

How Consumers' Brand Loyalty Would Be Influenced in Social Media Based Brand  
Communities

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## ABSTRACT

### How Consumers' Brand Loyalty Would Be Influenced in Social Media Based Brand Communities

Mingquan Miao

Building consumers' brand loyalty has always been of major importance for brands. Many previous studies have comprehensively studies how consumers' brand loyalty is affected through brand satisfaction and brand trust from different perspectives. However, in the development of new technologies, social media gradually plays an important role in people's daily life. In the same time, social media based brand community appeared corresponding to this development and a growing number of brands became alert to this change and began to use this platform to build their consumers' brand loyalty. As a result, how brand satisfaction and brand trust would influence consumers' brand loyalty nowadays in social media based brand communities became of great interest for marketers and companies. Moreover, social media based brand communities are beyond the limitation of national boundaries. And therefore if brands want to establish an effective marketing strategy to strengthen consumers' brand loyalty through social media based brand communities in a global context, they should take culture into consideration. In the meantime, shopping experiences with a brand could have more impact than product features and product benefits and leaves a more memorable impression on consumers so that consumers with different levels of shopping experience may have different attitudes towards a brand in social media based brand communities. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to study and investigate how brand satisfaction and brand trust from a separate perspective would influence brand loyalty in social media based brand communities when considering the effects of cultural difference and consumers' level of shopping experiences on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities so as to provide more comprehensive and profound suggestions for marketers to develop appropriate and efficient marketing strategies under targeted international marketing backgrounds.

**Keywords:** social media based brand community; brand satisfaction; brand trust; brand loyalty; shopping experience; cultural orientation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary marketing field, learning about, organizing and facilitating brand communities have interested many marketers (e.g., McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig 2002; Schau, Muniz, & Amould, 2009; Zhou, Zhang, Su, & Zhou, 2011) due to the fact that brand communities can effectively connect admirers of a brand and establish a strong bond among them at the same time (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Besides, there are several advantages of brand communities leading to marketers’ interest in brand communities, such as learning customer perceptions of new product offerings and competitive actions, maximizing opportunities to attract and collaborate closely with highly loyal consumers of the brand (Franke & Shah, 2003; McAlexander *et al.*, 2002), influencing evaluations and actions (Muniz & Schau, 2005), rapidly disseminating information (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Jin, Cheung, Lee, & Chen, 2009), and most importantly gaining a “holy grail” of loyal customers. (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002). Moreover, joining brand communities could facilitate information sharing, cementing the history and the culture to a brand and provide assistance to consumers, and positively influence brand communities (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Based on these advantages, it is not difficult to understand why marketers are eager to learn about and join brand communities (Laroche *et al.*, 2012). In the meantime, social media nowadays play an irreplaceable role in people’s daily life. People spend more and more time surfing the webpages, making friends, talking likes and dislikes, complaining about family daily chores, and even flirting on the virtual community through social media. With the growing popularity of social media, many brands and business are very sensitive to and alert to this trend as they all realize that it is a good opportunity for their business to boost their profits by establishing brand communities on these virtual platforms due to the inherent advantages of easy access, low cost, high communication, and efficiency of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For example, a social software called ‘We Chat’ originally designed for people to easily keep in touch has become a real hit as a trading and advertising platform by brands and private businessmen in China in recent years. Many brands, even small personal businesses, succeeded using it as their sales platforms by twittering some advertisements in order to boost their business. In the meanwhile, this success should also be attributed to the fact that people can see the comments of others while reading these advertisements, which can further influence people’s attitudes towards these brands. Moreover, some people who are jobless can support themselves by starting business on the software ‘We

Chat', further indicating the powerful influence of a social media could have on people's life in nowadays society.

The integration of the advantage of social media and brand communities in recent years have tempted many companies to participate in such spaces (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Although it seems that joining social media based brand communities could boost companies' profits, few companies were able to effectively and efficiently improve their consumers' brand loyalty so as to gain more profits through establishing social media based brand communities, which could be partially explained by the lack of practical knowledge relating to the combination of social media and brand community. Drawing on the previous literature review, we found that few researchers had conducted studies investigating factors influencing consumers' brand loyalty in social media based brand communities (e.g., Hsu & Tsou, 2011), which resulted in a lack of theoretical reference for marketers to develop effective marketing strategy, even if any, they all concluded that joining social media based brand communities would increase consumers' brand loyalty (Laroche *et al.*, 2012) without a specific discussion about under what condition this result could be supported.

According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412), a brand community is a non-geographical bound community, indicating social media based brand communities apparently transcend geographical boundaries as well. As a result, consumers' brand loyalty in social media based brand community is likely to be influenced by the factor of cultural differences due to the fact that consumers' reactions towards the same issue could differ under different cultural backgrounds.

On the other hand, we found that consumers' brand loyalty is closely related to brand satisfaction and brand trust based on literature review pertaining to brand loyalty. However, most prior studies pertaining to consumers' brand loyalty in social media based brand community only analyzed the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty without talking about the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty, which identifies a gap that will be discussed in this paper.

Besides, based on previous literature review, Brakus *et al.* (2009) stressed that shopping experiences could also have an impact on consumers' attitudes toward a brand even in an e-commerce environment, implying that members' shopping experiences may have an impact on their attitudes toward the focal brand in social media based brand community, which was also

devoid of previous researches. Due to the fact that none of prior studies have investigated brand satisfaction, brand trust, shopping experiences and cultures together to study how consumers' brand loyalty could be influenced in a social media based brand community, the purpose of this paper is to: study how consumers' brand satisfaction, brand trust would influence consumers' brand loyalty after taking into consideration of consumers' shopping experiences and culture differences in social media based brand communities.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

### ***2.1 Social Media Based Brand Community***

Social media based brand communities are communities established on the platform of social media, which consists two concepts: social media and brand community. There are many different definitions of social media. In this paper we adopted the most acknowledged definition of social media by Kaplan and Haenlem (2010, p61) as: "a group of internet brand applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and it allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content." From this definition, we can see that users of social media could create the contents and exchange ideas or communicate with people from all over the world, which also explains why social media is so prevalent everywhere. Moreover, according to Lang (2010), on average, consumers spend nearly one third of their daytime in the consumption of online social media. For example, Facebook alone, a very popular social medium, has an estimated 3.2 billion online users by the end of 2015, with an appropriate increase by 200 to 300 million users per year in accordance with a Facebook official statement, showing the popularity and the important role of social media in people's daily life. Obviously, there must be some other reasons making social media become such popularity. From a non-commercial perspective, people could use social media to keep in touch with their friends in a timely manner, make new friends casually, share pictures, videos, and songs with anyone they want, even flirt with some strangers at times, exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends, play games, and create a little high talk and a lot of idle talks (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Rheingold, 1991). Meanwhile, from a commercial perspective, social media contributes to cementing businesses to consumers, developing relationships and fostering these relationships in a timely manner and at a low cost (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Besides,

consumers' comments, perceptions, attitudes and end behaviors could be influenced by each other (Williams & Cothrell, 2000). More importantly, social media brings different like-minded people together (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997). Furthermore, from the perspective of motivations, people join social media to fulfill their psychological and cognitive needs. They join social media and connect with people to achieve their need for belongingness (Gangadharbhatla, 2008; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005), and to fulfill their psychological needs (Sarason, 1974). Furthermore, joining social media helps people fulfill their need to be identified with groups or symbols they wish to associate with, or that are desirable to them. (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Schembri, Merrilees, & Kristiansen, 2010). For marketers, the advantages of social media as a highly efficient and low cost communication and distribution channel (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), as a powerful means of influencing customer perceptions and behavior (Williams & Cothrell, 2000), and of bringing together different likeminded people (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997; Wellman & Gulia, 1999) are motivating them to participate in social media.

