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Nikunj Kumar Jain, Shampy Kamboj, Vinod Kumar, Zillur Rahman,

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Examining consumer-brand relationships on social media platforms

Nikunj Kumar Jain
*Department of Operations and Quantitative Methods,
International Management Institute, New Delhi, India*
Shampy Kamboj
Amity School of Business, Amity University, Noida, India
Vinod Kumar
*Department of Marketing, International Management Institute,
New Delhi, India, and*
Zillur Rahman
*Department of Management Studies,
Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, India*

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine how consumer-brand relationships affect brand loyalty and word of mouth when mediated by brand trust considering online brand communities on social media platforms.

Design/methodology/approach – A conceptual model is developed, depicting the impact of customer-brand relationships on brand loyalty and word of mouth via brand trust. The conceptual model is validated using partial least squares structural equation modeling and data for which are collected online through a structured questionnaire from a sample of 131 brand community members in North Capital Region of India.

Findings – Findings of the present study revealed that brand trust partially mediated between the involvement and commitment variables of customer-brand relationships, and brand loyalty and word of mouth. However, the link between satisfaction variable of customer-brand relationships, and brand loyalty and word of mouth via brand trust was found insignificant.

Originality/value – The present study provides novel insight to understand consumer-brand relationships on social media platforms.

Keywords Word of mouth, Brand loyalty, Brand involvement, Brand trust, Brand satisfaction, Brand commitment

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

With the emergence of social media, the communication means between customers and companies have transformed significantly (Aladwani, 2014). The most popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (Nisar and Whitehead, 2016). The popularity of social media platforms emphasizes the shifts in media consumption (Twitter, 2014). According to Rapp *et al.* (2013), around 88 percent of the companies including media, IT and telecommunication, FMCG and retail, travel and leisure have already initiated to use various social media platforms and among them approximately 42 percent have fully incorporated different social media sites into their marketing strategies.

Social media is thus a more efficient way to find new customers and to maintain, retain the existing customers (Luo *et al.*, 2015). Recently, social media is also highlighted as one of the dominant 2016-2018 research priorities area of Marketing Science Institute (2016). However, there is a dearth of existing study investigating why individuals communicate with brands using social media platforms. Still, there is limited number of academic study

regarding examining customer-brand relationships through social media platforms. The present research intends to fill these research gaps and investigate the customer-brand relationship on social media platforms and to examine how consumer-brand relationships affect brand loyalty and word of mouth when mediated by brand trust considering online brand communities on social media platforms. This will be accomplished by fulfilling the following research questions:

RQ1. Why do customers involve, satisfy and committed with brands through social media platforms?

RQ2. Does following a brand through online brand communities on social media platforms influence brand trust, brand loyalty and word of mouth?

Customers are rapidly shifting from traditional communication sources to social media to share their views, information and ideas. Thus, companies require considering customer-brand relationship management through internet, especially on social media platforms (Ku *et al.*, 2013). Hence, the present paper is designed to investigate the customer-brand relationship in online brand communities considering social media platforms that will be useful and helpful for practitioners.

Literature review

Involvement
Involvement is considered as a key component facilitating customer relationships (Beatty *et al.*, 1988). Involvement is defined as "perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests" (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342). Involvement is not an active relationship, it usually requires some consumption object (Mollen and Wilson, 2010), and it is mainly based on affection or motivation, cognition (Smith and Godbey, 1991) but actually not on behavior (Zaichkowsky, 1985).

Satisfaction
In the marketing literature, customer satisfaction has been defined as the pleasure feeling obtained by customer when their post-consumption evaluations match with their expectations (Pizam and Ellis, 1999). It is evident from the definition that customer-brand exchanges are less likely to succeed if customers are unsatisfied. Prior research has supported that customer satisfaction is a precondition and a precursor of behavioral intentions and loyalty (Cooil *et al.*, 2007).

