 1-a), Customer-Brand relationship (Hypothesis 1-b), Customer-Organization relationship (Hypothesis 1-c) and Customer-Other customrs relationship (Hypothesis 1-d):
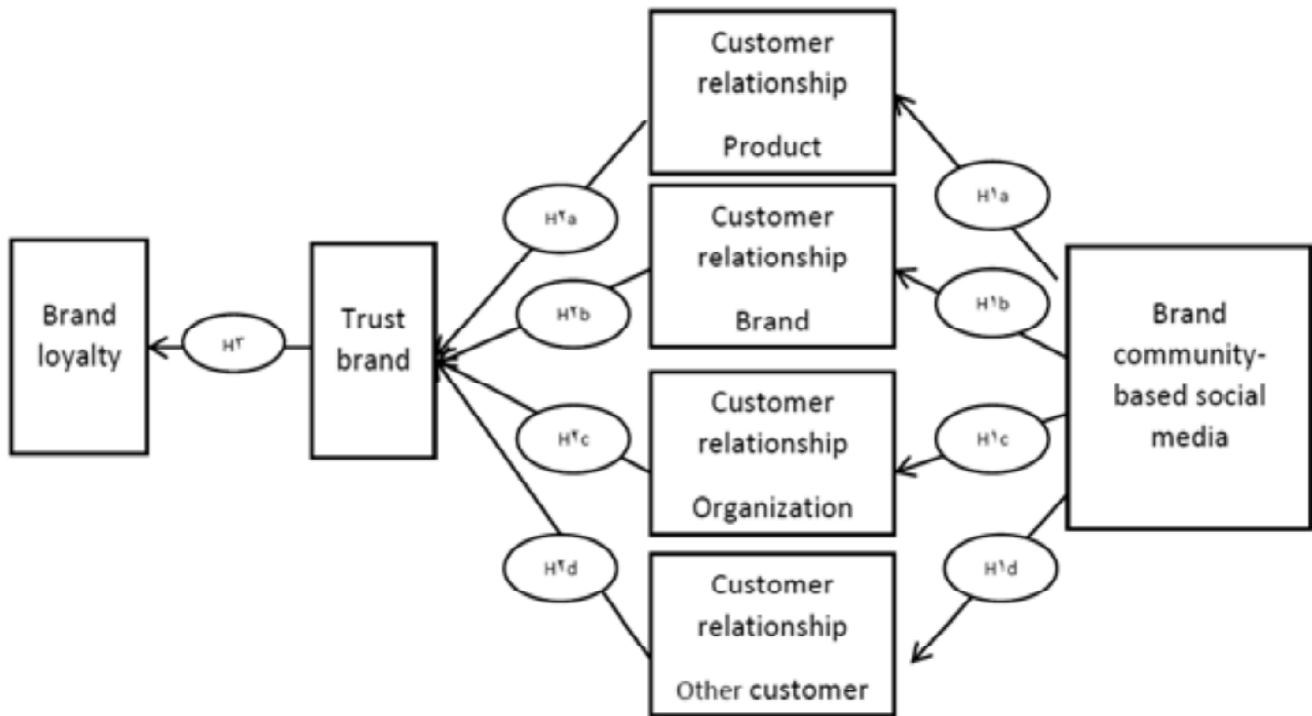
Figure 2: The conceptual model of research

H 1-a: Social media based brand communitieshave positive effects on the customer-product relationship;

H 1-b: Social media based brand communities have positive effects on the customer-brand relationship;

H 1-c: Social media based brand communities have positive effects on the customer-organization relationship;

H 1-d: Social media based brand communities have positive effects on the customer-other customers relationship.

The second set of hypotheses aims to investigate the mediating role of the "brand trust". In this step, the impact of each above mentioned elements will be studied on "Brand trust". Finally the impact of "brand trust" and how it influences "brand loyalty" will be investigated.

H 2-a: The customer-product relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust;

H 2-b: The customer-brand relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust;

H 2-c: The customer-organization relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust;

H 2-d: The customer-other customers relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust.

