

# The relationships among community experience, community commitment, brand attitude, and purchase intention in social media

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## ABSTRACT

The brand community built by social networking sites (SNSs) promotes efficiency in modern marketing. However, building consumer-brand relationships through an SNS brand community to improve marketing performance has always presented a challenge. Thus, this study aims to identify and test the main factors related to SNS brand communities that can predict purchase intention. The conceptual model includes community experience, community commitment, brand attitude, and purchase intention. The results of the structural equation modeling (SEM) using a sample of 278 Korean consumers reveals that in addition to information experience, other experiences (entertainment, homophily, and relationship-based) have a positive influence on community commitment. Relationship-based experience as constructed in this study has the largest impact on community commitment. SNS brand community commitment has a positive influence on brand attitude. However, SNS brand community commitment has no significant impact on purchase intention. Finally, the results show that SNS brand community commitment has a partial mediation effect on the relationship between SNS brand community experience and brand attitude. This study suggests that companies should strategically manage consumers' SNS brand community experiences and commitment. Other theoretical implications and managerial implications are also discussed.

## 1. Introduction

Brand experience encompasses “subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments” (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009, p. 53). Thus, brand experience is a special response triggered by brand related experience attributes; thus, brand experience relies on external stimuli to activate situational cues embedded in brand memory (Iglesias, Singh, & Batista-Foguet, 2011). Brand experience does not assume motivation; even if consumers have no personal connection to the brand or no interest in the brand, the experience may still occur (Brakus et al., 2009). Brand experience can build the consumer environment and create perceived value by using diverse and flexible marketing methods and tools (Chen & Lin, 2015). With the arrival of experience economy, scholars have fully studied the concept of experience and specifically understood experience as brand experience (Brakus et al., 2009), consumer experience (Meyer & Schwager, 2007) and brand community experience (Schouten,

McAlexander, & Koenig, 2007). These three interpretations of experience differ in definition and focus. However, these constructs have many commonalities. First, the experience is derived from the brand's stimuli; second, experience is a customer psychological perception; third, experience does not assume customer participation motivation; and forth, experience is derived from interactions. Studies have investigated the dimensions of brand experience (Brakus et al., 2009) and the results of brand experience (Iglesias et al., 2011).

In the SNS context, the brand community interacts with customers through posts, reviews, comments, and experience sharing (Kamboj, Sarmah, Gupta, & Dwivedi, 2018), and these interactions can provide consumers with a rich brand experience and enhance marketing performance (Alalwan, 2018; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013; Munnukka, Karjaluto, & Tikkanen, 2015; Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017). However, few studies have documented the factors that lead to customer brand experience in the virtual environment (Nambisan & Watt, 2011), especially brand community experience in the SNS environment (Simon, Brexendorf, & Fassnacht, 2013). The SNS brand community is currently an important component of marketing strategies (Alalwan,

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Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017; Kapoor et al., 2017).

Commitment is identified as a core feature of relationship marketing management, which is particularly important in the field of community research (Jang, Ko, & Koh, 2007; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Zhou, Zhang, Su, & Zhou, 2012). The concept of commitment can be viewed as a set of needs for maintaining a worthwhile relationship in business-to-consumer contexts (Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003). Previous studies on brand communities have primarily focused on community commitment because of its marketing productivity (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2011; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). However, it is well known that commitment does not come naturally (McAlexander et al., 2002). Extensive studies have been conducted to determine how SNS brand community members become committed to community activities (Kang, Tang, & Fiore, 2014; Tseng, Huang, & Setiawan, 2017). Scholars have found that online brand community participation (Hajli, Shanmugam, Papagiannidis, Zahay, & Richard, 2017; Kamboj et al., 2018), interaction characteristics and perceived benefits (Kuo & Feng, 2013), brand community trust (Hur et al., 2011), and customer value (Shi, Cao, Chen, & Chow, 2019) have positive impacts on online brand community commitment. Recent studies have also investigated the outcomes of commitment such as brand performance (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014), brand loyalty (Raies, Mühlbacher, & Gavard-Perret, 2015), and branding co-creation (Hajli et al., 2017), and they have confirmed that commitment in the SNS context will produce positive marketing effects. However, the research has also demonstrated that the effectiveness of commitment in establishing consumer-brand relationships has not been sufficiently proven (Kang et al., 2014).