According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412), a brand community is defined as "a specialized, none-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand." This definition shows that a brand community consists of its entities including its members, their relationships and the essential resources either emotional or material as in other communities. What's more, McAlexander *et al.* (2002, p. 38) proposed that the most important thing being shared in a brand community is the creation and negotiation of meaning, indicating that there are various comments and arguments either positive or negative about a brand among members of a brand community. Similarly, people have their own reasons to join brand communities. From the perspective of motivation, joining brand communities also helps people realize their psychological and social needs by expressing who they are and what group they align themselves with (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Also, it is believed that consumers join brands communities to identify themselves with brands so that their social needs of being identified as persons that they wished to be identified with are met. In their own ways, consumers search for the symbols or signs in the communities that help them decipher who they want to be and how they really want to be identified by others. From the perspective of advantages, a brand community supports information sharing so that members of that brand community could obtain the necessary information from various sources (Szmigin & Reppel, 2001), and emphasize different values (Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009). Besides, there are

some other purposes for consumers to join brand communities, such as researching, entertainment and making money (Zhou, Zhang, Chenting, & Zhou, 2011a). What is more, brand communities have a way of gathering customers together and into conversations (Szmigin & Reppel, 2001), which also are the reasons for companies to enhance and support brand communities. Because of these reasons and advantages, today more firms are realizing the importance of online brand communities, including the opportunity for effective communications with their customers and obtaining valuable information so that they pay more attention to building online brand communities.

Regarding the motivations for joining social media and brand communities for both people and brand managers, the concepts of social media and brand community have become closer. The intersection of social media and brand community leads to the concept of social media based brand community (Laroche *et al.*, 2012), though there is no exact or very specific definition of social media based brand community. According to Laroche, Habibi, and Richard (2012), a social media based brand community is defined as: “a combination of both brand community and social media which takes advantages of both community and social media and social media based brand community actually can be taken as a subset of the more general concept of virtual community or online community.” The integration of social media and brand community leads to not only more consumers, but also a growing number of companies participate in social media based brand community for different purposes respectively. Companies try to gain more profits through social media based brand community due to the advances of technology, the previously geographical bounded concept of brand communities now transcends geography so that more consumers are brought into a brand community and social media are an efficient and low cost channel (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) for consumers to exchange ideas and influence other consumers’ perception and behavior (Williams & Cothrell, 2000). Moreover, social media based brand communities play a role in directly connecting brands and end-consumers so as to get more instant feedbacks, just as Von Hippel (2005) posits that already existing customers can be a rich source of innovative ideas and thereby lead to a chain of reactions that might produce the right product or product modifications, which is an important incentive for companies to strengthen consumers’ loyalty.

## ***2.2 The Separate Impacts of Brand Satisfaction and Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty in Social Media Based Brand Communities***

Based on the findings of researcher Laroche *et al.* (2012), a social media based brand community has a positive impact on the customer centric model which was a triad of customer–customer–brand model proposed by Muniz & O’Guinn (2001) and perfected by McAlexander *et al.* (2002) who added other entities that are related to the concept of brand community, i.e., product and company. Specifically, based on consumer centric model, a social media based brand community is made up of entities of brand, products, customer, company and social media that is the platform for that community to exist. Laroche *et al.* (2012) showed that membership in a social media based brand community has a positive impact on the customer/product relationship; customer/brand relationship; customer/company relationship and customer/other customer relationship through a survey-based empirical study. Now that a social media based brand community could enhance the relationship between customers and the products, customers and focal brands, customers and companies and customers and customers, we have reasons to believe that consumers’ brand loyalty in the context of social media based brand community still has some connections with consumers’ brand satisfaction as well as brand trust. Moreover, we found that brand loyalty in social media based brand communities is actually developed in the way that is more dynamic and complex than expected (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Fournier, 1998; Oliver, 1999). But studies pertaining to how consumers’ brand loyalty is influenced in social media based brand communities still remained very limited, both in terms of the actual number of studies undertaken and in terms of the scope of these studies (Ha, & Perks, 2005), if any, none of the prior studies has thoroughly discussed how the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty separately and thoroughly in social media based brand communities.

As a result, this research would investigate how consumers’ brand loyalty would be influenced in a social media based brand community from a more comprehensive perspective to fill this gap by analyzing the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities respectively.

### ***2.3 The Relationship between Brand Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty in Social Media Based Brand Communities***

Brand loyalty is a major goal for marketers and its value has been considered as “self-evident to every business person” (Reichheld, 1996, p.35). Companies build a social media based brand community to achieve this purpose by taking advantage of the convenience of social media and the influential power of brand communities. According to McAlexander *et al.* (2002, p. 38), the most important reason for companies to support brand communities is increasing brand loyalty, which is called the “Holy Grail” for businesses, indicating the importance of brand loyalty for companies. Based on the previous literature pertaining to brand satisfaction and loyalty, we found that brand satisfaction has been recognized as an important facet of marketing, and marketers devoted their efforts to improving their customers’ consumption satisfaction so as to achieve their long-term goal of building brand loyalty (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973; Jones & Sasser, 1995; Szymanski & Henard, 2001). However, there is no general agreement on the definition of brand satisfaction (Rogers *et al.*, 1992). Oliver (1997) defined brand satisfaction as the consumer’s fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, has provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, indicating that satisfaction does not mean the same thing to everyone. In this study, however, brand satisfaction is defined as the contentment of customers with respect to their prior purchasing experiences with a given brand on social media. (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003).

Recent studies also demonstrated that satisfaction is an antecedent to brand loyalty. As brand satisfaction increases, brand loyalty increases. (Bennett, 2001; Bolton, 1998; Jones & Suh, 2000; Ringham, Johnson, & Spreng, 1994). Also, brand satisfaction and attitude gained partially from prior experiences (Ganesan 1994); and in return, they would have an impact on subsequent purchases (Oliver, 1980). According to Agustin and Singh (2005), fulfilling consumers’ satisfaction is the first step to building consumers’ brand loyalty. Similarly, in this paper we deducted that in social media based brand communities, establishing members’ brand satisfaction should also be the first step to establishing brand loyalty. When consumers are satisfied, they show commitment to continually buy the same brand and become a loyal customer; however, no matter how satisfaction levels affect brand loyalty, it alone is not sufficient to create brand loyalty, and it was concluded that brand satisfaction is a necessary but not sufficient component of loyalty (Agustin & Singh, 2005), which further indicates that there is a relationship between

brand satisfaction and brand loyalty but we want to know how this relationship is like in social media based brand communities. Due to the attributes of social media based brand communities, the dissatisfaction of members leads to negative word of mouth regarding the poor quality of the brand to meet their needs (Dolinsky, 1994; Halstead *et al.*, 1993). On the contrary, members' satisfaction is associated with positive word-of-mouth communications and increases brand loyalty (Athanasopoulos *et al.*, 2001), suggesting that when members of social media based brand communities experience a high level of satisfaction, they decide to make positive comments about the existing brand and overrule their negative behavioral intentions and as the satisfaction increases, their brand loyalty increases. Based on the literature review above, the author propose that:

**H1: Brand satisfaction has a positive impact on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.**

#### ***2.4 Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty in Social Media Based Brand Communities***

Brand trust is defined as 'a feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interactions with the brand, such that it is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumers (Delgado-Ballester, 2001). The role of trust is to decrease uncertainty and information asymmetry and make customers feel comfortable with their brand (Chiu, Huang, & Yen, 2010; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003; Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992; Pavlou, Liang, & Xue, 2007). Taking advantage of social media, people can share information about the brand and the story related to that brand, which actually helps relieve consumers' doubts toward a brand and to some extent increases consumers' trust of the focal brand. Besides, drawing on the brand trust and brand loyalty literatures (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Chiu, Huang, & Yen, 2010; Harris & Goode, 2004; Hong & Cho, 2011; Kim, Chung, & Lee, 2011; Zhou *et al.*, 2011a), we inferred that brand trust still has an impact on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. Besides, trust plays an irreplaceable role in building strong consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998; Urban, Sultan, & Qualls, 2000). According to Amine (1998), consumers' brand trust in purchasing the focal brand can be taken as a leverage of its credibility, which in turn has an influence on consumers' brand loyalty. Brand trust reflected the accumulative effects over time on brand loyalty (Chiou & Droge, 2006), which should also be able to apply to the relationship



between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. Therefore, we proposed that:

**H2: Brand trust has a positive impact on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.**

Although we assumed that both brand satisfaction and brand trust had an impact on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities, the researcher found out that none of previous articles has considered the role of consumers' level of shopping experiences and consumers' different cultural orientations when analyzing relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.