Finally, the third hypothesis of this research will study the role of factor of "Brand trust" in the transmission the impact of each element in customer centric model on loyalty and is expressed as:

H 3: Brand trust positively influences brand loyalty.

Tools and methodology of research:

This research is a practical study in terms of research goal, a descriptive study in terms of data collection method, and a correlation analysis in terms of the relationship between variables.

To do data collection, the research questionnaire have been distributed among the sample population, which makes the current study a descriptive study.

Also since the findings of this research will be of a very good benefit for marketing managers and will help them to find new ways to enrich their marketing plans, therefore it is categorized as a practical research.

Since the final aim of this study is to understand how social media based brand communities can create or strengthen customer's feeling toward the brand, we can assert that the objective of these researches is the development of applied knowledge in a particular field. Therefore using the results of research can lead brands to take advantage of these media to communicate with their customers.

The research like most of researches in field of behavioral sciences is empirical survey studies. These kinds of scholars are trying to present a clear view from the situation in order to help people make better and more realistic decisions. The main purpose of such studies is to collect data about what people know, what they think and what they occasionally do. The most noticeable advantage of this group of scholars is that findings of the researches are expandable and reliable is similar circumstances, that is the results from the sample study, with a higher degree of certainty will be representative of the populations characteristics.

Namely, the research is describing the level of relationship between the variables in the society and the sample population. In the other words, in the researches which the researcher is describing the variables and seeking to check out the relationship between them can categorized as a correlation analysis study (Sarmad, Bazargan & Hejazi, 1380).

The statistical society is defined as a group of individuals or units which are similar in a common or shared specification (Sarmad, Bazargan&Hejazi, 1380, p. 177). The statistical society refers to the whole group of individuals, events or items which are the subject of researche's study (Sekaran, 1382, p. 294). The statistical society of this research includes all members of Mobinnet fan pages in Facebook. In this research unlike the most researches (for example the study of Lee et al. in the social networks area) which choose a group sample to study, have targeted the whole society and the questionnaire were sent to all the members of the brand communities in Facebook. Because the number of the fan pages of Mobinnetin the Facebook were countable and since the research questionnaire is listed in the main page and were visible and available for the all members, all the members of brand groups have been targeted but among all, due to limited access to Facebook in IRAN, not all member were willing to participate in the study and answer and lots of them either did not have access to Facebook during the period study was conducted or were reluctant to answer for some reasons including fear of being pursued. Among about 500 members of these societies, the 203respondents have answered the research questionnaire. Therefore, the statistical sample of this research is included 203 persons who are members of Mobinnet fan pages in Facebook.

Data collected using the research questionnaire, then have been analyzed usingthe structural equation techniquesinLISERL ver. 8.80.

The questionnaire is a common research tool and is a direct method to obtain the research data. A questionnaire is a set of questions (phrases or items) which the responder is asked to reply. This answer forms the researcher's required data. The questions of the questionnaire can be considered as a kind of stimulus-respond. Using questionnaire will make the researcher able to investigate and evaluate respondent's knowledge, interests, attitudes, opinions and

Table 1
Components and the number of each component in the questionnaire

Row	The name of component	The number of item	Number of questions of component
1.	Social media based brand community	3 items	1-3
2.	Product	5 items	4-8
3.	Brand	5 items	9-13
4.	Company	3 items	14-16
5.	Other customers	4 items	17-20
6.	Brand Loyalty	4 items	21-24
7.	(Brand Trust)	4 items	25-28

previous experiences about the subject of research, and also will lead him to learn about each participant's current attributes. (Sarmad, 1377: 45). The questionnaire of this research includes 28 phrases. Table 1, offers a summary of research questionnaire components.

As it is shown in table 1, this questionnaire is consists of 28 phrases (apparent variables). To measure all the questions of the questionnaire LIKRET's five-degree scale and respondents were asked to for each question, choose the phrase (quite agree, agree, no idea, disagree and quite disagree) which express their feeling best.

