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‘From customer participation and involvement to brand evangelism: Analysing the mediating role of customer engagement in online brand communities (OBCs)’

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From customer participation and involvement to brand evangelism: Analysing the mediating role of customer engagement in online brand communities (OBCs)

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Introduction

The implications of customer involvement and participation in online brand communities (OBCs) have not been extensively addressed in the existing literature. Prominent scholars in marketing (Ortiz, Reynolds and Franke, 2013; Liao, Huang and Xiao, 2017; Auh *et al.*, 2019; Algharabat *et al.*, 2020; Xie, Wang and García, 2021) argue that customer involvement and participation is a research area that would especially benefit from more theorizing and empirical research. Customer involvement steams from a psychological state (Zaichkowsky, 1994; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017) which is associated with “personal relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests” (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342). This enables brands to develop an essential customer brand relationship strategy (Beatty, Homer and Kahle, 1988; Islam and Rahman, 2016). Customer participation is conceptualized as a set of behaviours or activities performed by customers, i.e. customers’ constructive feedback and helpful suggestions on the products and services (Eisingerich, Auh and Merlo, 2014) in its actual delivery or production (Bendapudi and Leone, 2003). It is suggested that customers

involvement and participation in brand communities should improve their brand evangelical behaviour (Ramaswamy and Gouillart, 2010; Panda *et al.*, 2020; Mvondo *et al.*, 2022). However, neither this assertion has been emetically tested, nor the process through which customers involvement and participation in brand communities influence their brand evangelical behaviour has yet been explored.

Both customers' psychological state and behavioural activities should influence their engagement in brand communities (ref) which then should influence their cognitive, affective, and behavioural investment (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Baldus, Voorhees and Calantone, 2015; Santos *et al.*, 2022) maintaining or improving their brand evangelism (Nyadzayo, Leckie and Johnson, 2020; Sharma *et al.*, 2021). This suggests that customer online brand community engagement should be a potential mediating variable in the relationship between customer involvement and participation in brand communities, and brand evangelism. Furthermore, prior studies (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012; Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018) suggest that customer involvement and participation in brand communities may have indirect relationship. Brand evangelism, in this study, is conceptualised as conveying positive information, voicing against negative criticism, and showing a desire for future brand use, which includes extreme brand related behaviours, for example future brand purchase/use, word of mouth referral, and brand defence (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018; Dalman, Buche and Min, 2019; Nyadzayo, Leckie and Johnson, 2020; Mansoor and Paul, 2022). On the one hand, involvement encourages customers' time, energy, and affection contribution towards online brand community that may promote brand's online community engagement (Islam and Rahman, 2016). On the other hand, customer participation may influence customers' likelihood of creating and providing feedback and suggestions and improves behavioural brand community engagement (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012).

Customer engagement in brand communities should allow the combination of the customer's cognitive, affective, and behavioural activities with co-creative and relationship building capabilities transforming them into distinctive brand evangelism behaviours (Pentina, Guilloux and Micu, 2018; Wang, Sarkar and Sarkar, 2019; Harrigan, Roy and Chen, 2020; Nyadzayo, Leckie and Johnson, 2020; Le, Tan and Hoang, 2022; Mvondo *et al.*, 2022).

However, the relationship between customer involvement, participation and engagement in online brand communities, and brand evangelism has not received much attention in the literature (Ortiz, Reynolds and Franke, 2013; Hsu, 2019; Mvondo *et al.*, 2022). Although customer involvement and participation in brand communities are usually considered to have a positive impact on brand related behaviours (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012; Kamboj and Rahman, 2016; Algharabat *et al.*, 2018, 2020), some studies have provided controversial results concerning the link between customers involvement and participation in brand communities, and their brand relationships (Chang, Hsieh and Tseng, 2013; Blut, Heirati and Schoefer, 2020; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2020). Therefore, it is important to empirically investigate whether and how the customer involvement and participation in online brand communities influence brand evangelism to advance our knowledge and understanding. In order to understand the processes which customer involvement and participation in online brand communities enhance brand evangelism, we suggest that it is necessary to take intermediate variables into account, such as customer engagement in online brand communities. In doing so, our first objective will be to test the role of customer engagement as a mediator of the relationship between customer involvement and participation in brand evangelism.