### ***2.5 The Roles of Shopping Experience and Cultural Orientation in Influencing the Relationship Between Brand Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty and the Relationship Between Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty in Social Media Based Brand Communities***

Drawing on previous literatures, some investigations have shown evidence that consumers' brand loyalty is influenced by their shopping experiences (Licate *et al.*, 2001; Mittal *et al.* 1999, 2001). Experience has been defined as showing a relatively high degree of familiarity with a certain subject area, which could be attained through some type of exposure (Braunsberger & Munch, 1998), showing that consumer experiences are a coalescence of symbolic meanings with allied behavior, thoughts and feelings during the consumption of a brand. Moreover, shopping experiences are perceived as an important factor in informing consumers' perceptions. Shopping experiences with a brand could have more impact than product features and product benefits and leave a more memorable impression on consumers. As a result, the impact will be more significant for high-experienced consumers buying products of the focal brand many times than low-experienced consumers not buying products of the focal brand many times. In this paper, we adopted the definition of consumers' shopping experience as their number of purchases times made in the past. (Pappas *et al.* 2014).

According to Liang and Huang (1998), consumers with high levels of shopping experiences are very likely to continue shopping in the future. Based on the literature review mentioned above, we have identified the importance of brand satisfaction in social media based brand communities. Satisfaction derived from previous successful purchases may increase customers' effort expectancy and a good previous experience with the focal brand creates

positive attitudes, positive word-of-mouth, customers' self-efficacy and could influence future intentions, while a bad experience might cause a negative word-of-mouth. Moreover, we have identified the important role of brand trust in influencing brand loyalty in a social media based brand community. Previous shopping experiences with the focal brand are very likely to influence customers' sense of trust in the future (Chiu *et al.* 2009), and therefore influence their brand loyalty. Moreover, consumers with high level of shopping experiences of the focal brand may perceive low levels of risks and hence increase their brand trust (Miyazaki & Fernandez, 2001). In the meantime, the levels of perceived risk has an impact on brand trust. Ganesan (1994) found that experience did not significantly influence brand trust while Giannakos *et al.* (2011) posited that the effect of experience on trust is marginal when taking into account the level of shopping experiences (high vs low).

Basically, consumers with a high level of shopping experiences are more familiar with a brand. As consumers become familiar with a brand, the information gained from experiences would form the basis for their future purchase decisions (Murray, 1991). Moreover, Ha & Perks (2005) showed that consumers with a low level of shopping experiences have less familiarity with the brand and Perk and Lessig (1981) proposed that consumers with a low level of brand familiarity were not discriminating enough in their choice. While in the meantime, several studies indicated that experienced consumers normally had prior knowledge of the various attributes of alternatives and they knew what is the attribute to discriminate the focal brand from the alternatives (Brucks, 1985), strongly suggesting that members from a social media based brand community with a high level of shopping experience actually are more familiar with the brand and so that they are discriminating enough to have their own judgments and opinions toward the brand, which may have a great influence on their future attitudes towards that particular brand. Thus, experience as a personal source of information is likely to play an increasingly important role in influencing consumers' brand loyalty in a social media based brand community. Moreover, shopping experiences could provide more vivid and concrete memories when consumers experienced it directly (Paivio, 1971), because experience requires more elaborative internal rehearsal and self-generation (Slameka & Graf, 1978). Consumers who do not have a high level shopping experience with a particular brand are highly likely to use extrinsic cues to judge a brand and are very influenced by other members' arguments and comments, because they have relatively little intrinsic brand information in memory, making

processing intrinsic information more difficult. As a result, for consumers with a low level of shopping experiences, their brand satisfaction, brand trust are probably easily influenced by other members' opinions and attitudes. However, consumers who have a high level of shopping experiences and are more familiar with the brand could be able to assess the brand based on their knowledge of intrinsic attributes and therefore their brand satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty are not easily influenced by other members' opinions and attitudes.

Based on these meaningful literature reviews, we detected that the relationship between consumers' brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities are moderated by consumers' level of shopping experiences of the focal brand. Thus, we proposed the following hypotheses:

**H3a: The level of consumers' shopping experiences moderates the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities in such a way that the relationship is stronger for those with high level of shopping experiences.**

**H3b: The level of consumers' shopping experiences moderates the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities in such a way that the relationship is stronger for those with high level of shopping experiences.**

In addition, as the definition of a social media based brand community indicated that social media based brand communities transcended the geographical boundaries, suggesting that a social media based brand community could be established under different cultural conditions and members of the community may come from various cultural backgrounds. However, none of previous studies has taken into consideration of culture differences when investigating consumers' brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. In this study, we do not only take into consideration the cultural differences but also analyze this factor from a more reasonable standpoint. After reviewing some literatures pertaining to culture differences, we found that most of previous researchers took the country as a unit to analyze culture differences while ignoring cultural diversity within a country (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). In fact, we think it is problematic to stereotype a country as having only one culture, unless a nation is entirely homogeneous on various socio-demographics and it is meaningless to search for the modal characteristics of the country (e.g. national culture). When the subcultures of a country are heterogeneous, classifying

the country could cause a lack of representativeness of such a description (Yoo, 2000). For example, the U.S.A. are well known to have distinct subcultural groups based on ethnicity and race. In Canada, English- and French-speaking consumers show very different behaviors from each other (Laroche *et al.*, 2003). China and India consist of diverse ethnic groups speaking different dialects and languages, whose speakers do not easily understand each other's languages. Thus, treating a country as having one common culture will not correctly reflect the reality of the cultural diversity among the citizens of the nation. Therefore, in this paper, we used personal cultural orientation as a unit to study whether personal cultural orientation would have a bearing on the consumers' brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.

We know that culture has been understood as one of the major factors affecting global marketing decisions such as marketing program standardization vs localization. Standardization is successful only when market segments possessing homogeneous cultural orientations are pursued across countries (Levitt, 1983; Samiee & Roth, 1992). Culture has an important role in deciding a company's marketing strategy, let alone its influence on a brand community as well as a social media based brand community; and different cultural orientations may influence consumers' enthusiasm or their initiative to join a social media based brand community.

Individualism–collectivism is the most popularly researched dimension of culture in social sciences (Hofstede, 2001). Individualism “pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family,” and collectivism, as its opposite, “pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede, 1991, p.51), which indicates that different personal cultural orientations lead to different attitudes towards brand loyalty.

In individualistic societies, people would rather act as individuals than as members of groups. Individualists stress the importance of self-concept and free will or freedom, and individualists develop a greater sense of autonomy and personal achievement as opposed to a sense of collectivism and importance of social and security needs (Hofstede, 2001). According to Schwartz and Bilsky (1987), it has been shown both in a German sample and an Israeli sample that motivational domains such as self-direction, enjoyment and achievement consistently loaded on the individualism dimension while other domains such as security and restrictive conformity

loaded on the collectivism dimension, indicating that collectivists show more interdependence and dependence when making a decision, whereas individualists show more independence. Besides, collectivists are more likely to mind others' opinions over their own's to accommodate ingroup harmony; and they normally do not make their final decision until they hear from others' and they are even ready to compromise their opinions when they see a discrepancy in opinions in groups. Therefore, collectivists will be more vulnerable to the majority opinion of the group and can be easily influenced by others' opinions, giving up their original, initial thoughts (Yoo, 2000).