A-Validity

Validity means that the tool will exactly measure what it is supposed to measure which is what the researcher intends to meter.(Hafezinia, 1386, p. 155)

The measuring tool should have necessary validity that the researcher has been certainty which the variable or the component has been supposed to measure is placed on the evaluation and measurement or to test the same which wanted not the other thing. In the other words, the aim of validity is that the content of tools or the questions contained in the tools exactly to measure the variables and the studied subject (Hafeznia, 1386, p. 155). The various methods has exist to measure the validity of measurement tools which are included:Content validity, the criterion validity and the structure validity (Danaeefar et al., 1383).

All the questions in the research questionnaire were chosen with reference to literature of subject and were extracted from previous researches with partial revisions to comply with circumstances of study. So researchers claim that the questionnaire is a standard questionnaire and so it is valid. To measure research variables similar researches which has been done by (Laroche et al., 2013) has been used with minor reforms to adopt the conditions and the subject of the research. In this questionnaire the items measuring brand community based on the social media has been extracted of researches of (Srinvasan, Anderson &Ponnavolu, 2002), and items measuring the factors of customer centric model (product, brand, company and other customers) was obtained from researches of (Alexander et al., 2002). In order to measure the loyalty factor one questions has been added to the findings of (Delgado-Ballester, Manuera-Aleman &Yague Guillen, 2003), which according to peers opinion was reliabe. Finally, to measure brand trust 3 out of 4 questions proposed by Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) were used. Therefore, due to the fact that all the proposed questions in the questionnaire were derivate from findings of researches work and have been used in the several researches, it can be argued that the standard questionnaire has been used for the research data.

After all in order to explore validity of the questionnaire,Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was calculated using (Lawshe,1975) formula for each phrase in questionnaire and the results have confirmed the idea that the questionnaire is well adjusted for the research purpose.

B-Reliability

In order to collect any data, the measurement tool also has to be reliable.Reliability means if similar population is tested under the same condition with the same tool, in a different place or period of time, similar results acquires, that is the test must be repeatable and each time you can get similar outcomes. (Hafeznia, 1386, p. 155).

In this research to investigate reliability of the questionnaire, to calculate the Cronbach's alpha was calculated. Table 2 suggests the calculated values of Cronbach's alpha for each of 7 (hidden) variables of the questionnaire. As we can see acquired outcomes suggest that the questionnaire is reliable.

Also in order to test normality of population, Kolomogrof test was conducted in SPSS ver.18.

Now that the validity and reliability of the questionnaire is investigated and confirmed, we can apply confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)can be conducted. CFA is a statistical technique used to verify the factor structure of a set of observed variables. CFA allows the researcher to test the hypothesis that a relationship between observed variables and their underlying latent constructs exists.Figure3 illustrates the outcomes of CFA.

Table 2
To calculate the CRONBACH's alpha of each variable in the questionnaire

Row	Variable	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
1.	Social media base brand community	0.74
2.	Product	0.88
3.	Brand	0.81
4.	Company	0.79
5.	Other customers	0.81
6.	Brand Loyalty	0.84
7.	Brand trust	0.82

Outcomes of drawing the factor analysis model shows that the factor loading of the all questionsin the questionnaire have a value of larger than 0.4,which indicate a good fit that proves the accuracy of the measuring model is confirmed and it can be argued that the suggested model is acceptable.

Besides calculation of FCA which evaluates how fit the conceptual model is, the amount of T-Value is also calculated to test accuracy of factors of conceptual model. Figure 4 represents the amount of t-value calculated for each question in the questionnaire. Since the calculated amounts for the all items shows a value larger than 1.96, this test also is proves that the measurement model is accurate that is confirms the model.

Data analysis& Results:

A) Descriptive findings: Since the questionnaire of this research is distributed in the Mobinnetfan pages in the Facebook and because having access to this media is forbidden in Iran currently, to diminish respondents fear of being pursued, the questionnaire was designed and distributed without asking any personal information from participants. Even though since the research questionnairewas posted in the Mobinnet fan pages in the Facebook and all of the members are considered potential respondent, it can be claimed that the research sample includesa normal distribution of the men and women with an appropriate variety of demographic characteristics.

Figure 3: The measurement model (the factor analysis)

B) Inductive findings: After the reliability and validity of the questionnaire have been confirmed and also the measurement model were evaluated,the structural equation model is drawn and the indexes of fitted model is calculated to investigate the accuracy of the model of research. Table 3 reports outcomes of SEM using Lisrel. The results confirm that the model is well fitted.