Great progress has been achieved in brand community experience research and commitment research; however, we found that three research topics must be explored to reduce the deficiencies of the previous studies:

Marketers have succeeded in using brand-related stimulations as the primary sources of brand experience (Das, Agarwal, Malhotra, & Varshneya, 2019) and SNS brand communities as the main tool of brand stimulation; currently, research focusing on consumers' experience via SNS brand communities is not very substantial. In particular, empirical work is very limited. It is commonly known that Nambisan and Watt (2011) formally proposed and verified the concept of the online community experience, which is divided into the following four dimensions: pragmatic experience, hedonic experience, sociability experience and usability experience. However, an online brand community hosted by an enterprise obviously differs from an SNS brand community. For example, the interaction volumes in SNS brand communities are significantly higher than those in online product communities. Subsequently, scholars have categorized the brand community experience on Facebook and found that its brand community experience includes the following: engagement experience, usability experience, sensory experience, affective experience, cognitive experience, and relational experience (Simon et al., 2013). However, these authors did not verify the reliability and validity of these dimensions and did not analyze the influence of experience on outcome factors. Moreover, SNS brand communities based on Web 2.0 technology have many new features (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014). However, in the article by Habibi et al. (2014), the characteristics of the social context can be further studied. According to Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007), extending people's offline or existing relationships to the Internet is an important feature of SNSs. Hence, the question of whether these new features can provide new experience to users is also worth discussing. Additionally, the variables explaining SNS sociality must be further developed (Nambisan & Watt, 2011). If marketers cannot fully understand the experience provided to customers by SNS brand communities, the effects of the strategic use of SNS brand communities are limited. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the existing literature and conduct a statistical verification of the experience with different constructed dimensions.

Commitment is considered to be an important mediating variable in online brand community studies (Zhou et al., 2012). Previous studies have clarified that an SNS brand community can help companies build such consumer-brand relationships (Kamboj et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the studies on SNS brand community commitment mainly focus on the influence of the participation motivation and participation behavior of members in the context of SNS brand community commitment (e.g., Akrouf & Nagy, 2018; Anderson, Knight, Pookulangara, & Josiam, 2014; Tseng et al., 2017). In this regard, studies have mainly been based on the behavioral pattern of "motivation – behavior – result", ignoring the psychological evolution stage of members' "perception – attitude – behavior", i.e., the influence of people's psychological perception on behavior and results. Community members' perception is formed through their experiences with the community. As a precondition of community members' perception, community experience will have an important influence on the formation of community commitment, brand attitude and brand use behavior (Nambisan & Watt, 2011). The brand community experience provides an important touchpoint for a variety of stimuli that lead customers to a brand community and brand. However, we do not fully understand its relationships with brand community commitment (Brakus et al., 2009; Das et al., 2019). Since experiential marketing has only recently emerged, research focusing on the brand community experience is not perfect, and specifically, the relationship framework between brand community experience and brand community commitment has not been clearly described. Notably, in the framework of brand management, existing studies, such as the study conducted by Ramaseshan and Stein (2014), have confirmed that brand experience has a direct impact on brand commitment. In the context of experiential consumption and SNSs, research concerning the relationship between consumer experience and commitment is insufficient. Scholars have noted that the issue of how to strategically manage virtual brand communities is an important research topic in terms of the future customer experience research (e.g., Marzocchi, Morandin, & Bergami, 2013; Verhoef et al., 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to study the relationship between brand community experience and brand community commitment in the SNS environment, which not only expands the research content of brand communities but also has great significance for research on social media marketing.