From this perspective, it seems that once consumers who are collectivists manage to join the social media based brand communities, they tend to be more easily affected by other members' opinions than those who are individualism oriented customers, and also as collectivists cherish the ingroup harmony, friendship and co-operation, it is difficult for consumers who are collectivists to give up their loyalty to a focal brand and switch to another brand (Yoo, 2009). Therefore once they are connected with some loyal members of a brand in social media based brand communities, they are very likely to become a loyal member of a brand as well, manifesting that for collectivism oriented consumers, there is a positive moderating effect on the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty as well as on the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.

In contrast, individualists are less likely to compromise their own decisions to accept other opinions and their goal is to maximize their own welfare. As a result, companies, brands and industries are expected to do their best to improve their products quality so that to earn good comments among members who are individualism oriented. (Donthu & Yoo, 1998). As we know, competition could hurt the harmony of a society, however, people who are individualism oriented desire competition, even when it may hurt other people's benefits, believing that it would make the best product available to the whole society. Therefore, consumers who are individualists do not mind switching from a particular brand to another brand through which they think they could get more benefits, resulting in a low brand loyalty to a particular brand.

Based on these arguments, we surmise that if members of social media based brand communities are collectivism oriented, they will pay more attention to ingroup harmony, respecting other members opinions and very venerable to other members' comments on the focal brand. Besides, they are not inclined to break their established and balanced relationships with

the focal brand, while if the members of social media based brand communities are individualism oriented, it is highly possible that once they get information about other brands that could provide them more benefits, they are likely to switch from this brand to another brand and their brand loyalty won't be strengthened through a social media based brand community due to the fact that they care more about their own benefits and try to maximize their profits. Based on the literature review above, we proposed the following hypotheses:

**H4a: Consumers' personal cultural orientation moderates the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in such a way that the relationship is stronger for those high in collectivism in social media based brand communities.**

**H4b: Consumers' personal cultural orientation moderates the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in such a way that the relationship is stronger for those high in collectivism in social media based brand communities.**

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### ***3.1 Subjects and Procedures***

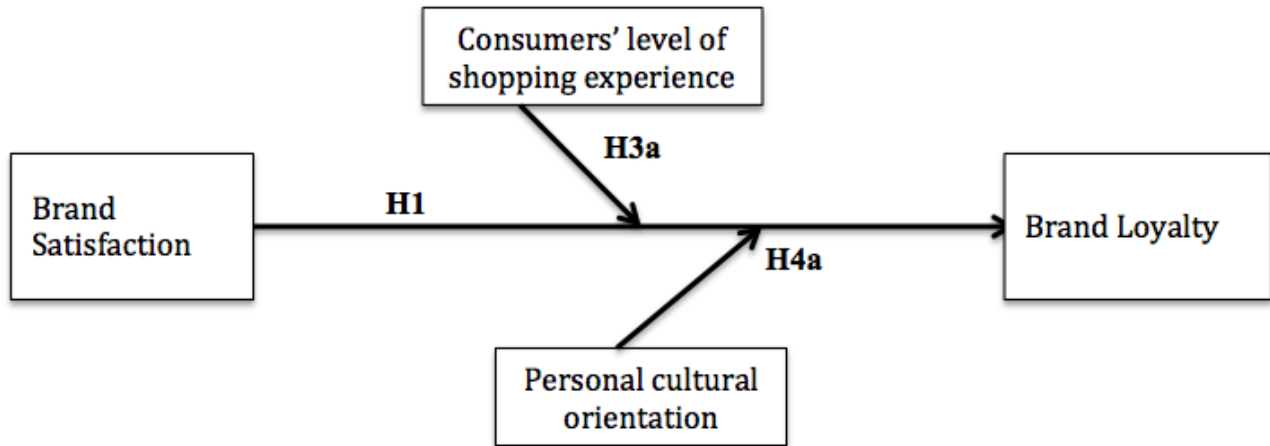
Our targeted subjects are people who are members of any social media based brand community with different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, we send our questionnaire from different sources through the Internet, such as Facebook, My Space, Twitter, We Chat and Weibo and crowdflower.ca. As this research pertains to different cultural orientations, we chose these social media platforms in order to reach people individualists and people collectivists in a relatively easy way due to the fact that through these social media platforms, we can reach people from all over the world with different cultural orientations. We introduced our questionnaire as an attitude survey to minimize participants' biases once they knew the real purpose of the study. At the very beginning of the questionnaire, we asked participants to list the brand community that they are a member of or follow up on any social media platform and then asked them to answer some questions to indicate their cultural orientations and to indicate their level of shopping experiences. Moreover, the participants were required to keep in mind these brand communities during the time of answering all the questions (Laroche *et al.*, 2003). Based on these procedures, we collected 208 valid responses and there were 132 male participants and 76 female participants. The age range of the participants is 18 years old to 56 years old.

### **3.2 Measures**

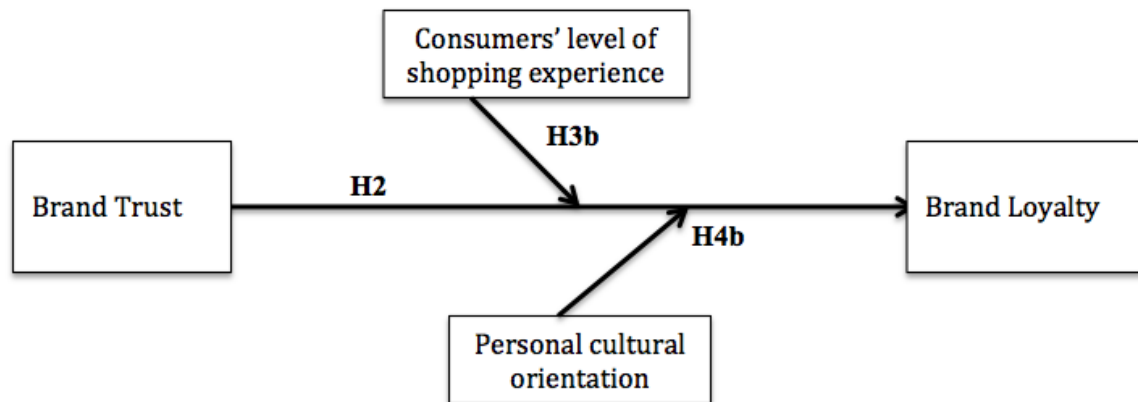
The measures of all the constructs in the model were based on the previous literatures. The scales to measure brand satisfaction were adopted from previous audience studies (Grace & O’Cass 2005; Fullerton 2005; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Heitmann *et al.*, 2007, Yi & Suna, 2004; Ha & Perks, 2005; Lyer & Muncy, 2005; Lin, Wang, & Hsieh, 2003; Methlie & Nysveen 1999; McAlexander, Kim, & Roberts, 2003), but we made slight modifications to better suit the context of our study, which consists of 6 items. The scale to measure brand trust was drawn from the literature (Hsteh & Hiang 2004; Caceres & Paparoidamis 2007; Ballester & Aleman-Munuera 2001; Dixon, Bridson, Evans & Morrison 2005; Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001). The modified scale consists of 6 items. The scales to measure brand loyalty were adapted from previous studies (Grace & O’Cass 2005; Algesheimer, Uptal & Herrmann, 2005; Fullerton, 2005; Heithman, Lehman, & Herrmann, 2007; Hess & Story, 2005; Johnson, Herrmann, & Huber, 2006; Sierra & McQuity, 2005; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuman, 1996). The modified scale consists of 11 items. We derived a 6-item measure from Yoo and Donthu (2005) to measure participants’ cultural orientations. The level of shopping experiences was measured by one item developed by Chiu et al. (2009), but slightly modified to suit the context of our study. All items were 5 point Likert-type scales except for the items measuring level of shopping experience.