This paper also makes another contribution to the literature: customer involvement and participation in online brand communities may exert a direct effect on the relationships previously ignored. The majority of customer-brand relationship studies have concentrated on

behavioural consequences, such as loyalty, advocacy and competitive advantage (Scarpi, 2010; Davcik and Sharma, 2016; Sicilia, Delgado-Ballester and Palazon, 2016; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Bowden and Mirzaei, 2021). These are based on case studies of brands that are successful in their brand equity (Keller and Swaminathan, 2019) and brand value creation (Schau, Muñiz and Arnould, 2009). Notwithstanding, the empirical evidence is limited (Ding and Tseng, 2015). This is particularly so in the case of online brand communities (OBCs) type for too long (Hanson, Jiang and Dahl, 2019; Meek *et al.*, 2019). Contrariwise, the literature also hints that customer involvement and participation could be a key impediment to brand evangelism (Leckie, Nyadzayo and Johnson, 2016; Mvondo *et al.*, 2022). Given that situation, as a second objective we explore the direct role of customer involvement and participation as a potential independent variable on brand evangelism. Such inquiry provides managerial implications that reveals how brand evangelism can be fostered in OBCs.

To achieve the objectives proposed, the structure of the paper is as follows. First, there is a description of the theoretical framework applied in this research. This leads to a series of hypotheses describing the research model. Next, we present the sample selection, the questionnaire design, and the planning of the fieldwork. Then, we report our findings and discuss their implications based on an analysis of data collected from 303 MTurk OBCs members. Finally, we state the limitations and guidelines for future research, as well as the conclusions of our study.

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Relationships among drivers of customer engagement

This paper defines customer engagement as a “multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioural dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community” (Roderick *et al.*, 2013, p. 106). It derives the generation and development of relational value creation capabilities that enable the brand to improve its brand evangelism (Nyadzayo, Leckie and Johnson, 2020).

Based on this definition, the work takes the SDL approach to involvement and participation as other relational concepts and antecedents of customer engagement. Relational concepts, i.e. involvement and participation, are the main drivers of engagement from the current literature (Bowden, 2009; Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Hollebeek, 2011; Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012; Leckie, Nyadzayo and Johnson, 2016; Harrigan *et al.*, 2018; Algharabat *et al.*, 2020) and commonly used constructs in brand community literature results in positive brand directed behaviours (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2010; Islam and Rahman, 2016; Algharabat *et al.*, 2018; Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018). Customer involvement, an essential customer relationship enabler (Beatty, Homer and Kahle, 1988), denotes customers’ perception of the “personal relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests” (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342). Therefore, customer involvement is a key component of engagement and is frequently used as one of its prerequisites (Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014; Harrigan *et al.*, 2018; Dessart, Aldás-Manzano and Veloutsou, 2019). However, involvement is different from customer engagement, mainly because it needs a consumption object and is not a functional relationship (Mollen and Wilson, 2010; Islam and Rahman, 2016). Moreover, unlike customer engagement, which is considered an amalgam of cognitive, affective, and behavioural (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Dessart, Aldás-Manzano and Veloutsou, 2019), involvement is based on cognition, affection, or motivation (Smith and Godbey, 1991) but not on behaviour (Zaichkowsky, 1985). In contrast, participation describes a behavioural response (Dabholkar, 2015). It is a set of

behaviours or activities performed by customers, for example, customers' constructive feedback and helpful suggestions on the products and services (Eisingerich, Auh and Merlo, 2014). Therefore, the selection of involvement, participation and engagement is because of their potential contribution in the service dominant logic (SDL) aligns with extant literature (Algharabat *et al.*, 2020).

According to the service dominant logic (SDL), customers are not passive respondents but are active value creators; they act as resource integrators and contribute to value creation via physical and social resources integration (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). For example, customers' propensity to proactively cocreate their brand experiences and values via active dialogue and interactions (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016) between brands and customers in OBCs (Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Hajli *et al.*, 2017). Such consistent interaction often transforms participants from inactive to dynamic followers involved with the brand and its value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000). As a result, customers become value cocreators who link their values and identity with the brand and engage with its community (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001). In addition, cocreation is customers' active role in creating value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). When customers are changed from passive customers to active players (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), they identify with brand community characters and goals and show commitment (Hajli *et al.*, 2017) and motivation to actively engage (Wirtz *et al.*, 2013), share and create content (Munnukka, Karjaluoto and Tikkanen, 2015), in turn, results in their loyalty and advocacy for the preferred brand (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Qiao, Song and Wang, 2021). In addition, such active players welcome their brand passionately and devotionally (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Mansoor and Paul, 2022), actively propagate brand directed experiences to others, and voice against negative information of their brand (Matzler, Pichler and Hemetsberger, 2007; Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Dalman, Buche and Min, 2019).

Thus, the service dominant logic provides a strong theoretical ground regarding the impacts of involvement and participation on customer engagement and brand evangelism in OBCs.

Customer involvement and engagement in OBCs

Given that involvement depends on perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests and it may be cognitive, affective, motivational, but not behavioural. Highly involved customers search more (Beatty and Smith, 1987), spend more time and energy to enjoy their product or activity (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). They perceive the object to be relevant based on their needs, values, and interests (Zaichkowsky, 1985) in the cocreation of brand's content (Hajli *et al.*, 2017). We extend this object involvement to brand community activities as well. The more they believe the object or activity is relevant and feel it is important and meaningful, the higher their engagement. In addition, extant studies suggest a strong positive association between customer involvement and engagement (Islam and Rahman, 2016; Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018; Harrigan *et al.*, 2018). Thus, OBCs may provide platforms for customers' interactions related to their relevant needs, interest, and importance to get involved with the community, which is more likely to encourage their engagement in OBCs.