The role of brand community in improving brand relationship and brand performance has been fully verified (Kumar & Nayak, 2018; Zhou et al., 2012). However, brand community relationships do not always lead to brand-based consequences such as loyalty (Jang et al., 2007; Raies et al., 2015) because this transformation is mediated by an emotional brand state such as brand community commitment (Zhou et al., 2012). Thus, the community-to-brand relationship mechanism remains to be clarified (Kumar & Nayak, 2018). In the SNS literature, scholars have noted that consumers' positive SNS behaviors cannot necessarily be translated into meaningful results (John, Leslie, Oliver, Gupta, & Michael, 2017; Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012). One objective explanation is that companies fail to develop meaningful social media strategies, and therefore, consumers do not receive the experience they are seeking (VanMeter, Syrdal, Powell-Mantel, Grisaffe, & Nesson, 2018). In addition, previous studies have shown that brand attitude corresponds to consumers' overall evaluation of a brand (Colliander & Marder, 2018), and it is likely to significantly influence consumers' choice of one brand over others (Augusto, Mário, & Torres, 2018). Indeed, social media marketing studies have also found that enterprises' social media marketing activities can affect brand attitude. For example, Colliander and Marder (2018) demonstrate that the 'snapshot aesthetic' in social media, through the mediation of liking and credibility, affects brand attitude. However, the relevant literature on SNS brand community seems to ignore the important link of brand attitude, which leads to insufficient theoretical developments and vague marketing management implications (e.g., Demiray & Burnaz, 2019; Tseng et al., 2017). An analysis of the influence of the commitment formed through customer experience with regard to brand attitude can

deepen the integration of commitment theory and attitude theory and can lead to more specific results and marketing strategies. Thus, brand attitude is expected to be an important driver of brand purchase intention within the SNS context. In the current study, we investigate the mediation effects of brand attitude.

Considering the above, the primary objective of this research is to develop a model of “experiences-commitment-attitude-purchase intention” with regard to SNS brand communities. The model constructed in this study includes two stages. In the first stage, the relationship between the SNS brand community experience and community commitment is explored to identify the formation mechanism of the brand community relationship according to online community experience theory (Nambisan & Watt, 2011) and commitment theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the second stage, the dependent variable (commitment) of the brand community relationship is regarded as the focus of the transformation to the brand relationship, and the brand attitude is regarded as the media variable/dependent variable to identify the mechanism of the transformation from the brand community relationship to the brand relationship according to the theory of reason action (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Ajzen, 1991). The model describes the SNS brand community experiences that affect brand community commitment, brand attitude, and purchase intention as well as the influence mechanism. Moreover, the current study attempts to explore whether SNS brand communities involve a unique experience and examine the impact of such an experience on community commitment. In addition, the question of whether the commitment relationship of an SNS brand community can form a brand relationship is discussed, including the influence of commitment on brand attitude and purchase intention. We tested the hypotheses using structural equation modeling (SEM) with survey data from Korea ( $N = 278$ ) and compared the model fit of the full model and rival models. The study findings show that consumers' SNS brand community experiences have a positive impact on community commitment, which confirms that the new variable in the current study has the greatest impact (termed ‘relationship-based experience’). Moreover, consumers' SNS brand community commitment can transform into brand attitude and then form brand purchase intention. The findings also indicate the critical need for companies to manage SNS brand community experiences.

## 2. Theoretical background and literature review

### 2.1. Online brand community experience in the SNS context

Creating a compelling online experience for online customers is crucial for creating a competitive advantage on the Internet (Novak & Hoffman, 2000). With the popularization of the internet in enterprises, scholars have explored the customer/user experience in the internet environment for more than two decades. Concepts such as web experience (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Novak & Hoffman, 2000), online shopping and retail experience (Noble, Griffith, & Weinberger, 2005), and online community experience (Nambisan & Watt, 2011) emerged in academia. These studies consider how online customer experience affects shopping preferences and product purchase intentions. The online community experience is defined as the overall experience that a customer derives from his or her interactions with an online community (Nambisan & Watt, 2011), and it has two potential impacts on the brand: customer attitudes and organizational service quality (Nambisan & Watt, 2011). This experience is a subjective and internal response that is evoked by any interaction (direct or indirect) with a company's offerings (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). The internal response is generated through interactions between the customer and the various components provided by the enterprise, including the performance of the product itself, packaging, pricing, advertising, retail environment and customer service (Rose, Clark, Samouel, & Hair, 2012).

In this paper, the various components provided by the SNS brand community can include the following: format or style of posts, quantity

of posts, quantity and quality of interaction, advertising information, feedback and other content. The SNS brand community experience can be considered an internal response (i.e., something that resides within the customer) because it can directly distinguish between similar concepts, such as customer benefit (Kang et al., 2014) and customer value (Shi et al., 2019). The customer experience within an SNS brand community is a consequence of using and engaging with the community (Huang & Chen, 2018).