Commitment
Commitment has been defined as "an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Moorman *et al.*, 1992). As per Morgan and Hunt (1994), commitment contributes significantly in the formation of loyalty and behavioral intention and defined in a consumer-brand relationship as, "mutual trust that requires effort to maintain a sustainable relationship, arguing that commitment appears when community members value their relationships with other members." According to Beatty *et al.* (1988, p. 4), brand commitment is defined as, "an emotional or psychological attachment of consumers to a specific brand within a product class." On the basis of these definitions, it can be said that in an online community context, commitment refers to community member's attitude and behavior in the brand community.

Brand trust
Brand trust is defined as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). According to

Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán (2001, p. 11), brand trust is defined as, "Feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, that it is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer." Trust usually is more of an issue when there is information asymmetry and chances of opportunism. Decreasing information asymmetry results in increased trust.

Brand loyalty
Loyalty has been widely examined in service marketing literature (Gronholdt *et al.*, 2000). Loyalty can be defined as attachment/feelings toward a brand and company (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). Brand loyalty is usually defined as behavioral and attitudinal response toward a brand revealed by a customer over time (Keller, 1993). Loyalty can be identified as relationally beneficial to both company and customer, as loyal consumers need not to seek out for new service providers (Yang and Peterson, 2004). In online brand community, customers reveal loyalty via their positive word of mouth and repeat purchase behavior (Hur *et al.*, 2011; Yang and Peterson, 2004).

Word of mouth
According to Anderson (1998, p. 6), word of mouth refers to, "informal communications between private parties concerning evaluations of goods and services rather than formal complaints to firms and/or personnel." Word of mouth is a generally occurring phenomenon taking place in consumer behavior studies (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). Social networking sites provide an option to spread word of mouth. The immediate reach of social media to millions of users has improved dispersion of word of mouth considerably.

Hypothesis development
Prior studies found that high involvement level resulted into increase in the trust level of the customer for the brand (Teichert and Rost, 2003). Once consumers respond to the transactional marketing undertakings of the company, they easily get involved with that company and start to become more sensitive to the relational marketing initiatives (Islam and Rahman, 2016). If the experience of customers is satisfactory, this may raise trust among them. Customers may be involved with online brand communities, which provide trustworthy, correct and appropriate information, and lead to the reinforcement of their trust toward the brand:

> *H1a.* Customer-brand relationship (involvement) is positively related to the brand trust.

In the marketing literature, a number of studies have established a direct link between satisfaction and trust (Han and Jeong, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2009). Trust is a basic need of customer and has been identified as an important determinant of customer to brand relationships (Chung-Herrera, 2007). Kim *et al.* (2009) found that instant and continuous satisfaction of customers is formed based on their trust in a specific brand.

Although the association between satisfaction and brand trust in online brand community, especially in social media context, has not been examined yet; a number of scholars have believed that satisfaction has a direct effect on trust in the context of customer relationships over internet (e.g. Bauer *et al.*, 2002). Additionally, as stated by the "Disconfirmation of Expectations Model" (e.g. Spreng and Chiou, 2002), satisfaction always reveals the extent to which expectations formed on earlier circumstances have been met. Following the earlier considerations, in this paper we propose that:

> *H1b.* Customer-brand relationship (satisfaction) is positively related to the brand trust.

Commitment refers to the situation of creating constant relationships with other partners, bearing short-term sacrifice to retain that relationships as well as assuring the relationships

stability (Anderson and Weitz, 1992). The level of confidence users have in online exchanges for instance social media platforms is the e-trust of customers (Luo *et al.*, 2015). As there is indirect contact with the company, online users may find risky to interact with the brands in an online settings. Consequently, trust seems to be important for creating commitment (Valenzuela *et al.*, 2009). In a study, Pitta *et al.* (2006) showed how customers become committed toward the brands. As per the study, customer commitment consists of trust and emotional attachment. Thus, if a company assists its consumers to lower down their perceived risk, it gains trust. Once a company established trust, it further looks for long-term relationships with the customers (Laroche *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, the researchers hypothesize the following:

H1c. Customer-brand relationship (commitment) is positively related to the brand trust.

