

## Online Brand Community Components in Gadgets Industry, Thailand

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### Abstract

*Current global businesses focus on interacting with customers by creating an online brand community to create market venues to be more successful. However, creating a venue for brands comes with a high challenge in terms of managing the media and the activities to be unique and draw in more customers. This research aims to study and confirm the online brand community components in gadget products, which are the products that many people talk about and exchange their experiences in terms of the brands. To understand the major component of creating an online community, the researcher collected the data using an online questionnaire with 400 people who had purchased electronic accessories or gadgets through an e-commerce channel. The result from the analysis of the confirmation components revealed that the online brand community consists of three following components: the feeling of inclusiveness within the communities, shared norms and traditions, and the feeling of responsibility towards the communities.*

*Keywords: Online Brand Community, Gadgets*



## 1. Introduction

The creation of brands has a crucial role in the marketing sector and gaining the interest of academics and economic practitioners over the years [1]. Creating strong brand recognition is very crucial to successful companies. Organizations attract and maintain customers by promoting values, image, reputation, or lifestyles through the effort to create the brands [2]. As mentioned earlier, brand creation is a crucial marketing strategy. Apart from the success in creating brands for the products, current marketers also specialize in creating diverse aspects and concepts for the brand, [3] which will be mentioned later on in this research.

The business world in the age of globalization and the advancement of the latest information technology increases the expectation of customers and cause the brand management to be more complicated [4], which includes faster innovation, increase competition, complication, and consumers' need [5]. Due to the online environment, consumers who interact with the brand are not only communicating with the brand, but they can also respond to respond more to the different content and create their own content about the brand, which shows an increasing level of interaction [6][7]. Because of this, companies with online brands are trying to create and increase brand perception with the hope that, eventually, they will influence the intention and purchasing behavior in the real world. Different companies put their focus on social media platforms to compile the information related to their products and brands to respond to the need of the customers and try to create brand support [8], creating a good image for their brand in order for the customers to support both their products and brands. Additionally, they also want to create customers' positive attitudes toward their brands that will eventually lead to customers advertising their brands to others. This kind of behavior is considered brand support [9].

Therefore, it can be seen that more marketers are emphasizing using brands to create long-term relationships with their customers [10], which led to an emergence of a significant concept in creating a relationship and gaining customers' support, that is brand community. A brand community is a large platform for consumers to share their experience of the products, expand the word-of-mouth communication space, and make the products more well-known [11][12]. Many users participated in communicating about the brand, whether through their existing experience with the products or services. Another reason was the complexities of the products, which requires them to acquire more knowledge from the companies and other users [1]. Therefore, the marketing importance of brands relates to all the stakeholders, people who prefer one brand over the other, in which their relationship formed under the context of brand usage. The concept of brand community has been gaining interest and expanding. Marketers who realized the value of brand community started to build or facilitate the development of brand communities, both in the offline and online brand community, which is a significant challenge. This development helps encourages participation from the customers and supports brand loyalty [13].

Currently, especially in the era facing the impact of COVID-19, technology has been supporting the livelihood of today's customers. Information technology organizations produce and sell gadgets, which have gained a lot of interest, especially those related to the lifestyle [14]. The factors related to the livelihood of consumers became the factor for laying out marketing strategies today [15], which also led to higher business competition [16][17]. The study also revealed that consumers still consider the credibility of the brands by seeking out more information and learning from the online community, choosing a more reliable and well-known brand. Therefore, the researcher aimed to study the online brand community components by focusing on the context of gadgets, which still had a limited amount of studies. The result of this research will help fulfill the online marketing knowledge.

## 2. Research Method

### 2.1 Literature Review

#### The concept of online brand community

The online brand community represents the relationship network between consumers and product brands [18][19]. The online communities were designed to be groups of people participating in the online communications in virtual spaces in which the community members developed the conversation and the content. Members with similar interests communicate using

computers as a means of communication. These similar interests, such as an admiration for a brand, created a social interaction among the online community members [20], which is a place where this kind of interaction happens and the technological medium as the support [13].

A significant challenge is how marketers approach consumers within the online brand community in this context. Marketers use defensive methods, emphasizing entertainment and creating positive emotion [21] or interesting and refreshing components. Another method is an offensive one that has gained interest in recent research. This offensive method involves the suggestions on using persuasive content that actively encourages users to be part of the online brand community since marketers observed a decrease in the need for a marketing budget if they successfully get the users to participate. Therefore, marketers place high importance on the latter method [13] and found that creating a brand community can start with creating relationships with consumers, creating an online brand community, and creating marketing programs through activities to help build a relationship with customers, which all help the creation of their brand community [22].