### **3.3 Research Models**

In this research, the author proposed two separate models to described the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. The study is organized as following. First of all, a conceptualization for the study is developed through the definition of the constructs of conceptual mold and we did this by elaborating and defining of each construct of brand satisfaction, brand trust, brand loyalty, consumers’ level of shopping experience and consumers’ personal cultural orientation. For each construct, its relationship with the other constructs is investigated and research hypothesis are proposed. (Figure.1 and Figure. 2). Secondly, the sample and the measures employed in this paper are described, and then the data analysis and results as well as the discussion and implications are provided.



**Figure 1: Relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities**



**Figure 2: Relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities**

Fig1 and Fig2 showed how consumers' brand loyalty was influenced in a social media based brand community. As depicted, it is supposed that brand satisfaction had a direct impact on brand loyalty and brand trust also had a direct impact on brand loyalty. Moreover, consumers' personal cultural orientation and consumers' level of shopping experiences have a moderating role both in influencing the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.



**The hypotheses in this research:**

**Hypothesis 1 (H1): Brand satisfaction has a positive impact on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.**

**Hypothesis 2 (H2): Brand trust has a positive impact on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.**

**Hypothesis 3a (H3a): The level of consumers' shopping experiences moderates the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities in such a way that the relationship is stronger for those with high levels of shopping experiences.**

**Hypothesis 3b (H3b): The level of consumers' shopping experiences moderates the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities in such a way that the relationship is stronger for those with high level of shopping experiences.**

**Hypothesis 4a (H4a): Consumers' personal cultural orientation moderates the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in such a way that the relationship is stronger for those high in collectivism in social media based brand communities.**

**Hypothesis 4b (H4b): Consumers' personal cultural orientation moderates the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in such a way that the relationship is stronger for those high in collectivism in social media based brand communities.**

## **4. Data Analysis And Results**

### ***4.1 Reliability***

Firstly, we assessed the reliability of the constructs in the two models shown in Figure1 and Figure2. The reliability analysis of all these scales yielded favorable results. The constructs demonstrated a high degree of reliability in terms of the coefficient alphas. Most values exceeded the recommended value of Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1995). We also found that the items6, 7 and 8 measuring the scale of brand loyalty were not closely correlated with the other items in that scale and after removing them from the scale, the value of Cronbach's alpha of scale brand loyalty increased from 0.925 to 0.949. As a result, we removed the three items from the scale and used only 8 items to measure brand loyalty. Table 1 presents the items to measure constructs in the paper as well as the results of the reliability analysis.

**Table 1: Items Measuring Constructs and Results of Reliability Analysis**

Items to measure the construct	Construct	Cronbach's alpha
1. I am very satisfied with the service provided by this brand.	Brand satisfaction (6 items)	0.946
2. I am very happy with this brand.		
3. This brand does a good job of satisfying my needs.		
4. The products provided by this brand are very satisfactory.		
5. I believe that using this brand is usually a very satisfying experience.		
6. I made the right decision when I decided to use this brand.		
1. This brand meets my expectations.	Brand trust (6 items)	0.871
2. I feel confident in this brand.		
3. This brand guarantees satisfaction		
4. I could rely on this brand to solve my problem.		
5. This brand would make any effort to satisfy me.		
6. This brand would compensate me in some way for the problem with the product.		
1. I intend to buy this brand in the near future.	Brand loyalty (8 items)	0.949
2. I intend to buy other products of this brand.		
3. I consider this brand as my first choice in this category.		
4. The next time I need that product, I will buy the same brand.		
5. I will continue to be loyal customer for this brand.		
6. I am willing to pay a price premium over competing products to be able to purchase this brand again.		
7. I would only consider purchasing this brand again, if it would be substantially cheaper.		

8. Commercials regarding to competing brands are not able to reduce my interest in buying this brand.		
9. I say positive things about this brand to other people.		
10. I recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice.		
11. I consider this brand my first choice in the next few years.		
How many times you have purchased products of the brand that you are a member of its social media based brand community in the past six months?	Consumers' level of shopping experience	
1. Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group that they belong to.	Personal cultural orientation (5items)	0.852
2. Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties.		
3. Group welfare is more important than individual rewards.		
4. Group success is more important than individual success.		
5. Individuals should pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group.		

#### 4.2 Correlation Analysis

We computed mean value and standard deviations for the variables of brand satisfaction, brand trust, brand loyalty, personal cultural orientation and level of shopping experiences, and created two correlation matrixes separately of the two models created in our research. Standard deviation, and correlations among all scales used in the analysis are shown in Table 2 and Table 3. The mean and standard deviations are within the expected ranges. According to Table 2 and Table 3, most of the respondents expressed the presence of a relatively higher level of brand satisfaction (mean=4.05), followed by brand loyalty (mean=3.96), brand trust (mean=3.79). After analyzing Table 2, we can see that relationships between brand satisfaction, personal

cultural orientation and brand loyalty have positive correlations while the relationships between brand satisfaction and shopping experiences as well as between brand loyalty. However, shopping experiences have negative correlations with brand loyalty and brand satisfaction at the level of  $p < 0.01$ , which is in contrast to our expectations. This phenomenon may be explained by the fact that as consumers' purchase times increase, the possibility of having bad shopping experience increases during this process, influencing their attitudes towards the focal brand.

**Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlation Analysis**

		Mean	SD	1	2
1	Brand satisfaction	4.0418	.87709		
2	Brand loyalty	3.9585	0.88397	0.873**	
3	Consumers' Personal cultural orientation	3.1558	0.96947	0.299**	0.302**
4	Consumers' level of shopping experience	8.95	49.176	-0.63**	-0.122**

\*\*  $P < 0.01$

After analyzing Table 3, we can see that relationships between brand trust, personal cultural orientation and brand loyalty have positive correlations while the relationships between brand trust and shopping experience as well as between brand trust but similarly shopping experience have negative correlations with brand trust and brand loyalty at the level of  $p < 0.01$ , which is also in contrast to our expectations. The reasons used to explain the unexpected phenomenon in relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty also applies to the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty, which could be explained by the fact that as consumers' purchase times increase, the possibility of having bad shopping experience increases during this process, influencing their attitudes towards the focal brand.

**Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlation Analysis**

		Mean	SD	1	2
1	Brand trust	3.7941	0.78220		
2	Brand loyalty	3.9585	0.88397	0.849**	
3	Consumers' personal cultural orientation	3.1558	0.96947	0.332**	0.302**
4	Level of shopping experience	8.95	49.16	-0.93**	-0.122**

\*\* P< 0.01

#### **4.3 Regression Analyses**

We have applied ten separate regression analyses via SPSS to test our hypotheses proposed in this research.

In regression model 1 as shown in Table 4, brand satisfaction is the independent variable and brand loyalty is the dependent variable. As shown in Table 4, the regression model was statistically significant ( $F=659.7$ ;  $R^2=0.762$ ;  $p=.000$ ). The regression analysis indicates that brand satisfaction had a significant positive effect on brand loyalty ( $p<0.01$ ;  $\beta=0.88$ ). Thus, H1, proposing that brand satisfaction had a positive effect on brand loyalty in a social media based brand community, was supported by our study.

In regression model 2 as shown in Table 5, brand trust is the independent variable and brand loyalty is the dependent variable. As shown in Table 5, the regression model was statistically significant ( $F=529.8$ ;  $R^2 =0.72$ ;  $p=.000$ ). The regression analysis indicates that brand trust had a significant positive effect on brand loyalty ( $p<0.01$ ;  $\beta=0.96$ ). Thus, H2, proposing that brand trust had a positive effect on brand loyalty in a social media based brand community, was supported by our study.