For involvement, there is support to confirm that it is an antecedent of loyalty (Bowden, 2009). For social media brand communities, the association between involvement and loyalty is essential (Islam and Rahman, 2016). Consecutively, this has facilitated these brands using social media platforms to increase customer involvement, with an aim of encouraging customer retention. A number of studies have established a direct link between involvement and brand loyalty (Islam and Rahman, 2016). Following the earlier arguments, in this paper we propose that:

H2a. Customer-brand relationship (involvement) is positively related to the brand loyalty.

In the marketing literature, it is well supported that the result of positive post-consumption assessment is long-term patronage (Giovanis *et al.*, 2014), and it is evidenced that customer satisfaction can be an important factor of loyalty (Sashi, 2012). The findings of some empirical research suggest that customer's evaluations of satisfaction act as a precursor to loyalty (Ladhari *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, Fuentes-Blasco *et al.*'s (2017) study found that satisfaction has a direct impact on both dimensions of loyalty (behavioral and attitudinal). Additionally, Jani and Han (2014) found that customer satisfaction has a positive and significant impact on loyalty. Consistent with the earlier findings, Bennett *et al.* (2005) found that customer satisfaction contributed significantly to the brand loyalty. A number of other studies also suggest that satisfaction significantly and positively influences loyalty (Hyun, 2010). Although it may be depend on the users to be a loyal customer toward a specific brand, companies also act a significant role in making their customers loyal. The prior study (Story and Hess, 2006) was based on loyal customers' behavior. The findings of a number of studies show that satisfaction positively and significantly influence e-loyalty (Oh *et al.*, 2014); consequently, the researchers hypothesize the following:

H2b. Customer-brand relationship (satisfaction) is positively related to the brand loyalty.

Although in literature there is some confusion about the relationship between commitment and loyalty, it is usually accepted that commitment is entirely different from loyalty in that commitment leads to loyalty. Beatty *et al.* (1988) found that commitment takes place when someone is searching through brands prior to making a selection, whereas loyalty takes place later on. Thus, Beatty *et al.* (1988) argued commitment is the base for the development of brand loyalty. In online brand community, customer participation and their commitment may increase the brand value, as it may assist members to have a positive approach toward the brand along with brand loyalty (Jang *et al.*, 2008). As a result, stimulating the activities of community, commitment is expected and resulted into brand loyalty of customers in long term. Brand loyalty has both factors attitudinal and behavioral, and emerges when these components co-exist. Thus we hypothesized:

H2c. Customer-brand relationship (commitment) is positively related to the brand loyalty.

Customer involvement influences the extent of concern and interest associated with their consumption (Mittal and Lee, 1989). Customers can be highly involved in the consumption of a service, which may reduce their risk and increase satisfaction and enjoyment. In the literature, a number of studies have shown that consumers with high involvement are likely to engage in post-purchase behaviors, for instance word-of-mouth behavior (Voyer and Ranaweera, 2015). It can be due to the fact that customers who are strongly involved may demonstrate more pleasure or a possible cognitive dissonance in long term as compare to those who are not highly involved (Lau and Ng, 2001). Lang and Hyde (2013) found that customers with a high involvement level will show high intentions for engaging in e-word of mouth. Thus, based on above discussions we hypothesize:

H3a. Customer-brand relationship (involvement) is positively related to the word of mouth.

Word-of-mouth communication significantly affects consumer decisions, and therefore a number of researchers have extensively studied the association between word of mouth and consumer behavior outcomes. Customers who come across appropriate services brand have a tendency to engage in positive word-of-mouth communication, and this positive word of mouth has been studied widely as consequence of customer satisfaction (Kau and Loh, 2006). Blodgett *et al.* (1993) observed that satisfied consumers have positive effect on their word-of-mouth intentions. Similarly, Collier and Bienstock (2006) found that unsatisfied customers mainly get involved in negative word of mouth. Therefore, customer satisfaction has been studied as a predictor of customers' word-of-mouth intentions (See-To and Ho, 2014). Therefore, this study assumed that customer satisfaction affects their WOM intentions. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H3b. Customer-brand relationship (satisfaction) is positively related to the word of mouth.