Table 1 Components and the Measurement of Online Brand Community

Author	Dimensions/Measurements	Detail	Context
Sohn [23]	<p>Eight Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) I feel like I am a member of this community</li> <li>2) I feel the “we” in the relationship with other members of this community.</li> <li>3) I feel that I influence this community and am also influenced by this community.</li> <li>4) I have many opportunities to express my opinions in the activities of this community.</li> <li>5) I feel that other members of this community and I have similar needs.</li> <li>6) This community responds to my need and desire and that of other members to a certain level.</li> <li>7) I consider the happiness and the fun of other members of this group my happiness and joy.</li> <li>8) I feel close to other members of this community.</li> </ol>	The form of thought leaders and behavior in seeking information in the online and offline environment	Online brand community (Digital camera)
Casalo, Flavian, and Guinaliu [24]	<p>Four questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) In general, I am very motivated to join this virtual community.</li> <li>2) In general, I participate to help motivate our virtual community.</li> <li>3) I normally provide useful information to other community members.</li> <li>4) In general, I post messages and replies in the community with excitement and frequency.</li> </ol>	Survey the impact of participation in the online brand community on consumers	Website
Schouten et al. [25]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Relationship between customers and products</li> <li>2) Relationship between customers and brand</li> <li>3) Relationship between customers and companies</li> <li>4) Relationship between customers and other owners</li> </ol>	Exclusive experience and impacts on brand communities	Motorcycles and off-road vehicles

Table 1 Components and the Measurement of Online Brand Community (continued)

Author	Dimensions/Measurements	Detail	Context
Laroche et al. [26]	Six questions 1) The community allows users to input messages or post on the website directly. 2) Customers share their experience with the products with other customers. 3) The community benefits from compiling the information related to the products or the brand. 4) The members of this community receive benefits from the community. 5) The members share the relationship together with other community members. 6) The members have a close relationship with other members.	Social media brand community has positive impacts on the main component of the community and the guideline in creating values in the community and the trust in the brand and brand loyalty.	Online social media
Zhou et al. [27]	1) Identifying brand community 2) Brand community contract	checking brand communities and the relationship with the brand	Automobile brand
Kumar [28]	1) Acknowledging one's own ability 2) Responsibilities 3) Ownership 4) Being oneself	Studying the psychological feeling of ownership in motivating participation in the online brand community	Organization brand
Jamie et al. [29]	1) Emotional cue 2) Brand interaction cue 3) Interaction between customers cue	In-depth information related to the online brand community for content marketing to improve customers' brand experience	Retail markets on Facebook and Weibo platforms

From table 1, it can be seen that the brand community attracts much interest amongst researchers and marketers from the relationship they share. From the literature reviews and past research, it was found that evaluating the nature of a brand community can be done through questions related to the feeling of membership, the relationship between group members, and the community's activities created for the survival of the community. The research determined the three following components in evaluating brand community: 1. Shared consciousness within the community 2. Share rituals and traditions, and 3. Sense of moral responsibility [30][31]. The result from these studies has been used to create various brand communication with the following detail.

**1. Shared consciousness within the community** is a feeling that binds every member and the community brand. In other words, it is the connection that the community members feel toward one another and the overall feeling of the connection to the brand and other members. The word "we" is typically used to express the differences between them and others who are not the group members.

**2. Shared rituals and traditions** are the processes that the community members carry out in helping with managing the activities and passing on the meaning of the community to those inside and outside of the community. The members have relationships with one another through past memories related to the brand and share certain behaviors, such as the language used, the clothes, and the valued created by the community. Rituals and traditions are not equally intense and complicated in every brand community and are different according to the age of the brand.

**3. Sense of moral responsibilities** reflect the feelings of the connectedness of morals amongst community members. Two basic behaviors are created from a sense of moral responsibility: coming together as a group and maintaining membership. These behaviors ensure the survival of the community, such as spreading the bad experience of people who faced issues using products of other brands and supporting the correct use of the brand, such as sharing the qualities of the products.

## 2.2 Research Method

The tool used in this research is an online questionnaire. The online questionnaire consists of basic questions used to select the sample group appropriately, general information about the respondents, and questions for evaluating the variables of the online brand community. The researcher adapted the tools used for evaluating online brand community from Laroche et al. [26], Sohn [23], Jiao et al. [32], and Kumar [28]. Theoretical Variables of Online Brand Community consists of three components, shared consciousness within the community, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibilities. A seven-level Likert scale was used, starting from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree).