Likewise, extant studies have shown relationships between customer involvement and active participation (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Nardi *et al.*, 2020). Customers involve with a brand community when it fulfils customers' expectations (Adjei, Noble and Noble, 2010), which enhances the relevance of the brand among the customers to recommend, comment and share (Pihl, 2013). Additionally, involved customers exhibit higher intensity of their association in the brand community (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). For example, involved customers tend to have a strong belief in the preferred brand community (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001) because of their

strong brand identification (Qiao, Song and Wang, 2021). Moreover, involvement is also associated with affective motives, which are influenced by emotional factors (e.g., beliefs and feelings) within the network (Harrigan *et al.*, 2018), which is the result of long term brand community relationships (Qiao, Song and Wang, 2021). Thus, this study hypothesises the following:

H1. Customer involvement positively influences customer engagement in OBCs.

H2. Customer involvement positively influences customer participation in OBCs.

Customer participation and engagement in OBCs

Customer participation captures customers' active contribution to the actual delivery or the production of a service (Bendapudi and Leone, 2003) and value creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014), which is the result of internal motivation in OBCs (Baldus, Voorhees and Calantone, 2015) and co-creation between multiple actors that always includes beneficiary (e.g. customer) defined in (SDL) by (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008).

Previous studies hinted at a strong positive association between customer participation and cognitive engagement (Leckie, Nyadzayo and Johnson, 2016), affective engagement (Hall-Phillips *et al.*, 2016) and behavioural engagement (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012), but this relationship is still underexplored in OBCs context. Active participation of members in an online community share their intrinsic motivation (Baldus, Voorhees and Calantone, 2015), participate in constant dialogue (Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018), willing to take part in interactive process (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012). Therefore, customer participation motivates brand community members to interact frequently to create and share brand related information and knowledge, which may stimulate customer engagement in OBCs. Thus, we hypothesise that:

H3. Customer participation positively influences customer engagement in OBCs.

Brand evangelism and customer engagement in OBCs

Businesses are closely monitoring highly influential customers group known as brand evangelists (Tafesse and Korneliussen, 2020; Sharma *et al.*, 2021) who welcome their brands passionately and speak in its favour as a spokesperson (Matzler, Pichler and Hemetsberger, 2007). In this sense, brand evangelism is more intense and passionate than just positive word of mouth (Matzler, Pichler and Hemetsberger, 2007). Truly devoted customers go beyond positive word-of-mouth and recruit and actively convince others of the benefits of their favourite brand(s) (Pimentel and Reynolds, 2004). In addition, (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Mansoor and Paul, 2022; Mvondo, Jing and Hussain, 2023) addressed a limitation in (Matzler, Pichler and Hemetsberger, 2007) brand evangelism definition and added that brand evangelism is more than just their positive communication with a brand. Brand evangelism also comprises active interaction with the brand and purchases associated with goods and/or services. Therefore, brand evangelism includes brand purchase, positive brand referral, and brand defence: defending disparaging comments about the brands (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Mansoor and Paul, 2022; Mvondo, Jing and Hussain, 2023).

Consequently, recent researchers call for additional forms of brand related behaviours, mainly brand advocacy, brand consumptions, and brand defence exhibited by brand evangelists (Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018; Nyadzayo, Leckie and Johnson, 2020; Harrigan, Roy and Chen, 2021; Sharma *et al.*, 2021; Mansoor and Paul, 2022). For example, brand evangelists recommend and protect brands of their choice impassionedly against negative information and show commitment through frequent purchases (Nyadzayo, Leckie and Johnson, 2020; Harrigan, Roy and Chen, 2021). Moreover, brand evangelists defend their favourite brand by proactively standing up for the brand to preserve the “brand’s good name and goodwill” (Wilk

et al., 2019, p. 420) by showing resistance to negative information (Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012) at the time when a brand attack occurs (Ilhan, Kübler and Pauwels, 2018).

Whereas customer engagement has its foundations in the theory of relationship marketing; encouraging repeat purchases, keeping customers, and increasing loyalty and service dominant logic (SDL) (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012); an active role of the customer in a network in the value cocreation process (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), aids in the development of meaningful customer brand relationships to fuel brand directed behaviours (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Dessart, Aldás-Manzano and Veloutsou, 2019). Moreover, prolonged engagement in OBCs is more likely to improve community success, encourage stable future relationships (Muniz and O’guinn, 2001) and fulfil collective goals (Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005; Sharma *et al.*, 2021). Undoubtedly, consistent customers’ engagement is indicative of the intense psychological and behavioural investments towards their preferred brand community, which encourages their brand advocacy, loyalty (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Zaglia, 2013) and initiates to defend brand image (Kumar and Nayak, 2018).