As a psychological attachment, the concept of commitment leads to the proactive behavior of customers (Bettencourt, 1997), for example, word-of-mouth communication (Dick and Basu, 1994). In particular, when customers are committed to a brand, they identify themselves with brand, and consequently they demonstrated proactive behaviors, for instance, positive word-of-mouth communication (Chonko, 1986). Thus, customers' sense of unity with online brand community resulted into their active word-of-mouth behavior. A number of scholars have also identified the positive and significant influence of commitment on word of mouth (Kamboj and Rahman, 2017). This leads to the following hypothesis on the positive influence of commitment on users' word of mouth (Figure 1):

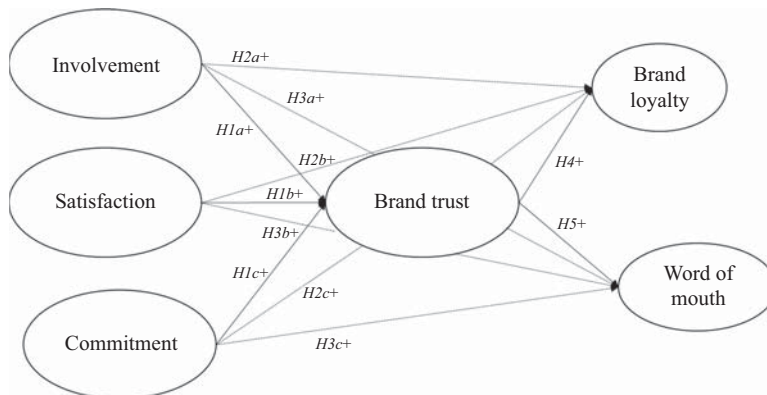*H3c.* Customer-brand relationship (commitment) is positively related to the word of mouth.

Figure 1.
Conceptual framework

Research methodology

Sampling and data collection

The sampling frame for this study was youth, since this group represents active internet users in India (Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), 2015), and college students represent the profile of internet and social media users (Park and Kim, 2014). Thus, the data were collected using web-based survey, and target population for this paper was post-graduate students who were the members of any online brand community on social networking sites. The main objective of this paper is to comprehend the behavior of customers irrespective of the characteristics of online brand communities on social media sites. Respondents were asked to answer the survey instrument on the basis of their perception regarding online community which they were part of. It is worth mentioning here that no list of online brand community members on social media sites is available in India; therefore, it was not feasible to choose the sample directly from the population. Consequently, the convenience sampling method was considered to gather data (Agag and El-Masry, 2016; Kamboj and Rahman, 2016). For this purpose, the researcher collected quantitative data by providing an invitation to participate in the online survey with a hyperlink to the web-based questionnaire (using Google Docs) to the students of North Capital Region. To ensure the eligibility of respondents, initially a screening question was asked from respondents that whether they have subscribed, liked or joined any of online brand community on social media.

Pretesting was carried out by conducting a focused group discussion with eight participants and face validity of the questionnaire by five academicians and five industry experts. A pilot test was also conducted on doctoral and post-graduate students of North-Central India to test the reliability and validity of questionnaire. In total, 34 post-graduate students at North-Central India, who were the members of any online brand communities on social media sites, were accepted to participate. The comments of participants assisted in instrument refinement with respect to its format, clarity, length and readability. Seven doctoral students were also asked to review the survey instrument. Their review was resulted into exclusion of few items. This elimination did not pose any threat to the validity of constructs. In addition, few changes were made with respect to the wording of scale items. A total of 154 responses were obtained from the web-based survey, and after excluding 23 unusable responses, 131 effective responses were considered valid for data analysis. This sample is consistent with the earlier studies in this field (Agag and El-Masry, 2016).

Of these 131 respondents, 81 were male (62 percent) and 50 were female (38 percent). Most of the respondents were unmarried belonging to the age group between 21 and 25 years, majority of respondents were spending 30 minutes-2 hours on social media sites. Previous studies have also revealed that young adults are the most active web users (Kaur, 2016; Park and Kim, 2014). Thus, the data are representative in nature since majority of the internet and social media users fall within the age group of 18-30 years (IAMAI, 2015).