SNS brand communities differ from traditional online brand communities. Scholars have demonstrated that SNS brand communities have the following five unique aspects: social context, structure, scale, content and storytelling, and affiliated brand communities (Habibi et al., 2014). This uniqueness has led to substantial and universal changes in marketing management, which is a considerable challenge for businesses because many established management methods are ill-suited for addressing customers (Alalwan et al., 2017). Indeed, digital marketing managed by unskilled service providers is often detrimental (Aswani, Kar, Ilavarasan, & Dwivedi, 2018).

The content conveyed to users by the SNS brand community may have strong repercussions at one point in time, and it may be abandoned by the audience at another. Therefore, SNS brand community managers must consciously generate content that is of interest to the target customers and that is worthy of appreciation to ensure that they have a superior experience and maintain a loyal relationship (Dwivedi, Kapoor, & Chen, 2015). Thus, if brand promoters aim for their consumers to have positive feelings about the brand, they must deliver strong, memorable and unique experiences (Brakus et al., 2009). Scholars have raised questions regarding how to create consumer experience value to increase brand relationships through SNS (Simon et al., 2013). Companies can improve their SNS brand community experience in terms of engagement, usability, sensory, affective, cognitive, and relational dimensions (Simon et al., 2013). Nambisan and Watt (2011) considered that firm-hosted online product communities have four customer experiential dimensions: pragmatic, hedonic, sociability, and usability. A number of studies have investigated brand community experience to clarify theoretical and practical implications regarding aspects such as interaction-based customer benefits (Nambisan & Baron, 2009), online brand community engagement (Baldus, Voorhees, & Calantone, 2015), and motivation for retailer brand community participation (Anderson et al., 2014).

Nambisan and Watt (2011) proposed and verified the concept of online community experience by dividing this concept into four dimensions. However, considering the objective of their research, we can find that their dimension of online brand community experience is the brand community based on web 1.0 technology because this research focuses on enterprise-hosted websites. Although very similar, the SNS brand community is more dynamic than an online product/customer community and serves completely different purposes. For example, compared to an SNS brand community, a customer community has a much lower interaction volume and frequency, very different demographics, and most importantly, different user functions.

With the popularization and application of SNS brand communities in the field of enterprise marketing, scholars have begun to pay attention to the composition of brand community experience based on Web 2.0 technology. Scholars have constructed the dimensions of the Facebook brand community experience, including engagement, usability, sensory experience, affective, cognitive and relational (Simon et al., 2013). The SNS brand community based on Web 2.0 technology has many new features (Habibi et al., 2014). The social feature is among the largest features (Ellison et al., 2007); thus, this community is called social media. However, most of the above studies concerning the SNS brand community experience are conceptual, and empirical work in this field is limited.

Integrating the existing SNS research, SNS brand community experience is defined as a construct of the overall experience a customer/brand page user derives from his or her interactions in an SNS brand

community. The concept includes the feelings and impressions of a community member based on his or her interactions in the SNS brand community. Hence, the concept does not presume a motivational state or an evaluative state and thus varies from other motivational constructs (Das et al., 2019). Having addressed the concept of SNS brand community commitment, we will construct the hypothesis model between experience-commitment to further improve the knowledge framework of experiential and social media marketing.

## 2.2. Online brand community commitment in the SNS context

While marketers attempt to design brand strategies to attract customers and build long-term relationships, the ready availability of competitive branded products can lead customers to deviate from brand commitments with limited or no switching costs. Therefore, in the current increasingly competitive and dynamic market, one of the ultimate goals of a brand is to solve this contradiction and successfully achieve the brand promise. Recently, scholars have reported that one of the most important issues for brand managers is translating brand experience into brand commitment (Das et al., 2019). Commitment is identified as a core feature of relationship marketing management and as a requirement for achieving a company's goals (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). A stable customer relationship cannot be effectively formed without a solid commitment foundation (Fullerton & Gordon, 2005). Brand community commitment refers to members' desire to maintain their relationships with the brand community (Zhou et al., 2012); this definition is attitudinally based rather than behaviorally based (McAlexander et al., 2002). The literature on virtual brand communities based on Web 1.0 has indicated that online brand community commitment had a significant impact on brand loyalty, word-of-mouth and other marketing performance. For instance, Jang et al. (2007) reported that brand community commitment had a significant influence on brand loyalty. Hur et al. (2011) analyzed the influence of brand community effect and trust on brand community commitment, which had a positive influence on word-of-mouth.