While discussing engagement, evangelism is an essential enabler for customers’ extra-role and consumption behaviours, such as promotional and defensive roles (Muniz and O’guinn, 2001; Harrigan, Roy and Chen, 2021) and brand use (Mansoor and Paul, 2022), and purchase behaviour (Nyadzayo, Leckie and Johnson, 2020). Evangelists disseminate their positive voice about brands in OBCs (Matzler, Pichler and Hemetsberger, 2007) as a spokesperson of the brand (Doss, 2014), frequently purchase it (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Nyadzayo, Leckie and Johnson, 2020) and protect its name and brand from negative criticism (Wilk, Soutar and Harrigan, 2019). Therefore, OBCs intermediate customers to voice their opinions, concern, and consumption of the brand (Scarpi, 2010; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015), highly engaged customers with brands are likely to exhibit brand evangelical behaviours. Hence, we hypothesise that:

H4. Customer engagement in OBCs positively influences brand evangelism.

Drawing on the identification theory (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001), scholars reveal a positive relationship between customer involvement and brand-related behaviours in OBCs. For example, highly involved customers are likely to consider a brand community a central part of their own identity, as discussed in Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Thus, for example, customers may exhibit active pro brand behaviours in the form of future purchases, and word of mouth referrals for the brand they identify as their own and strong brand defence, as any threat to a brand is a personal threat, is to protect their identities (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Qiao, Song and Wang, 2021). Moreover, highly product involved customer spend more time and cognitive efforts considering their product choices and show feelings of interest, enthusiasm and excitement about specific product categories (Goldsmith and Emmert, 1991; Lockshin, Spawton and Macintosh, 1997). We extend this product involvement activity in brand community. The intensity of customers' involvement association also depends on the level of cognitive and affective investments customers have in the brand community (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012), this, in turn, generates positive brand-related behaviours (Dessart, Aldás-Manzano and Veloutsou, 2019) also known as evangelism (Ortiz, Reynolds and Franke, 2013).

Changes in behaviours are signs of commitment (Verhoef, 2003), and the literature discusses several common ways to identify these changes. This includes increased participation in community activity (Wellman *et al.*, 2001; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006), which is consistent with (Staw, 1981) escalation of commitment theory. Staw explores an individual's behaviour in which they become locked into a course of action due to self-justification and commitment to resources. When an individual justifies past decisions and develops norms of behaviour, they are apt to continue, increase, and intensify participation in that activity. Moreover, (Casaló, Flavián and Guinalú, 2007) suggest personal factors: propensity to trust, satisfaction with

previous experiences, familiarity with the community, and communication level influence participation in OBCs.

Customer participation in OBCs is an act of commitment (Tsai, Huang and Chiu, 2012) as members share common goals, marking them more committed to the brand community than those who are not fans of the brand (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001) and behave altruistically (Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005). For example, committed members frequently interact with each other (Zaglia, 2013), share timely information (Munnukka, Karjaluo and Tikkanen, 2015), offer feedback about the brand (Hook et al., 2018), and regularly purchase (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, community members who commit more to their online communities associate brand show stronger attachment (Tsai, Huang and Chiu, 2012) with the brand community. In addition, they experience the brand's success and failure as their own (Badrinarayanan and Laverie, 2011), which stimulates their brand protective behaviours emotionally (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013) defending the brand from negative criticism (Sharma *et al.*, 2021). Hence, we hypothesise following:

H5. Customer involvement in OBCs positively influences brand evangelism

H6. Customer participation in OBCs positively influences brand evangelism

Mediation of customer engagement in OBCs

The proposed conceptual research model suggests that the relationship between customer involvement and participation and brand evangelism is mediated by customer engagement. Given that high involvement and active participation of customers is linked to their intense engagement (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012; Algharabat *et al.*, 2020) and intention to perform extra role behaviours (Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Brodie *et al.*, 2011), which may result in brand related evangelical behaviours (Harrigan, Roy and Chen, 2021; Sharma *et al.*, 2021). It is already hypothesised that customer involvement positively influences customer

engagement in OBCs (*H1*) and brand evangelism (*H5*), and that customer engagement in OBCs positively influences brand evangelism (*H4*). Additionally, Pansari and Kumar (2017) highlight that customer engagement mediates the relationship between customer involvement and brand related evangelical behaviours (Leckie, Nyadzayo and Johnson, 2016; Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018) in OBCs. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H7. Customer engagement in OBCs mediates the positive effect of customer involvement on brand evangelism.