This study had a sample size of 131 which was followed as per guidelines of Hair *et al.* (2014), who stated that "Minimum sample size – 100: Models containing five or fewer constructs, each with more than three items (observed variables)." Also, our sample size is consistent with previous studies in this area, for example, Kim and Ko (2010, p. 164) who utilized 133 responses for the statistical analysis. Thus, the sample size considers appropriate for the data analysis with partial least squares-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

Questionnaire and measurements. For this paper, the questionnaire was divided in two main parts. The first part of questionnaire included questions related to respondents' demographic profile. The second part included questions to measure all key constructs based on adapted scale. In this study, all items of scale were measured on a five-point Likert scale anchored with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Four items adapted from earlier developed scales were used to measure customer involvement

(Islam and Rahman, 2016) and amended accordingly on the basis of pilot study. In conceptualizing the customer satisfaction, this paper uses three items to evaluate the customer satisfaction borrowed from Hajli *et al.* (2017). The commitment was operationalized with six items as suggested by Aaker *et al.*'s (2008) and Kuo and Feng's (2013) scales. Brand trust measures were adapted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Kang *et al.* (2014), four items were borrowed and amended based on the pilot study. These items measure the reliability, integrity and trustworthiness of brand in online community. Brand loyalty was operationalized with three items as suggested by previous research (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Laroche *et al.*, 2012; Zheng *et al.*, 2015). The scale for word of mouth was borrowed from Choi and Choi (2014), Hur *et al.* (2011) and Zeithaml *et al.* (1996).

In this paper, PLS-SEM path modeling was applied to test the proposed hypotheses and to validate the measures. This method has been employed as investigated phenomenon is the latest and the study intends to theory generation rather than theory confirmation (Urbach and Ahlemann, 2010). In addition, this approach does not need a normal distribution, as required in covariance-based approaches (Hair *et al.*, 2014). It works well with small sample size, and lastly PLS approach includes both formative and reflective measures (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Given the theory-building nature of study and small sample size, PLS-SEM is the appropriate multivariate tool for testing the structural model.

Data analysis and findings
Inner model assessment. PLS-SEM to path modeling (Lohmoller, 1988) was used to test the hypotheses using smart PLS2 software (Ringle *et al.*, 2014). First, reflective measurement models were tested for their reliability and validity. In the course of indicator reliability assessment, items exhibited loadings higher than the specified requirement of 0.708 except one item (refer Table AI). Table II shows that composite reliability of the constructs was higher than minimum requirement of 0.70, and construct convergent validity (average validity extracted (AVE) was higher than 0.5 value (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion demonstrated that the square root of AVE values of all the reflective constructs were higher than the inter-construct correlations, indicating discriminant validity (refer Table I). Furthermore, all indicator loadings were higher than their respective cross-loadings, providing further evidence for the discriminant validity.

Structural model assessment. After the constructs have been confirmed as reliable and valid, next step is to assess the structural model results. Table II shows the path coefficients obtained by applying a nonparametric bootstrapping routine (Vinzi *et al.*, 2010) with 131 cases and 5,000 samples. Involvement and commitment positively impact brand trust indicating support for *H1a* and *H1c*. Involvement and commitment were found to be positively associated with brand loyalty and word of mouth, that is, *H2a*, *H2c*, *H3a* and *H3c* were accepted. However, satisfaction neither impacts brand trust nor brand loyalty and word of mouth (*H1c*, *H2c* and *H3c* were not accepted). Brand trust positively influences

Variables	Composite reliability	Cronbach's α	AVE	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Involvement (1)	0.91	0.87	0.67	0.82					
Satisfaction (2)	0.90	0.83	0.75	0.74	0.86				
Commitment (3)	0.92	0.90	0.66	0.82	0.76	0.82			
Brand trust (4)	0.92	0.88	0.74	0.71	0.69	0.74	0.86		
Brand loyalty (5)	0.90	0.83	0.75	0.56	0.48	0.68	0.71	0.87	
WOM (6)	0.92	0.88	0.80	0.61	0.56	0.62	0.82	0.74	0.90