In regression model 3 as shown in Table 4, brand satisfaction and consumers' level of

shopping experience are independent variables, and brand loyalty is used as the independent variable. The regression model was significant as shown in Table 4 with  $F=336.570$ ,  $R^2=0.767$  and  $p=.000$ . Paying attention to the coefficients as shown in Table 4, we find that coefficients of both variable brand satisfaction and variable consumers' level of shopping experience are statistically significant ( $p<0.01$ ;  $\beta=0.876$ ,  $p<0.05$ ;  $\beta=-0.001$ ), indicating that brand satisfaction had a significant positive effect on brand loyalty while consumers' level of shopping experience alone had a significant but negative effect on brand loyalty, however, the negative effect is very weak because when consumers purchase the brand 100 more times, the value of their brand loyalty would increase only 1 point.

In regression model 4 as shown in Table 4, we tried to test the moderating role of consumers' level of shopping experiences in the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in a social media based brand community. We constructed a variable by multiplying the variable brand satisfaction and the variable consumers' level of shopping experiences to study the interaction effect between consumers' shopping experiences and brand satisfaction on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities to test whether consumers' level of shopping experiences could significantly moderate the relationship. In this model, brand satisfaction, consumers' level of shopping experiences as well as the product of the two variables are the independent variables and brand loyalty is the dependent variable. The regression model was statistically significant ( $F=224.1$ ;  $R^2=0.767$ ;  $p=.000$ ). However, when we concern the coefficients shown in table 4, we find that the coefficient of the variable consumers' level of shopping experiences ( $\beta=-0.009$ ,  $p=0.383$ ) in this model that contains the interaction variable is not significant any more when compared with that in model 3 without the interaction variable. Moreover, the coefficient of the variable brand satisfaction\*consumers' level of shopping experience ( $\beta=0.002$ ,  $p=0.444$ ) is not significant either, indicating that the moderating role of the variable consumers' level of shopping experiences is not statistically significant in the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. As a result, H3a, proposing that consumers' level of shopping experience moderates the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in a social media based brand community, was not supported by our study. As for the reason why the whole model is significant is that the variable brand satisfaction is well significant with  $\beta=0.864$  and  $p=.000$  in this model.

In regression model 5 as shown in Table 4, brand satisfaction and personal cultural orientation are independent variables, and brand loyalty is the independent variable. The regression model was significant as shown in Table 4 with  $F=331.517$ ,  $R^2=0.764$  and  $p=.000$ . Paying attention to the coefficients of regression model 5 shown in Table 4, we find that the coefficient of variable brand satisfaction is statistically significant ( $p<0.01$ ;  $\beta=0.866$ ) while the coefficient of variable personal cultural orientation is not statistically significant ( $p=0.215$ ;  $\beta=0.40$ ), indicating that brand satisfaction had a significant positive effect on brand loyalty while personal cultural orientation alone had no effect on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.

In regression model 6 as shown in Table 4, we tried to test the moderating role of personal cultural orientation in the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. We constructed a variable by multiplying the variable brand satisfaction and the variable personal cultural orientation to study the interaction effect between personal cultural orientation and brand satisfaction on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities so as to test whether consumers' personal cultural orientation could significantly moderate the relationship. In this regression model, brand satisfaction, personal cultural orientation as well as the product of the two variables are the independent variables and brand loyalty is the dependent variable. As shown in Table 4, the regression model was statistically significant ( $F=223.8$ ;  $R^2=0.767$ ;  $p=.000$ ). Similarly, when noticing the coefficients of this model shown in Table 4, we find out that the coefficient of variable brand satisfaction\* personal cultural orientation ( $\beta=-0.047$  and  $p=.099$ ) could be understood as partially significant because the mean value of brand loyalty is only 3.96. Moreover, the coefficient of variable personal cultural orientation becomes statistically significant ( $\beta=0.231$  and  $p=.055$ ) in this model which contains the interaction variable when compared with that in model 5 without the interaction variable, which further indicates the moderating role of personal cultural orientation in relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty is significant in social media based brand communities.

Besides, when holding the value of brand satisfaction constant, we can find that the value of variable brand loyalty increases as the value of variable personal cultural orientation increases. In the same time, the larger value of personal cultural orientation is, the more collectivism orientated the consumer is, suggesting that the more consumers are collectivism oriented, the

more loyal they could be. Based on the analysis above, H4a, proposing that consumers' personal cultural orientation plays a moderator role in the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in a social media based brand community and the more collectivism the consumer is, the more loyal they could be, was supported by our study.

**Table 4: Regression Analysis for Relationship between Brand satisfaction and Brand Loyalty in Social Media Based Brand Communities**

	Model 1 Brand loyalty		Model 3 Brand loyalty		Model 4 Brand loyalty		Model 5 Brand loyalty		Model 6 Brand loyalty	
	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.
Brand satisfaction H1H3aH4a	.880	.000	.876	.000	.864	.000	.866	.000	.985	.000
Level of shopping experience H3a			-.001	.048	-.009	0.383				
Personal cultural orientation H4a							.040	.215	.231	.055
Brand satis*level of shopping experience H3a					.002	.444				
Brand satis*personal cultural orientation H4a									-.047	.099
R <sup>2</sup>	.762		.767		.767		.764		.767	
F	659.735		336.57		224.113		331.517		223.80	
Sig.	.000		.000		.000		.000		.000	



In regression model 7 as shown in Table 5, brand trust and consumers' level of shopping experience are independent variables, and brand loyalty is the independent variable. The regression model was significant as shown in table 5 with  $F=266.042$ ,  $R^2=0.722$  and  $p=.000$ . Paying attention to the coefficients of model 7 as shown in Table 5, we find that coefficients of variable brand trust is statistically significant ( $p<0.01$ ;  $\beta=0.954$ ) while the coefficient of consumers' level of shopping experience ( $p=0.246$ ;  $\beta=-0.001$ ) is not statistically significant, indicating that brand trust had a significant positive effect on brand loyalty while the variable consumers' level of shopping experience alone had no impact on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.

Regression model 8 as shown in Table 5 was established to test the moderating role of consumers' level of shopping experience in the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. In this model, we also constructed a variable by multiplying the variable brand trust and the variable consumers' level of shopping experience to study the interaction effect between consumers' level of shopping experiences and brand trust on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities so as to test whether consumers' level of shopping experiences could significantly moderate this relationship. In this model, brand trust, consumers' personal cultural orientation as well as the product of the variables are the independent variables and brand loyalty is the dependent variable. The regression model was statistically significant ( $F=177.8$ ;  $R^2=0.723$ ;  $p=.000$ ). However, when analyzing the coefficients of this model as shown in Table 5, we find out that the coefficient of the variable shopping experience ( $\beta=-0.002$ ,  $p=0.291$ ) as well as the coefficient of the product variable ( $\beta=-0.005$ ,  $p=0.367$ ) used to test the interaction effect between consumers' level of shopping experiences and brand trust are not significant either, indicating that the moderating effect of consumers' level of shopping experiences is not statistically significant in the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in a social media based brand community. As a result, H3b, proposing that consumers' level of shopping experience moderates the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand community, is not supported by our study. As for the reason why the whole model is significant is that the variable brand trust is well significant with  $\beta=0.969$  and  $p=.000$ , making the whole model significant.

In regression model 9 as shown in Table 5, brand trust and personal cultural orientation are independent variables, and brand loyalty is the independent variable. The regression model

was significant as shown in Table 5 with  $F=264.194$ ,  $R^2=0.720$  and  $p=.000$ . Paying attention to the coefficients as shown in Table 5, we find that coefficients of variable brand trust is statistically significant ( $p<0.01$ ;  $\beta=0.954$ ) while the coefficient of variable personal cultural orientation ( $p=0.573$ ;  $\beta=0.20$ ) is not statistically significant, indicating that brand trust had a significant positive effect on brand loyalty while the variable personal cultural orientation alone had no impact on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.