Similarly, customer participation derives customers' active contribution via frequent interaction and information share (Munnukka, Karjaluoto and Tikkanen, 2015), and it is considered as an antecedent of customer engagement (Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018; Algharabat *et al.*, 2020). It is already hypothesised that customer participation positively influences customer engagement in OBCs (*H3*) and brand evangelism (*H6*), and that customer engagement in OBCs positively influences brand evangelism (*H4*). Moreover, some empirical studies (Leckie, Nyadzayo and Johnson, 2016; Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018) reveal that customer engagement mediates the relationship between customer participation and brand related behaviours. Therefore, this leads to the following hypothesis:

H8. Customer engagement in OBCs mediates the positive effect of customer participation on brand evangelism

Figure 1
Conceptual model

Methodology

Data collection

An online survey was developed to collect data for this study. The choice of the online survey is in line with the context of this study as the population of interest for this research are Facebook OBCs members. To qualify for the survey, participants who self-identified as current members of Facebook and at least one Facebook-based brand community for the past three months served as respondents to this survey. The participants (workers) are recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), one of the largest online survey websites in the world. MTurk is widely used for researching user behaviours (Mason and Suri, 2012) and in marketing research (Antonetti and Maklan, 2017). A HIT (Human Intelligence Task) was generated and posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk to invite participants to complete the survey. Only participants (workers) on MTurk with 99 percent approval scores (Matherly, 2019) and 5,000 HITs approved and over are selected to maintain data quality. Following (Dalman, Buche and Min, 2019), the survey completion time is monitored for the participants to maintain the quality of data. Each participant took approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey, which is considered excellent compared to 4-5 minutes average time spent in each task. Among the 303 completed responses, (35%) were from males, and (65%) were from females. Extant study hinted that females spend more time on Facebook than males (Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018), and statistic shows that females, on average, are the most active Facebook users (Pew Research Centre, 2021), which aligns with the sample population.

Measures

All the constructs in this study are borrowed from the extant marketing literature. A total of four scales were used in the study: customer participation (Koh and Kim, 2004), customer involvement (Beatty and Talpade, 1994), customer engagement (Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014), purchase intention, word of mouth referrals, and brand defence as representative of

brand evangelism (Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1996; Becerra and Korgaonkar, 2011; Dalman, Buche and Min, 2019). Measurement items (see appendix A) are anchored on 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (“strongly agree”) to 7 (“strongly disagree”).

Data analysis

This study employed Structural equation modelling via AMOS 25.0 software to test the proposed model and hypotheses. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, found an acceptable measurement model, and then imposed this model on the structural model to test the hypotheses. Subsequently, internal reliability and validity tests were run to calculate Cronbach’s alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variances Extracted for all the constructs. The value of Cronbach’s alpha ranged good suggested level between 0.719 and 0.912 (Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018), while the Composite Reliability and Average Variances Extracted showed values more significant than the recommended levels of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2010; Bagozzi and Yi, 2012). The results are shown in *Table 1*.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Common method bias

Self-administered online surveys asked each respondent to answer questions about independent and dependent variables in the same questionnaire, risking common method bias in their responses (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). However, the risk of common method bias was attempted to reduce by guaranteeing respondents' anonymity so that the respondents could answer the questions freely and honestly, and by spreading out the questions for dependent and independent variables in the questionnaire so that the respondents could not easily perceive a relationship between the variables, deterring them from manipulating their responses (Krishnan, Martin and Noorderhaven, 2006).

However, even after applying such measures, there could still be a risk of common method bias in responses. Therefore, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to test the common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The test result shows that the variance explained by the single factor is below 50%, confirming no significant level of common method bias in this study (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

Reliability and validity

This study achieved both reliability and validity of all the constructs. All the factor loadings are above 0.7, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha of all the constructs are above 0.7, and the AVE of all the constructs is above 0.5, providing evidence for the convergent validity of the measures, greater internal consistency, and adequate item reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Islam and Rahman, 2016). Moreover, discriminant validity of the constructs was achieved as the squared root of the AVE of each variable was higher than its correlations with other variables (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2010; Bagozzi and Yi, 2012). The descriptive statistics, inter correlation matrix, and the square root value of the AVE of each variable are shown in *Table 2*. Finally, the measurement model fits well with data as the goodness of fit indices for the measurement model are within the recommended ranges (CFI > 0.9, GFI > 0.9, TLI > 0.9, RMSEA < 0.05 and SRMR < 0.05) (Bentler and Yuan, 1999; Byrne, 2012; Brown, 2015).