Note: Square root of AVE across diagonal

Table I.
Reliability and validity

Hypotheses	Path	Original sample (O)	Result
H1a	Involvement → brand trust	0.24*	Accepted
H1b	Satisfaction → brand trust	0.23	Not Accepted
H1c	Commitment → brand trust	0.37**	Accepted
H2a	Involvement → brand loyalty	0.31**	Accepted
H2b	Satisfaction → brand loyalty	0.08	Not Accepted
H2c	Commitment → brand loyalty	0.24*	Accepted
H3a	Involvement → WOM	0.19*	Accepted
H3b	Satisfaction → WOM	0.18	Not Accepted
H3c	Commitment → WOM	0.33***	Accepted
H4	Brand Trust → brand loyalty	0.64***	Accepted
H5	Brand Trust → WOM	0.80***	Accepted

Notes: $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.001$

Table II.
Results of path coefficient

brand loyalty (*H4* was accepted) and word of mouth (*H5* was accepted). The examination of the endogenous constructs' predictive power has substantial R^2 values for brand trust (0.59), brand loyalty (0.50) and word of mouth (0.69).

Mediation analysis. Mediation analysis was carried out by calculating the variation accounted for (VAF) that determines the size of indirect effect to total effect (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Full mediation is characterized by larger values of VAF (more than 80 percent); no mediation for very low values of VAF (< 20 percent) and partial mediation if VAF lies between 20 and 80 percent.

First, we analyze brand trust as a mediator between customer relationship determinants (involvement and commitment) and brand loyalty. For the involvement-loyalty relationship via trust as a mediator, value of VAF = 0.33 and for the commitment-loyalty relationship via trust as a mediator, value of VAF = 0.50. This shows that involvement and commitment partially mediate through brand trust to brand loyalty.

Next, we analyze the brand trust as a mediator between customer relationship determinants (involvement and commitment) and word of mouth. For the involvement-word-of-mouth relationship via trust as a mediator, value of VAF = 0.50 and for the commitment-word-of-mouth relationship via trust as a mediator, value of VAF = 0.48. This indicates the partial mediating effect of brand trust between involvement and word of mouth; and commitment and word of mouth. Mediation analysis was not carried out for satisfaction since direct and indirect effects were not significant.

Discussion and implications

The broad objective of present research was to empirically examine consumer-brand relationships on social media platforms. The proposed empirical model posits the mediating effect of brand trust between consumer-brand relationships and attitudinal expects of brand loyalty. The findings suggest that brand trust partially mediated between involvement and commitment variables of consumer-brand relationship and brand loyalty. Moreover, brand trust also mediated between involvement and commitment variables of consumer-brand relationship and word of mouth. This indicates that the impact of consumer-brand relationships on brand loyalty and word of mouth can be enhanced by building brand trust among customers (Ellonen *et al.*, 2009). Brand trust is an important variable for establishing the relationship between consumer-brand relationship and brand loyalty on social media platforms, which is consistent with the past literature (Kang *et al.*, 2014; Laroche *et al.*, 2012).

However, the link between satisfaction and brand trust; satisfaction and brand loyalty; and satisfaction and word of mouth was found insignificant. The relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is very complex and ambiguous in social media platforms

(Nisar and Whitehead, 2016). Thus, satisfaction can be a factor of loyalty (Sashi, 2012; Nisar and Whitehead, 2016). However, Story and Hess (2006) confirmed that there is a broken association between satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, satisfaction is not always an effective predictor of loyalty though it is essential for the commitment. Thus, it is not necessary that all satisfied customers are loyal (Nisar and Whitehead, 2016).This may be due to the fact that a customer is satisfied but he/she may not be loyal on social media (Yi and La, 2004). It further means that a satisfied customer may not trust the brand in social media context. Thus, the link between consumer-brand relationship and brand loyalty must be analyzed with prudently.