Recently, scholars have gradually become interested in commitment to SNS brand communities, which can be built on the superior value gained from the content regularly posted on the fan page or on customer engagement in the SNS brand community (Hsu, Liu, & Lee, 2010). SNS brand community commitment is a force that binds a user to content creation behaviors (e.g., liking, adding a comment, posting blogs/articles). Therefore, in this study, the concept of SNS brand community commitment is defined as the concept based on customer commitment, which refers to the strong attachment and emotional bond of customers to brand pages.

Because consumer commitment does not occur naturally (McAlexander et al., 2002), a series of studies on the causes of commitment in the field of SNS marketing have been conducted (e.g., Chen, Lu, Wang, Zhao, & Li, 2013; Kuo & Feng, 2013; Shi et al., 2019; Tseng et al., 2017). These studies often aim to build a model with commitment as the focus variable, which not only contains the determinants of commitment but also involves various possible outcome variables. Concerning the antecedent factors of commitment, the focus of SNS marketing is mainly on customer value (Shi et al., 2019), customer benefit (Hau & Kang, 2016), engagement (Raies et al., 2015) and interactive variables (Kuo & Feng, 2013). Chen et al. (2013) confirmed that social support, sunk costs, the quality of alternatives and social influence are the determining factors of SNS community commitment. To the best of our knowledge, there is no research showing the impact of SNS community experience on community commitment, whereas the research on the relationship between online community experience and commitment based on Web 1.0 technology is relatively sufficient (Jang et al., 2007). Meanwhile, existing studies also provide some evidence of a direct link between brand experience and brand commitment (Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014). Brand experience results in pleasurable outcomes because such customers seek to repeat these positive

experiences. Customers with a positive brand experience want to buy again, i.e., brand loyalty, endorse the brand, i.e., attitudinal loyalty, and rarely switch to alternative brands (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Research on the transformation of brand community relationships based on commitment into brand relationships or the formation of brand performance also provides strong evidence for the concept development of this study. Commitment is critical for the success of SNS brand communities because it can be translated into brand loyalty (Laroche et al., 2013). Zhou et al. (2012) reported that consumer commitment to an online brand community positively influenced brand attachment and brand commitment. Based on motivation theory (Tseng et al., 2017), pragmatic motivations have been found to improve consumers' satisfaction and symbolic motivations to form user commitment, improve the intensity of users' participation in the community, and finally improve consumers' brand purchase intention. Other scholars have built an integrated model of SNS brand community commitment based on customer value theory and found that product learning, interaction and entertainment value contributed to consumers' SNS brand community commitment, which in turn had a positive impact on functional conflict (Shi et al., 2019).

## 3. Research model and hypotheses development

### 3.1. Information experience

Informativeness is the specific goal of user participation (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996). The virtual brand community research literature has shown that information experience is an important factor in the pragmatic dimension of online brand communities as it can provide information to consumers with maximum efficiency (Archer-Brown, Piercy, & Joinson, 2013). The online tourism literature has found that if consumers obtain information value from online tourism communities in a virtual environment, the information provides consumers with experiences such as perceived utilitarian experience, which generates commitment and satisfaction (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). Research on brand community in the SNS environment has also formed a similar proposition. The members of an SNS brand community expect the content to be informative, relevant, up-to-date, and different from mass media advertising (Martins & Patricio, 2013). An SNS is a platform on which users can exchange information and receive informational support, which can improve user commitment (Chen et al., 2013). Accordingly, the first hypothesis is as follows:

**H1.** Information experience has a positive influence on community commitment in the SNS brand community context.

### 3.2. Entertainment experience

Entertainment value can be defined as an intangible reward sought by SNS brand community members (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). It refers to the ways in which individuals seek experiences of fun and relaxation and spend their free time in pursuit of their personal interests. In the online community context, individuals seek pleasure by playing games or interacting with others (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). Generally, users can obtain entertainment resources through an SNS, which is also why users will continue to use an SNS. However, compared with the information research in the SNS context, the academic research on the entertainment value of SNSs is still insufficient (Sledgianowski & Kulviwat, 2009).