[Insert Table 2 here]

Hypotheses testing

Direct effects test

A causal model was created by allowing direct paths from “customer participation” and “customer involvement” to “brand evangelism”. The model results in a good fit with data on all indices as $\chi^2 = 167.551$ (Df=131); GFI = 0.933; CFI = 0.958; TLI = 0.948; and SRMR =

0.064; RMSEA = 0.052 and $R^2=0.53$, $p < 0.05$ (Bentler and Yuan, 1999; Hu and Bentler, 1999; Byrne, 2012; Brown, 2015). The results of the analysis, as presented in *Table 3* show that customer involvement positively influences customer engagement ($\beta = 0.281$, $***p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis H1. Likewise, customer involvement generated positive effects on customer participation ($\beta = 0.324$, $***p < 0.001$) and brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.136$, $***p < 0.001$); thus, H2 and H5 are supported. In addition, the results show that customer participation positively influences customer engagement ($\beta = 0.272$, $***p < 0.001$) and brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.139$, $***p < 0.001$); thus, H3 and H6 are supported.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Indirect or mediated effects test (via customer brand engagement)

To test for mediation, another structural equation model was created that allowed direct paths and indirect paths through customer engagement from customer involvement in OBCs and customer participation to brand evangelism. Likewise, a nonparametric bootstrapping method was adopted, which guides to circumvent statistical power problems caused by asymmetric and non-normal sampling distributions of indirect effects (Zhao, Lynch Jr and Chen, 2010). The choice of this path was due to the shortcomings of the (Baron and Kenny, 1986) approach (see MacKinnon et al., 2002; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Then, bootstrap (1000) analysis (Bollen and Stine, 1990) was used to test all heightened hypotheses. The use of the bootstrapping method in SEM to evaluate mediation or indirect effects is popular (Iacobucci, 2008) as it provides not only the indirect effect coefficients but also their level of significance (Zhao, Lynch Jr and Chen, 2010). Therefore, in line with prior studies (Tibshirani and Efron, 1993; MacKinnon, Krull and Lockwood, 2000), this study employed the bootstrapping method to investigate the mediating role of customer engagement. The goodness of fit statistics of the mediating model ($\chi^2/df = 1.89$, $p < .05$, CFI=0.92, GFI=0.95, NFI=0.94, TLI=0.90,

RMSEA=0.064, and SRMR=0.0615) indicates that the model adequately fits with the data (Bentler and Yuan, 1999; Byrne, 2012; Brown, 2015).

The results of the analysis of the indirect effect indicate that customer engagement partially mediates the positive effect of customer involvement on brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.523$, *** $p < 0.001$) and the positive effect of customer participation on brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.431$, *** $p < 0.001$); thus, H7 and H8 are supported. Overall, all hypotheses are supported (see Table 3). The statistically significant indirect effect justified that higher customer involvement and participation is related to increased interaction, time spends, and association with the brand community; this generates a more significant effect on customer engagement in OBCs and thus results in higher brand evangelical behaviours.

Discussion

Our findings are an important contribution to the customer involvement and participation-brand evangelism research stream focusing on the intermediate link of customer engagement in the relationship. This research could explain why some brands might manifest a low brand evangelism while their customers show a clear involvement and participation intentions. Specifically, our study explains the relationship by an indirect effect through customer engagement, whose magnitude is even greater than the direct effect. Consequently, the other dependant variables more sensitive to involvement and participation should be suggested in order to understand the involvement, participation, and brand evangelism relationship. Brands with a strong customer involvement and participation will enter new brand community environment aggressively and incur greater relationships risks. This will require them to cope with complex and changing customer relationships situations and will call for engagement. The customer engagement process may partially mediate the relationship between involvement and

participation and brand evangelism by extending these interactions to the larger brand community environments.

The results confirm the conclusion of (Bowden, 2009; Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012; Algharabat *et al.*, 2020) and show how involvement and participation induces customer engagement in the creation of cognitive, affective, and behavioural activities that lays foundation for active interaction (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, according to (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012; Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018; Algharabat *et al.*, 2020), customer engagement is the major consequence of involvement and participation. Following (Algharabat *et al.*, 2020), SD logic and customer involvement and participation provide the foundation for customer engagement that customers are not passive respondent, but are active value cocreator and act as resource integrators, which further strengthens bottom up information approach (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012). Similarly, (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Harrigan *et al.*, 2018) consider that customer involvement and participation promote customer engagement and engagement investments, such as on time, energy, affection, comments, and feedback etc.

Several studies have indicated that there is a direct impact of customer involvement and participation on brand related behaviours (Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005; Algesheimer *et al.*, 2010; Ortiz, Reynolds and Franke, 2013; Harrigan *et al.*, 2018; Dessart, Aldás-Manzano and Veloutsou, 2019). Nonetheless, these studies did not pay attention to there being a mediator variable in such link. Our results show that customer engagement partially mediates the relationship between customer involvement and participation and brand evangelism. One of the reasons for this might be that brand evangelism depends directly on many variables, both internal and external to the brand (Mansoor and Paul, 2022). Our study innovatively contemplates such mediating role and finds evidence that there is an indirect effect of customer involvement and participation on brand evangelism via customer engagement. This finding supports the results of several authors. On the one hand, there are those who have

measured involved customer's psychological state that must be in place for customer engagement to occur (Harrigan *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, we find those who have done so according to critical behavioural components of customer participation (Carlson *et al.*, 2019). This paper explains this result. It considers the fact that involvement and participation stimulate customer's relevance and willingness to take part in the brand value creation.