The significant relationship between involvement and brand trust indicates that highly involved customers on social media have higher brand trust. At the same time, a positive relationship between involvement and brand loyalty; involvement and word of mouth shows that highly involved customers on social media are likely to become loyal customers and spread more information about the brand. Moreover, a relationship between commitment and brand trust is also found to be significant which means that commitment is one of the important prerequisite to brand trust in the social media context. Similarly, a positive relationship between commitment and brand loyalty; commitment and word of mouth proves/shows that more commitment results in brand loyalty and word of mouth. Consumer involvement and commitment were key determinants of loyalty in social media (Park *et al.*, 2016). In the context of social media, both involvement and commitment found to have an influence on brand trust, which is consistent with the results of prior studies (Islam and Rahman, 2016; Kang *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, prior studies also support another finding of our study, which shows that involvement and commitment positively influence word-of-mouth behavior on social media platforms (Hur *et al.*, 2011; Islam and Rahman, 2016). Hur *et al.* (2011) confirmed that commitment has a positive and significant influence on word-of-mouth behavior. Similarly, social networks theory also identifies involvement influencing word-of-mouth behavior, which is also supported by different empirical studies in literature (Wangenheim and Bayón, 2007).

Theoretical implications
The present research contributes to both literature on brand community and social media. This study has a number of theoretical implications. First, this study presents a model of how brand community can have an effect on both brand loyalty and word of mouth. In this study, as a translator of these effects the researchers identified the contribution of brand trust that was mainly ignored in existing research. The developed model was tested in the context of social networking platforms, but the model could be valid in other contexts also. Second, researchers treat this area a distinctive one as various scholars suggested that social media has its own distinct features (Hu and Kettinger, 2008), and our study extends the brand community concept to the social media context that might assist other researchers to have deeper insights about brands functioning in social media environment. Third, the findings reveal that among the consumer-brand relationship variables, brand commitment is the most significant variable for engaging customers on social media that generates trust and further enhances WOM since brand commitment variable has higher path coefficient for both the endogenous variables – trust and WOM.

Managerial implications
Similar to the other studies, this study also assists practitioners regarding consumer to brand relationships on social media platforms. The vast popularity, low cost and larger reach of social networking sites encourage all marketers to get advantage of these sites for several reasons. The proposed and empirically tested model of this study reveal that with building and improving social media-based brand communities, and facilitating usefulness,

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community feelings, information sharing and strengthening social connections between members and brand elements, a marketer can enhance brand loyalty and trust. As it is clear from this study that customers-brand relationships on social media-based brand communities have the potential to exert a positive and significant impact on brand trust, brand loyalty and word of mouth for brand. Consequently, e-marketers and managers who identify the important role of social media should make all attempts to involvement of their own brand community on social networking sites. This study assists marketing managers to identify brand trust as influential on both brand loyalty and word-of-mouth communication. Accordingly, managers in order to increase brand loyalty should emphasize on upholding brand commitment and undertake attentive communication management to make sure that all accessible information is trustworthy.

Conclusion
The objective of this paper was to assess the customer-brand relationships in terms of involvement, satisfaction and commitment and to establish their relationship with brand trust, brand loyalty and word-of-mouth behavior on social media platforms. To achieve the research objectives, we proposed six hypotheses and empirically tested them. Analysis indicated that brand trust contributed as a mediator between customer to brand relationships (involvement and commitment) and brand loyalty, word-of-mouth behavior. Thus, brand trust is of more importance for the involvement and commitment, which in turn related into brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth behavior on social media platforms. Therefore, involvement and commitment directly as well as indirectly (via brand trust) have an effect on brand loyalty and word-of-mouth behavior in the context of social media sites. Moreover, the relationship of satisfaction with brand loyalty and word of mouth is very ambiguous in social media platforms. The findings of the present study also depicted the same.

Limitations and future research
The present research has a number of limitations. First, the study was performed in India, and it will be worthwhile to examine the customer-brand relationships on social media platforms in other countries, as social media users are located globally. Second the present research is cross-sectional in nature, thus future studies with longitudinal data are needed to be conduct. Third, this paper investigated the brand trust as a mediating variable; further studies could assess the mediating as well as moderating effect of some other variables in the hypothesized model. A possible number of potential mediators and moderators for instance culture, communities' type, brand type, differences in social networking platforms features and facilities or functionality, structure and culture (Laroche *et al.*, 2012) could be examined to have more insights about how these relationships vary in different situation. In addition to these, some more moderating effects, for example, brand involvement, interaction experience and customers' interactivity (Bruhn *et al.*, 2014), interaction propensity (Wiertz and de Ruyter, 2007), will be attractive to explore.