Businesses should enhance customer-brand relationships by providing a positive entertainment experience in SNS brand communities (Kang et al., 2014). Entertainment experiences explain user participation in SNS brand communities and drive users to develop a positive attitude toward a post (Shareef, Mukerji, Dwivedi, Rana, & Islam, 2017). SNS brand communities based on Web 2.0 technologies allow users to explore and enjoy a richer entertainment experience than



virtual brand communities based on Web 1.0 technologies (Habibi et al., 2014). The entertainment value provided by Dell's brand community positively influences future participation intention (Zhang, Lu, Wang, & Wu, 2015), which leads us to the following hypothesis:

**H2.** Entertainment experience has a positive influence on community commitment in the SNS brand community context.

### 3.3. Homophily experience

People want to make connections with others who are similar to them rather than unlike them. This is the principle of homophily (McPherson, Lynn, & James, 2001). The concept of homophily is supported by social identity theory (Donavan, Janda, & Suh, 2006). According to this theory, when people share common attributes with the reference group, they have emotional connections with others: they are more likely to feel comfortable in such an environment (Hogg, 2001).

Social media platforms have essentially redefined the ways in which people choose to communicate and collaborate. An SNS community is a social technology space where a shared sense of identity drives user engagement (Kapoor et al., 2017). In the current study, homophily refers to the degree of similarity among SNS network connections based on people's beliefs, values, social status, and interests (McPherson et al., 2001), with brand messages being propagated within homogeneous networks (Liu-Thompkins, 2012). A similar study has shown that the brand information (ads) to which users are exposed on Facebook tends to come from peers rather than from external members. Because multiple interactions with peers can generate emotional connections (Shareef et al., 2017), such connections are Facebook's unique form of homogeneity. Homogeneous users within SNS brand communities have more opportunities to exchange brand-related information and are more likely to identify with group members (Phua et al., 2017). In turn, the phenomenon of user-generated content (UGC) and one-to-one interaction in SNS brand communities can facilitate homophily. Users emphasize that they frequently join an SNS brand community because of their interest in that specific brand or topic. If the content and activities offered by a company are a good fit for them, users will experience a sense of unity and be motivated to participate in the community (Martins & Patricio, 2013). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H3.** The homophily experience has a positive influence on community commitment in the SNS brand community context.

### 3.4. Relationship-based experience

Facebook makes it easier to connect with friends offline and to make new friends online (Ellison et al., 2007). Facebook actually transfers people's offline relationships to online social networks (Ross et al., 2009), which has enabled the majority of Facebook users' social network relationships to be built and maintained on Facebook (Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2014). Based on the above research, it can be determined that an SNS has the characteristics of extending consumers' offline relationships to online relationships. Hence, in summary, Facebook has several of the features proposed by Habibi et al. (2014); however, another feature is its ability to extend existing relationships, which represents a more microcosmic perspective than Habibi's concept of the social context (Habibi et al., 2014).

Habibi et al. believe that in a Facebook brand community, customers will use their real identity, photos and personal history in their profiles; thus, by clicking on a profile link, users can easily obtain information such as each other's age, sex, attraction, location and marital status (Habibi et al., 2014). In addition, people have the opportunity to get to know each other through the functions of social networks and activities. Through the network graph analysis in their study, Habibi et al. observed that in many cases, members appreciate this unique

context. For example, some members check each other's profiles before answering questions, or they may add another member as a friend if they find that they have similar connections. In other words, Habibi et al. (2014) state that Facebook can enable consumers to establish new connections/relationships but do not specify the characteristics of how they maintain existing connections/relationships.

Therefore, it is this characteristic of SNSs that must be included in the study of the SNS brand community experience and the relationship between experience and commitment. We refer to this feature as being relationship-based, which is consistent with the social context (Habibi et al., 2014); however, it is another dimension. Social context may be important from a brand perspective, as members have access to each other's profiles, which can affect their brand perception (Naylor et al., 2012). In the current research, the concept of a relationship-based experience refers to the experience of consumers who engage in activities together with offline/existing relationships on Facebook, both actively and passively.

In fact, the members of an SNS brand community hope to seek and maintain social relationships (Kang et al., 2014). When the users of an SNS brand community are acquaintances, their dialogue and activities can stimulate interaction. SNS users often focus on their group memberships to construct their identities, and they experience a sense of belonging through the network (Huang, Kim, & Kim, 2013). As a favorable SNS brand community experience, the relational dimension is important for both businesses and customers (Simon et al., 2013). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are postulated:

**H4.** Relationship-based experience has a positive influence on community commitment in the SNS brand community context.