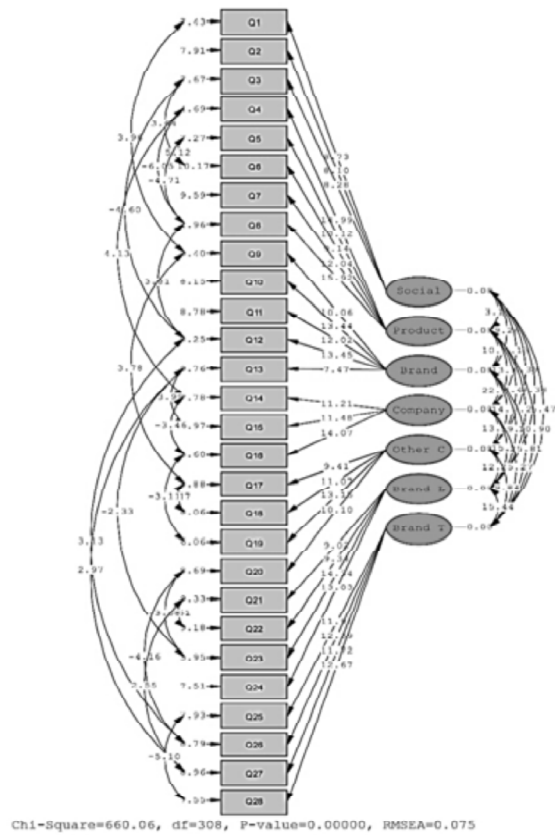Chi-Square=660.06, df=308, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.075

Figure 4: The measurement value (the amount of T-Value)

Table 3
The calculation of the fitted indexes of model

Index	Acceptable range of index	Value of index calculated for research model	conclusion
RMSEA	Lower than 0.08	0.068	The model is well fitted
Chi-Square/DF	Lower than 3	1.94	The model is well fitted
GFI	More than 0.9	0.93	The model is well fitted
AGFI	More than 0.9	0.91	The model is well fitted
NFI	More than 0.9	0,94	The model is well fitted
CFI	More than 0.9	0.97	The model is well fitted
IFI	0.97	0.97	The model is well fitted

According to the calculated indexes it was proved that the model is suitably fitted (as shown by significant coefficient, T-Value). To test the hypotheses T-Value coefficient was calculated.

Multivariate analysis or multiple regression were used to investigate the relationship between the variables of model.To do so, structural equation modeling were performed. It shall be noted thatto decide whether each hypothesis is confirmed or rejected, all the hypothesis were tested in 95% level of confidence. ($\alpha = 0.95$ & error level = 5%).

The figure 4 illustrates applicable model of research and figure 5 shows the T reform index model. Also table4 represents the value of T-Value calculated for each hypothesis. According to what is given in this table we can decide about each hypothesis.
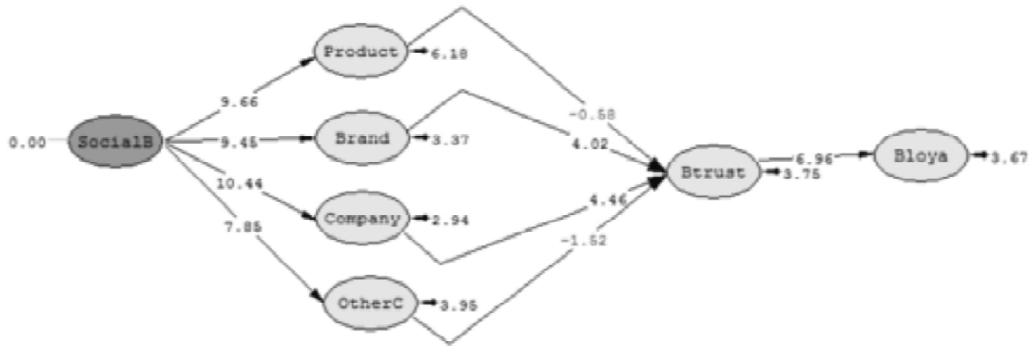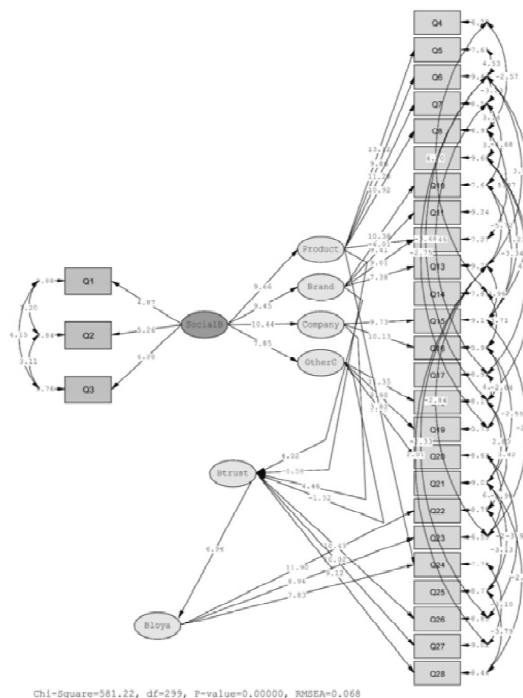
Chi-Square=581.22, df=299, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.068