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Appendix

S. No.	Construct	Item description	Loadings
1	Involvement	In general I have a strong interest in this brand	0.88
		This brand is very important to me	0.88
		This brand matters a lot to me	0.86
		I get bored when other people talk to me about this brand	0.55
		This brand is relevant to me	0.86
2	Satisfaction	Overall I am satisfied with this brand	0.85
		This brand exceeds my expectations	0.84
		The performance of the brand is very close to the ideal brand in the product category	0.90
3	Commitment	I am very loyal to this brand	0.80
		I am willing to make small sacrifices in order to keep using the products of this brand	0.81
		I would be willing to postpone my purchase if the products of this brand were temporarily unavailable	0.87
		I would stick with this brand even if it would let me down once or twice	0.84
		I am so happy with this brand that I no longer feel the need to watch out for other alternatives	0.85
		I am likely to be using this brand one year from now	0.72
4	Brand trust	I trust this brand	0.85
		I rely on this brand	0.90
		This brand is an honest brand	0.93
		This brand is safe to use	0.75
5	Brand loyalty	I consider myself to be loyal to the brand	0.83
		If the brand is not available at the store, I would buy the same brand from some other store	0.89
		I am willing to pay more for my brand	0.87
6	Word of mouth	I say positive things about this brand to other people	0.90
		I often recommend this brand to others	0.90
		I encourage friends to buy this brand	0.89

Table AI.
Questionnaire items

About the authors

Nikunj Kumar Jain has three years of cross-functional industrial experience in green field Bharat Oman Refineries Ltd, Bina (MP) (BORL, a joint venture between Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd and Oman Oil SAOC, Sultanate of Oman) in the areas of Project Management with exposure to Commissioning; Operations and Maintenance of Power Plants; Procurement and Inventory Management, Warehouse and Store Management, Contract Management, Vendor Management, etc. He has presented several research papers in national and international conferences like INFORMS Marketing Science, INFORMS Manufacturing and Service Operations Management (MSOM) Conference, IMRDC, COSMAR, SOM, etc. He has published in national and international journals (including "B" class publication as per ABDC classification) and has also published a case study in *Asian Journal of Management Cases*. His research interest areas include retail operations, logistics and supply chain management, game

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theory applications in supply chain management, Big Data analytics, mathematical modeling and optimization of real life problems.

Shampy Kamboj has received the MBA Degree in Marketing from Kurukshetra University, Haryana, India. She is working as an Assistant Professor in Amity University, Noida. She chose social media marketing as her research area while pursuing PhD from the Department of Management Studies, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Uttarakhand. Her work is published in journals like *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *Journal of Brand Management*, *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, *International Journal of Business Excellence*, *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *International Journal of Electronic Marketing and Retailing*, *International Journal of Culture, Tourism, and Hospitality Research*, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, etc. Her areas of interest are social media marketing, customer participation and co-creation.

Vinod Kumar holds the PhD Degree in Marketing from the Department of Management Studies, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Roorkee. Presently, he is working as an Assistant Professor (Marketing) in International Management Institute (IMI), Delhi. He has presented and published his research work in various reputed national and international platforms. His one of the published paper has recently been adjudged as Highly Commendable by Emerald Literati Network Awards for Excellence, 2017. His current research interests include e-marketing, sustainability marketing and sustainability reporting. Vinod Kumar is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: vkmehta.iitr@gmail.com

Zillur Rahman is an Associate Professor and the Head of the Department in the Department of Management Studies, at IIT Roorkee, India. His areas of interest are marketing, sustainability and strategic management. His work has been published and cited in various international journals like *Management Decision*, *Managing Service Quality*, *International Journal of Information Management*, *Industrial Management and Data Systems*, *European Business Review*, *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, to name a few. He was the recipient of the Emerald Literati Club Highly Commended Award in 2004 and Highly Commended Award winner of the 2009 Emerald/AIMA Indian Management Research Fund Award. One of his papers was The Sciencedirect Top 25 Hottest Article within the journal for the period October-December 2004.