This study confirms the influence of customer engagement on brand evangelism. This topic is a topic addressed by several Scholars, but which lacked a solid empirical foundation (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Mansoor and Paul, 2022; Mvondo, Jing and Hussain, 2023). This is due to inconclusive brand evangelism definition. (Matzler, Pichler and Hemetsberger, 2007; Doss, 2014) has included advocacy (e.g., promotion, recommendation) to define brand evangelism. However, (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Mansoor and Paul, 2022; Mvondo *et al.*, 2022) suggested customers' propensity to advocate, purchase and defend the preferred brand in their evangelism concertation. We the later definition and highlight that brand evangelism is an act of extreme brand related behaviours, including actively promoting, defending, and repurchasing preferred brand and provide further empirical support to this line of literature.

Moreover, the findings further strengthen involvement and participation as customer engagement drivers and support previous research in the OBCs context (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018). The relationship related to involvement and participation in brand evangelism is consistent with extant research and brand community identification (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001; Qiao, Song and Wang, 2021) motivation and commitment (Tsai, Huang and Chiu, 2012; Hajli *et al.*, 2017) when customers associate their character and goals with the community and perform in favour of their preferred brand.

Managerial implications

The findings of this study have some important managerial implications. As participation and involvement of customers in OBCs enhances their engagement and, in turn, brand evangelism, marketing and brand managers should focus on encouraging and motivating customers to engage in OBCs. Specifically, managers should focus on developing and implementing strategies that help customers' higher involvement and active participation. Studies show that managers can enhance customers' participation in online brand communities by addressing the comments and concerns of customers (Algharabat *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, helping customers to feel more attached with brands could also increase the engagement of customers in OBCs (Islam and Rahman, 2017).

Moreover, marketers could organise OBCs into a more dynamic, special, and co-creative group to grow engagement among current and prospective customers. Marketers could encourage individuals' participation in exciting events or activities and invest in community involvement to foster engagement. For example, OBCs event (e.g., My Starbucks Ideas) has enabled customers to become active collaborators through discussions, and new information shared in the community (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021) and, thus, encourage fostering to engagement. Likewise, brand managers' investment in OBCs (e.g., Lego Ideas customer cocreation platform) has captured, managed, and exploited opportunities from customers to gain a deeper understanding of customers' involvement with the community and brand-related interactions to serve specific customer needs, wants, or preferences better (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021), may enhance customer engagement.

Given that OBCs is a platform for customers to share their brand experiences and show their interest among like-minded people, they identify with the community and the brand

(Muniz and O'guinn, 2001), enhancing their engagement and brand-related behaviours. Marketers could learn from the HOG (Harley Owners Group) online community how it managed to encourage participation, involvement, and engagement and increase brand evangelism among Harley-Davidson motorcycles owners and enthusiasts. For example, Harley Owners Group (HOG) consists of passionate fans who regularly gather to share their Harley-Davidson brand experiences offline and online (Fournier and Lee, 2009). Such intimate community relationships lead to strengthened brand identification (Hajli *et al.*, 2017) and engagement, instilling a sense of belonging, loyalty, and brand advocacy in Harley Davidson Owners Group's online brand community (Wilk, Soutar and Harrigan, 2021).

Limitations

Although this study establishes a relationship between customer involvement and participation in OBCs, customer engagement, and brand evangelism, it has some limitations that warrant attention in future research. First, despite having recruited a significant number of participants ($n = 303$), this study is cross-sectional; it analyses data from a population at a particular time. As the degree of participation and involvement, and engagement with the brand community may change over a period, future studies should consider designing longitudinal studies to test this model. Longitudinal research would allow the flexibility to analyse developments in these relationships over time (Eisingerich, Auh and Merlo, 2014).

In addition to the research design, the other limitation is about the type of OBCs studied here. This research has adopted general OBCs characteristics (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001) to recruit members of the OBCs as the respondents for this study, without categorising the members of customer-created or business-created OBCs. A recent study (Pedeliento, Andreini and Veloutsou, 2020) has explored that “consumer-run communities stimulate higher levels of integration, participation and commitment than the company-managed communities” (p, 481).

Therefore, participation and involvement in the OBCs created by businesses and customers may produce different results on customer engagement and, in turn, brand evangelism. Therefore, future research may either control for that effect or test (compare) this model on those two different types of OBCs (customer created and business created). Further, this study collected data from Facebook online brand community members only. OBCs are created on many social media platforms, including Twitter. Thus, future studies should include OBCs from multiple social media platforms and perform comparative studies between them, for example Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, this study did not categorise the sectors and brands of OBCs. Future studies may test this model among diverse brand categories.