Regression model 10 as shown in Table 5 was used to test the moderating role of personal cultural orientation in the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. In this model, we constructed a variable by multiplying the variable brand trust and the variable personal cultural orientation to study the interaction effect between personal cultural orientation and brand trust on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities, testing whether consumers' personal cultural orientation could significantly moderate this relationship. In this model, brand trust, personal cultural orientation and the product variable are the independent variables and brand loyalty is the dependent variable. The regression model was statistically significant ( $F=179.9$ ;  $R^2=0.726$ ;  $p=.000$ ). Similarly, when noticing the coefficients shown in Table 5, we find out that the coefficient of the product variable brand trust\*personal cultural orientation ( $\beta=-0.064$  and  $p=.051$ ) was partially significant in terms of the mean value of brand loyalty is only 3.96. Furthermore, the coefficient of variable personal cultural orientation ( $\beta=0.265$  and  $p=.042$ ) becomes significant in this model containing the interaction variable when compared with that in model 9 without the interaction variable, which further indicates that the moderating role of personal cultural orientation in the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty is significant in social media based brand communities. Moreover, when holding the value of brand trust constant, we can find that the value of brand loyalty increases as the value of personal cultural orientation increases. In the meantime, the bigger the value of personal cultural orientation is, the more collectivism orientated the consumer is, suggesting that the more the consumers are collectivism oriented, the more loyal the consumers would be. Based on the analysis above, H4b, proposing that consumers' personal cultural orientation played a moderator role in the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities.

**Table 5: Regression Analysis for Relationship between Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty in Social Media Based Brand Communities**

	Model 2 Brand loyalty		Model 7 Brand loyalty		Model 8 Brand loyalty		Model 9 Brand loyalty		Model 10 Brand loyalty	
	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.
Brand trust H2H3bH4b	.960	.000	.954	.000	.969	.000	.954	.000	1.114	.000
Level of shopping experience H3b			-.001	.246	-.002	.291				
Personal cultural orientation H4b							.573	.200	.265	.042
Brand trust*level of shopping experience H3b					-.005	.367				
Brand trust*personal cultural orientation H4b									-.064	.051
R <sup>2</sup>	0.72		0.722		0.723		0.720		0.726	
F	529		266.042		177.8		264.194		179.9	
Sig.	.000		.000		.000		.000		.000	

## 5. Discussion and Implications

The objective of this study is to investigate in social media based brand communities whether consumers' brand loyalty is still closely related to brand satisfaction and brand trust as well as whether and how the two relationships could be moderated by consumers' level of shopping experience and consumers' personal cultural orientation due to the unique attributes of social media based brand communities, such as no restrictions of consumers' comments and no boundary limitations. First of all, we provided explicit definition and introduction about social

media and brand community as well as social media based brand community. In the whole time, there was a debate about social media, some researchers believe that social media is an ideal environment for marketing activities, while others believe that branding activities destroy the environment which was supposed to be used for strengthening people's contact. (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). However, in this research we found that consumers' brand loyalty in social media based brand communities can still be strengthened by improving their brand satisfaction and brand trust while this process is inseparable with the convenience of social media, indicating that social media actually is a good source to do marketing for brands. Moreover, based on the literature pertaining to brand community, brand satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty, we established two separate models concerning relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and brand trust and brand loyalty and then we tested all the hypotheses in the context of social media. We concluded that in social media based brand communities consumers' brand loyalty can be enhanced by improving brand satisfaction and brand trust, which is somehow consistent with other studies that in social virtual communities participants positively influence brand loyalty through brand trust. (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalú, 2010; Kardaras, Karakostas, & Papathanassiou, 2003). Our study contributes to the existing literature about how consumers brand loyalty would be influenced in social media based brand communities and provided its own theoretical and practical implications as well. As discussed above, previous studies only emphasized that social media based brand communities could enhance brand loyalty through brand trust but our model took consideration of the impacts of culture difference and shopping experience in this process. Especially, we also tested the roles of culture difference and shopping experience in the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. In our research, we used liner regression to test the two separate relationship established in our study. According to the findings, there is a strong liner relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty as well as between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. And as brand satisfaction increases, brand loyalty increases; moreover, as brand trust increases, brand loyalty increases as well and the increase is stronger than that in relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities, illustrating that brand satisfaction and brand loyalty as well as brand trust and brand loyalty are still tightly related in social media based brand communities. Moreover, this result is closely related to findings of Laroche *et al.*, (2003),

proposing that social media based brand community itself could intense consumers' interaction with the focal brand, product, marketer and other consumers so that the intensive relationships have significant and positive effects on consumers' brand trust and then the effects could strengthen consumers' brand loyalty, which from another point reflected that during the period of consumers' interaction with the brand, the marketer, the product and other consumers, their brand satisfaction and brand trust could be influenced and then the brand loyalty in social media based brand communities would be influenced.

As for the role of consumers' level of shopping experience in the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities: the results of this paper showed that when the interaction effect of brand satisfaction and consumers' level of shopping experience was not considered, both brand satisfaction and consumers' level of shopping experience had significant impacts on brand loyalty. However, when considering the interaction effects of brand satisfaction and consumers' level of shopping experience, we found that consumers' level of shopping experience alone did not have an impact on brand loyalty any more and consumers' brand loyalty will not increase as consumers' level of shopping experience increase either in the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. Therefore, we draw a conclusion that in social media based brand communities, for consumers with same level of brand satisfaction, though the past shopping times could cause some difference of their brand loyalty but the difference is so small so as to be ignored. However, the impacts of brand satisfaction on brand loyalty did not yield different results for those with high level of shopping experience than those with low level of shopping experience in social media based brand communities, and the impacts of brand satisfaction on brand loyalty will not strengthen as their shopping times increase, which indicated that managers do not have to especially target the consumers who used to buy their brands a lot as their potential loyal customers, because there is no huge difference of consumers' brand loyalty between consumers with high level of shopping experience and those with low level of shopping experience.

As for the role of personal cultural orientation in the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities: according to the results of this paper, when we do not take consideration of the interaction effect of brand satisfaction and personal cultural orientation, only brand satisfaction had significant impacts on brand loyalty,

there is no difference between consumers' attitude toward brand loyalty for consumers collectivism oriented and consumers individualism oriented . However, when considering the interaction effects, we found that consumers' personal cultural orientation do have an impact on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities and the positive impacts of brand satisfaction on brand loyalty would be stronger for those who are more collectivism orientated than those who are less collectivism oriented. In our study, the impacts of brand satisfaction on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities yielded different results for consumers who are more collectivism oriented than those who are less collectivism oriented, which was consistent with previous research that consumers who are more collectivism oriented are more loyal to a given brand than individualists (Yoo, 2009). Therefore, when developing global marketing programs, managers should consider the effect of personal cultural orientation that affects the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty, and more importantly the results suggested that it might be more effective for brand managers to target consumers who are collectivism oriented because they exhibited higher levels of brand loyalty than those less collectivism oriented.

The role of consumers' level of shopping experience in the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities: when only considering the impacts of brand trust and consumers' level of shopping experience on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities, we found that only brand trust had positive and significant impacts on brand loyalty while consumers' level of shopping experience had no impacts on brand loyalty. However, when we took consideration of the interaction effects, we found that only brand trust had an impact on brand loyalty and consumers' level of shopping experience still did not influence brand loyalty in the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. For consumers with same level of brand trust, the impacts of brand trust on brand loyalty did not yield different results for those with high level of shopping experience than those with low level of shopping experience in social media based brand communities, and the impacts of consumers' brand trust on brand loyalty will not be strengthened as the increase of consumers' level of shopping experience. Therefore, managers in fact do not have to target the consumers who are high level of shopping experience, because there is no difference of consumers' brand loyalty between people with high level of shopping experience and those with low level of shopping experience.