Figure 5: The main model of research

Table 4
The status of confirmation or rejection of hypotheses

No.	Hypothesis	T-Value	Hypothesis Status
1-a	Social media based brand communities have positive effects on the customer-product relationship	9.66	Confirmed
1-b	Social media based brand communities have positive effects on the customer-brand relationship	9.46	Confirmed
1-c	Social media based brand communities have positive effects on the customer-organization relationship	10.44	Confirmed
1-d	Social media based brand communities have positive effects on the customer-other customers relationship	7.86	Confirmed
2-a	The customer-product relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust	-0.58	Rejected
2-b	The customer-brand relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust	4.02	Confirmed
2-c	The customer-organization relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust	4.46	Confirmed
2-d	The customer-other customers relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust	-1.52	Rejected
3	Brand trust positively influences brand loyalty	6.96	Confirmed

Chi-Square=581.22, df=299, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.068

Figure 6: The T reform index model

5. CONCLUSION

As it is shown in figure 4 and table 4, even though the proposed model of research is well fitted but still two out of nine hypotheses have not been confirmed. Hypotheses 2-a, The customer-product relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust and 2-d, The customer-other customers relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust are the ones which are rejected according to table 4.

Considering the comments and also discussions in Mobinnet online pages, which reflects the ideas of members of these pages and customers of Mobinnet, authors of this article believe that one of the main reasons causes H 2-a (The customer-product relationship has a direct positive effect on brand trust) rejection, is that the key feature which motives customers of internet services to choose Wimax among other services, specially its main rival (ADSL), is that Wimax is a mobile service and users expect to be able to use the service all over the country. Such advantage at the beginning encourages customers to pay more compared to other services to purchase Wimax. But due to some service weaknesses, after purchase of service, they will eventually find out that the quality of service intensively depends on the location it is used for example, in some places speed of internet dramatically drops down, the number of hang outs increases and etc. Therefore researchers suggest that the difference of real quality with what the customer expect causes dissatisfaction which in turn deeply influences the customer-product relationship.

As far as H 2-d is concerned, the customer-other customer's relationship does not have a positive impact on brand trust.

People in 21st century do not only live in real world, but they also live a second life in virtual world which is turning into their primary source of information. When a customer surfs the internet and gets into Mobinnet pages, immediately faces and reads lots of unbecoming & undesirable ideas in online pages, therefore s/he will start to feel bad an remembers negative experiences about Mobinnet. These negative feelings will suddenly leads the customer to a higher level of dissatisfaction and s/he will begin to share negative opinions and experiences. These type of negative word of mouth will spreads among members and make customer to loose brand trust, which is why H 2-d is rejected.

Based what is described, future studies can focus on finding some ways to control and reduce negative word of mouth, some strategies to turn angry customers into loyal customers, suggesting some solutions to improve customers relationship or any other similar issue.

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