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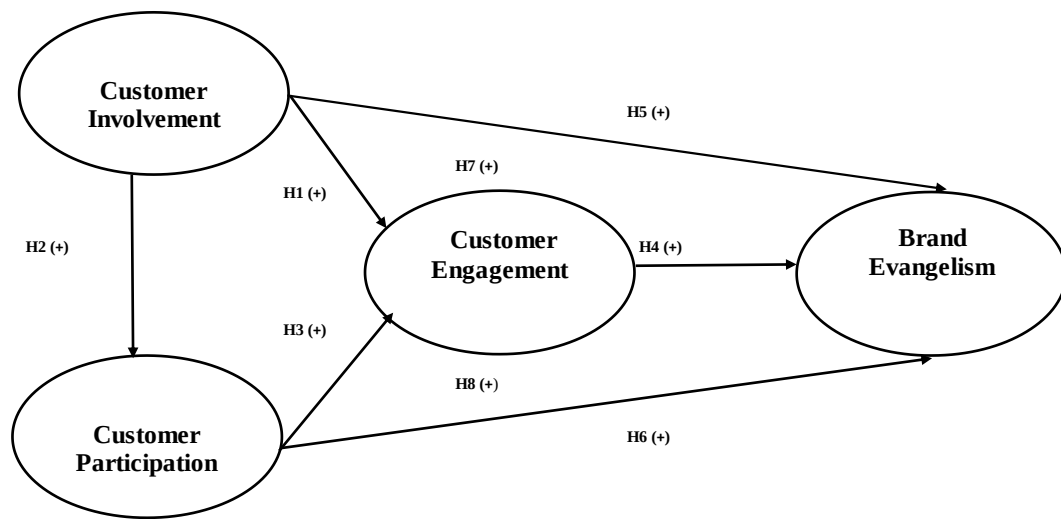
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Figure 1
Conceptual model



Note:

H7 (+) = Customer engagement mediates positive effect of customer involvement on brand evangelism

H8 (+) = Customer engagement mediates positive effect of customer participation on brand evangelism

Arrow = Hypothesized direction

+ = Positive hypothesized effects

Table1
Measurement scales, reliability, validity, and dimensionality statistics

Construct	Item	Standardised factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	Compositive Reliability	AVE	MSV	ASV
Customer Engagement	-	-	0.878	0.917	0.753	0.432	0.373
	CBE1	0.84					
	CBE2	0.83					
	CBE3	0.80					
	CBE4	0.70					
	CBE5	0.80					
	CBE6	0.86					
	CBE7	0.86					
	CBE8	0.76					
	CBE9	0.75					
	CBE10	0.88					
Involvement	-	-	0.885	0.862	0.68	0.354	0.375
	Inv1	0.73					
	Inv2	0.80					
Participation	-	-	0.824	0.835	0.716	0.441	0.437
	Part1	0.75					
	Part2	0.70					
Brand Evangelism	-	-	0.915	0.846	0.612	0.382	0.356
	WoM1	0.82					
	WoM2	0.74					
	PI1	0.74					
	PI2	0.77					
	BD1	0.82					
	BD2	0.83					

Note: All significant at $p < 0.05$; AVE= Average variance extracted; MSV=Maximum shared squared variance; ASV= Average shared squared variance

Table 2
Descriptive statistics, inter-correlations matrix, and square root of AVE

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Customer engagement	Involvement	Participation	Brand evangelism
Customer engagement	4.24	1.63	0.868			
Involvement	4.52	1.52	0.575	0.716		
Participation	3.68	1.74	0.527	0.612	0.742	
Brand evangelism	4.21	1.47	0.364	0.342	0.347	0.782

Note: The values in the diagonal cells (bold) signals the square roots of AVE; correlation significant at ($p < 0.05$); $N = 303$

Table 3
Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis		Standardised path coefficients (β)	Standard error (SE)	Path coefficients (B)	p-value	Result
H1	Involvement→ Customer Engagement	0.281	0.073	0.329	<0.001	Supported
H2	Involvement → Participation	0.324	0.055	0.246	<0.001	Supported
H3	Participation → Brand Engagement	0.272	0.045	0.137	<0.001	Supported
H4	Customer Engagement→ Brand Evangelism	0.743	0.041	0.841	<0.001	Supported
H5	Involvement → Brand Evangelism	0.136	0.085	0.232	<0.001	Supported
H6	Participation→ Brand Evangelism	0.139	0.053	0.243	<0.001	Supported
H7	Involvement → Brand Evangelism (indirect effect via CBE)	0.523	0.041	0.645	<0.001	Supported
H8	Participation → Brand Evangelism (indirect effect via CBE)	0.431	0.053	0.433	<0.001	Supported