The sample group in this research is 400 people who bought electronic accessories or gadgets through an e-commerce channel and have been members or followed at least one community to receive and exchange information related to electronic accessories or gadgets, as well as analyze the reliability and the coefficient value using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The selected questions need to have a coefficient value of .70 and above, showing high reliability [45]. The composite reliability (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE) should have a value higher than .60 and .50, respectively [46], followed by the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to find the relationship between the observable variables and latent variables of the model to find the appropriateness.

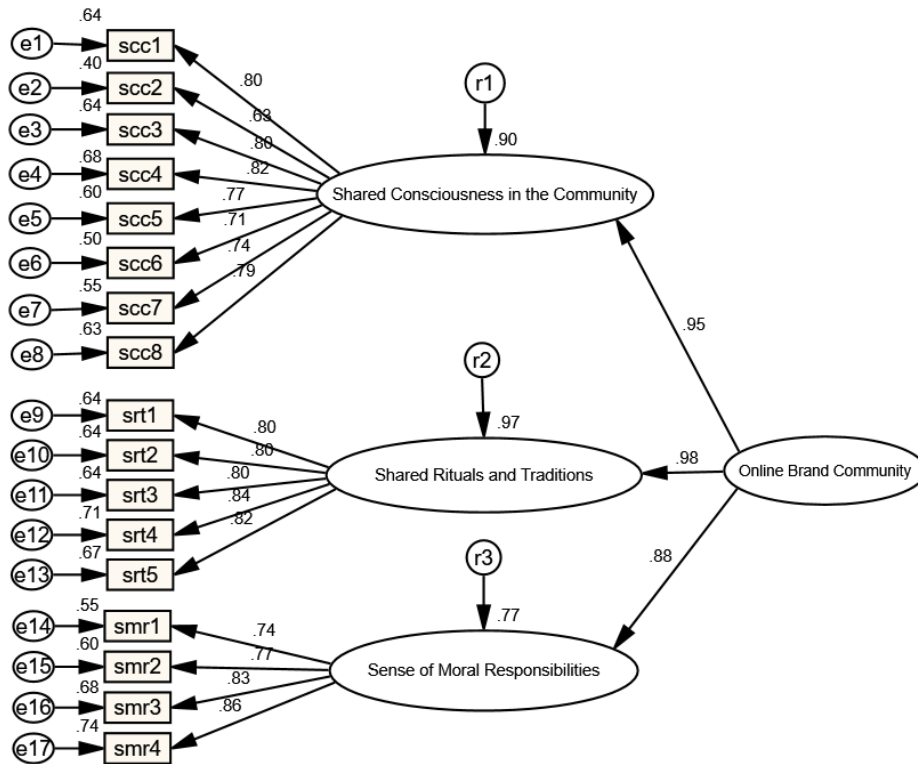
## 3. Findings

The basic questions to select an appropriate sample group revealed that for the experience of purchasing electronic accessories or gadgets through an online channel, 100 percent of the sample group of 400 people had bought electronic accessories or gadgets through an e-commerce channel. A majority of 346 people, 86.50 percent, purchased through Shopee/Lazada. For the type of gadget bought online, 275 people, 68.75 percent, of the sample group bought gadgets for smartphones, such as power banks, wireless chargers, Bluetooth headphones, and additional cameras. For the gadget brand purchased online, 275 people, 68.75 percent, bought Apple products. For the frequency of online gadget purchases, it was found that 315 people, 78.75 percent of the sample group, purchased the gadgets one to three times per month. In terms of the channel for sharing information and news related to the gadget types that the sample group had joined or followed, it was found that 225 people, 56.25 percent of the sample group, joined Facebook Fan pages.

The analysis of the general information of the sample group showed that a majority of the sample group are female, consisting of 284 people, 71 percent. In terms of age, 255 people, 63.75 percent of the sample group are between 21-37 years old. For marital status, 315 people, 78.75 percent of the sample group, are single. It was found that 217 people, 54.25 percent of the sample group, work in private companies. As for the education level, it was found that most of the majority of the sample group is currently studying or graduated with a bachelor's degree, with a total of 332 people, 83 percent. For the average income, the majority of the sample group, 254 people, 63.50 percent, has an income from 10,000 – 20,000 baht.

The confirmatory factor analysis of the online brand community showed that the community consists of three following components: (1) shared consciousness in the community (SCC), consisting of eight questions (2) shared rituals and traditions (SRT), consisting of five

questions, and (3) sense of moral responsibilities (SMR), consisting of four questions, as shown in Table 1.



Chi Square = 349.801, df = 116, Chi Square/df = 3.016,  
GFI = .907, CFI = .954, RMSEA = .071 SRMR = .0359

Picture 1. Result from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Online Brand Community for Gadgets

When considering the Chi-Square test value, it was found that  $\chi^2 = 349.801$   $df = 116$  and  $\chi^2/df = 3.016$ , the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was .907, the Comparative Fit Index was .954, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) Index was 0.071, and the Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR) was .036. Additionally, the Factor Loading of every variable has high values ( $> .50$ ) and a high t-value ( $> 1.96$ ). Every value passes the specified criteria. Therefore, the model for the online brand community was appropriate.