The role of personal cultural orientation in relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities: as the results showed, consumers' personal cultural orientation itself did not influence consumers' brand loyalty in social media based brand communities while consumers' brand trust had a strong impact on consumers' brand loyalty which is consistent with the results of Laroche *et al.*, (2003), proving that social media based brand community had a positive impact on brand loyalty through the mediator of brand trust. When we did not take consideration of the interaction effect of brand trust and personal cultural orientation, there is no difference between consumers' attitude toward brand loyalty for consumers collectivism oriented and consumers individualism oriented. However, when considering the interaction influence, we found that consumers' personal cultural orientation turned to have a significant impact on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities and the positive impacts of brand trust on brand loyalty would be stronger for those who are more collectivism orientated than those who are less collectivism oriented. In our study, the impacts of brand trust on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities yielded different results for consumers more collectivism oriented than those less collectivism oriented, which was consistent with previous research that consumers who are more collectivism oriented are more loyal to a given brand than individualists (Yoo, 2009). Therefore, when developing global marketing programs, managers should consider the influence of personal cultural orientation that affects the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty, and more importantly the results suggested that it might be more effective for brand managers to target consumers who are collectivism oriented because they exhibited higher levels of brand loyalty than those less collectivism oriented.

In conclusion, the findings of the study shows that brand satisfaction has positive impacts on brand loyalty and brand trust has positive impacts on brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. The results were also supported by Laroche *et al.*, (2003). Furthermore, as Yoo, B. (2009) pointed that same efforts of marketing produce different results about brand loyalty depending on a consumer's personal cultural orientation which is still applicable in our study. Therefore, marketers should consider the factor of personal cultural orientation that influence brand loyalty when developing global marketing programs. To the contrast, the factor shopping experience itself is not enough to affect consumers' brand loyalty in social media based brand communities. Personal culture orientations do matter and marketing managers need to

adjust their expectations on the brand performance in the market based on their consumers' culture type. Therefore, a way to develop an effective brand strategy is to group or segment the individuals based on the characteristics of cultural orientation and then to choose the most favorable cultural segments to invest so as to maximize marketing efficiency and when going to a market of favorable culture toward brand loyalty, marketing managers can expect better performance in the market for the same amount efforts.

## **6. Limitations and Future Study**

This study and results have several limitations and also some indications for further research.

First of all, the sample size itself is relatively smaller for a study researching a topic pertaining to culture. The results can be more reliable and persuasive if the sample size can be increased. As the sample size changed, the role of consumers' level of shopping experience in the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty as well as in the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty can get a more detailed empirical analysis and it is highly possible that the results about moderator role of consumers' level of shopping experience in this study could be overturned. Moreover, in this paper, we did not strictly define the standard of being a member of social media based brand communities, and all the participants were compensated by money, so it is highly possible that some of the participants wishing to get the money made up their identity of being a member of a social media based brand community of a brand to answer the questionnaire, weakening the reliability of the data and thus weakening the reliability of the whole results of this study.

Secondly, because all the items used to measure the constructs were adopted from prior researchers and thus we did not do the factor analysis to test the validity of all the items. As a result, the validity of the constructs cannot be guaranteed. We probably have some face validity issues of the scales we chose. Moreover, we only find one item to measure consumers' level of shopping experience because of the limitation of the literature we reviewed, but one item basically would not very accurately measure a construct. Therefore, the conclusion we made about the role of shopping experience remains to be further discussed in the future study and the items to measure consumers' level of shopping experience retains to be optimized.

Thirdly, when designing the questionnaire, we did not refine the category of the brand



when studying the moderating role of consumers' level of shopping experience, causing two possible conditions leading to an inaccurate conclusion. For example, if a consumer is a member of a social media based brand community of JEEP, he/she is very likely to buy this brand only once in his/her whole life, but if a consumer is a member of a social media based brand community of Coca Coke, it is highly possible for he/she to buy hundreds of times of this brand in the past six months. Therefore, the two extremes may lead the results about the moderating role of consumers' level of shopping experience biased in this study.

Besides, in this paper, we only focused on the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty separately without studying the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand trust in social media based brand communities. If we integrated brand satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty together to study how consumers' brand loyalty would be influenced in social media based brand communities, the results could be more meaningful and more completed. Moreover, we did not study how social media based brand community itself would influence consumers' brand loyalty in this study, which made the managerial implications somewhat less meaningful.

In conclusion, further research should focus on the direct impacts of social media based brand communities on brand loyalty while considering the role of consumers' personal cultural orientation as well as the how relationship between social media based brand community, brand satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty would be changed. Though there were some previous researches already investigated the relationship between social media based brand communities, brand trust and brand loyalty, they did not consider the role of brand satisfaction in this relationship, which would be an interesting topic for future study. Moreover, we did not discuss the potential negative impacts for brands to establish a social media based brand community as well as how those impacts would influence consumers' brand loyalty, which retains to be further discussed in the future. Furthermore, in this paper, we concluded that consumers' personal cultural orientation has a moderating role in influencing relationships between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and brand trust and brand loyalty in social media based brand communities by using dimension collectivism vs individualism, but we'd like to know whether this conclusion can still be supported if we use another dimension to study the role of culture in the context of social media based brand communities, which is also an interesting topic for the future study. Also, the research method should also be improved in future study. Future researchers could set a

control group to better study the difference of consumers with different cultural backgrounds, restrict the category of brands of social media based brand communities and enlarge the size and diversity of the sample, which could make the results more reliable and more persuasive.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

**Q1. Please list the name of the brand community that you are a member of or follow up on any social media platform**

(Brand community refers to a specialized, none-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand. For example, you are an admirer of NIKE or Coach or IKEA etc. so that you join its brand community or follow it up on social media platform.)

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**Q2. What are your opinions as for the following questions?**

*1-strongly disagree 2-somewhat disagree 3-neither agree nor disagree 4-somewhat agree 5-strongly agree*

	1	2	3	4	5
Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group that they belong to.					
Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties.					
Group welfare is more important than individual rewards.					
Group success is more important than individual success.					
Individuals should pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group.					

**Q3. How many times (approximately) have you purchased products from the brand that you are a member of brand community in any social media platforms in the past six months?**

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**Q4. What are your assessments towards the brand that you are a member of the brand community in any social media platform?**

*1-strongly disagree 2-somewhat disagree 3-neither agree nor disagree 4-somewhat agree 5-strongly agree*

	1	2	3	4	5
I am very satisfied with the service provided by this brand.					
I am very happy with this brand.					
This brand does a good job of satisfying my needs.					
The products provided by this brand are very satisfactory.					
I believe that using this brand is usually a very satisfying experience.					
I made the right decision when I decided to use this brand.					
This brand meets my expectations.					
I feel confident in this brand.					
This brand guarantees satisfaction.					
I could rely on this brand to solve my problem.					
This brand would make any effort to satisfy me.					
This brand would compensate me in some way for the problem with the product.					
I intend to buy this brand in the near future.					
I intend to buy other products of this brand.					
I consider this brand as my first choice in this category.					
The next time I need that product, I will buy the same brand.					
I will continue to be loyal customer for this brand.					
I am willing to pay a price premium over competing products to be able to purchase this brand again.					
I would only consider purchasing this brand again, if it would be substantially cheaper.					
Commercials regarding to competing brands are not able					

to reduce my interest in buying this brand.					
I say positive things about this brand to other people.					
I recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice.					
I consider this brand my first choice in the next few years.					

**Q5. What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female

**Q6. What is your age?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Q7. Which country are you from?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Q8. Please leave your email address. (used for informing you whether you will get a gift.)**

\_\_\_\_\_