The testing of the composite reliability (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE) with the composite reliability (CR) should have a value higher than .60, and the average variance extracted should have a value higher than .50. The result from the analysis showed that each latent variable could unanimously explain the variance of the observable variables. The evaluation model provided clear evidence that all the latent variables' definitions were accurate and reliable.

Table 2 Result of the research data analysis

Variables	Loading	AVE	CR	$\alpha$
<b>Online Brand Community (OBC) (<math>\bar{X}</math>=5.01, S.D.= 1.11)</b>				
<b>Shared consciousness in the community (<math>\bar{X}</math>=4.98, S.D.= 1.13)</b>		.578	.916	.911
1. I feel the mental connection between the members of this brand community. ( $\bar{X}$ =5.14)	.799			
2. I feel different from other members who are not in this brand community. ( $\bar{X}$ =4.60)	.630			
3. I feel like a member of this brand community. ( $\bar{X}$ =5.03)	.799			
4. I feel the "we" in the relationship with other members of this brand community. ( $\bar{X}$ =4.97)	.823			
5. I feel that I have an influence and was influenced by this brand community. ( $\bar{X}$ =4.89)	.772			
6. I feel that other members in this community and I have similar needs. ( $\bar{X}$ =5.32)	.707			
7. I consider the happiness and the fun of other members of this group my happiness and joy. ( $\bar{X}$ =5.12)	.743			
8. I feel very close to the other members of this brand community. ( $\bar{X}$ =4.79)	.792			
<b>Shared rituals and traditions (<math>\bar{X}</math>=4.92, S.D.= 1.29)</b>		.659	.906	.903
9. I think these activities helped create a unique community culture. ( $\bar{X}$ =5.01)	.798			
10. I had many opportunities to express my opinions in this brand community's activities. ( $\bar{X}$ =4.92)	.797			
11. I consulted with other members of this brand community concerning the issues related to the brand. ( $\bar{X}$ =4.89)	.801			
12. Spending time with other members of this brand community can make give me happiness. ( $\bar{X}$ =4.87)	.841			
13. I like sharing information with other members of this brand community. ( $\bar{X}$ =4.89)	.821			
<b>Sense of moral responsibilities (<math>\bar{X}</math>=5.14, S.D.= 1.22)</b>		.644	.878	.874
14. Members of this brand community participated in creating a group and maintaining its members. ( $\bar{X}$ =5.08)	.742			
15. If I found unusual things happening in the group, I asked other community members. ( $\bar{X}$ =5.00)	.774			
16. I will not hesitate to inform this brand community if I see something unusual. ( $\bar{X}$ =5.18)	.827			
17. I will ask for the direction and information of this brand community to make sure that everything is going right. ( $\bar{X}$ =5.31)	.862			

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

The aim of this research was to analyze the confirmatory components of online brand community on gadgets. From the literature review and related research, there was still a limited amount of research on the components of the online brand community [23][26][28]. The result from the analysis of the confirmatory components found that online brand community consist of three components: shared consciousness in the community, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibilities. The component that has the most weight is shared rituals and traditions. Gadget brands can use the research results as a guideline in developing a sense of community by creating activities that are unique to their brand. Providing opportunities for the members to express their opinions and share information on the brand's online platform. The group can develop the activities into their group culture. The second component in terms of weight was the shared consciousness in the community. Consumers who feel a sense of membership in the community, have a mental connection, a feeling of closeness, fun, and happiness will help create an online brand community. Another component that has the least weight is a sense of moral responsibility. Consumers within the group will maintain and take care of the community together, especially in maintaining the group rules and informing the group administrator and other members to help maintain the group members. It can also be said that creating unique activities in the group to create a sense of belonging will help consumers to gain knowledge and experience related to the brand. When a sense of ownership is formed amongst the members, they will accept the shared values and goals of the brand, which means the members' brand loyalty will be supported and lead to more stable brand loyalty.

However, business organizations, especially those related to technological products and electronic accessories on electronic commerce channels, can adapt the research result and use it as a guideline in developing their online brand community to be more appropriate to the current context of business competition. Some examples are creating a closed online group, creating a space for information, experience, and suggestion sharing relating the brand from consumers to other interested people, which can lead to brand support by consumers who are community members and create a good relationship between the brand and the consumers. Eventually, consumers will pass on the stories and support the brand activities, which helps create an advantage over the brand competition.

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