**H4-1.** A full model that includes the relationship-based experience variable will be a better fit than a rival model that omits this variable.

### 3.5. SNS brand community commitment, brand attitude, and purchase intention

Empirical studies have demonstrated that customers participating in an SNS brand community have a positive impact on marketing performance (Kamboj et al., 2018; Laroche et al., 2013). In the context of relationship marketing, online community commitment refers to each member's attitude toward the online brand community (Hur et al., 2011). In this regard, online brand community commitment should be interpreted as an attitudinal factor that describes users' acknowledgment of the continuing relationship between the community and the users or their belief that the relationship is valuable (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

According to the brand community research literature, the emotions of brand community consumers can form a brand emotion, which includes both positive and negative emotions (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The literature on social media marketing also indicates that consumers' SNS brand community content attitude can form their brand attitude through emotional transfer (Taiminen & Karjalainen, 2017). A recent study concerning the outcome factors of Facebook brand community user identification also shows that consumer identification can form brand community commitment and that the brand community relationship can be converted into a marketing effect, such as purchase intention and WOM (Demiray & Burnaz, 2019). Hence, we can infer the following hypothesis.

**H5-1.** SNS brand community commitment has a positive influence on brand attitude.

Using the social identity theory, studies have shown that consumers in a brand community tend to support products and brands related to the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Notably, studies have shown that brand community commitment is one of the most important factors in forming brand attitude and purchase intention (Dijkman, Kerkhof, &

Beukeboom, 2015; Hur et al., 2011). Jang et al. (2007) asserted that online brand community commitment was a motivational factor for emotion and behavior with regard to the brand. Users participating in Zara's Facebook brand community were found to develop SNS brand community commitment and that their commitment increased brand loyalty (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014). Consumers who follow an SNS brand community have favorable evaluations of the brand, including brand attitude, brand equity, and purchase intention (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, & de Vries, 2015); furthermore, they are more positive about the brand and spend more money on the brand's products (Dijkmans et al., 2015).

**H5-2.** SNS brand community commitment has a positive influence on brand purchase intention.

### 3.6. Brand attitude and purchase intention

The theory of reason action (TRA) explains the relationship between attitude and behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and suggests that human beings are rational individuals with the ability to process decision-making information. TRA explains that attitude is a psychological tendency to form an evaluation in favor or against a particular object to some degree and that behavior is a function of an individual's attitude. Brand attitude, which is a classic variable for understanding and predicting consumers' brand choices, refers to consumers' internal evaluation of brands, which is characterized by relative stability and sustainability (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Mitchell & Olson, 1981). Brand attitude develops from exposure to the brand, which is the knowledge of the brand's functional and symbolic attributes formed by consumers through the physical experience of a product/service or marketing design content (Keller, 1993). The previous academic papers on SNS advertising have noted that an enterprise's SNS advertising activities can improve consumers' brand attitude and that a brand attitude formed based on SNS advertising can predict purchase intention (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012; Yang, 2012). Moreover, positive evaluations of a brand's SNS community postings were shown to relate to both positive brand attitudes and higher purchase intention (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed (Fig. 1):

**H6.** SNS brand attitude has a positive influence on purchase intention.

## 4. Research methodology

### 4.1. Data collection

A survey was created and administered to the users of Facebook fan pages in Korea in June 2017. Initially, we ran a pilot study with SNS brand community users to determine whether there were any ambiguous questionnaire items that needed revision. To ensure that the

**Table 1**  
Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Demographic		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	139	50.0
	Female	139	50.0
Age	Under 20	16	5.8
	20–29	196	66.9
	30–39	62	22.3
	Over 40	14	5.0
	Other	98	35.3
Occupation	Student	146	52.5
	Businessperson	9	3.2
	Office worker	25	9.0
	Other	212	76.3
Frequency of Facebook usage	More than once per day	32	11.5
	Less than once per day	22	7.9
	Once a week	12	4.3
	Once a month or less	74	26.6
Time using Facebook fan page	Less than 1 year	109	39.2
	1–2 years	67	24.1
	2–3 years	28	9.9
	More than 3 years	139	50
Frequency of Facebook fan page usage	More than once per day	60	21.6
	Less than once per day	60	21.6
	Once a week	19	6.8
	Once a month or less	278	100
Total			

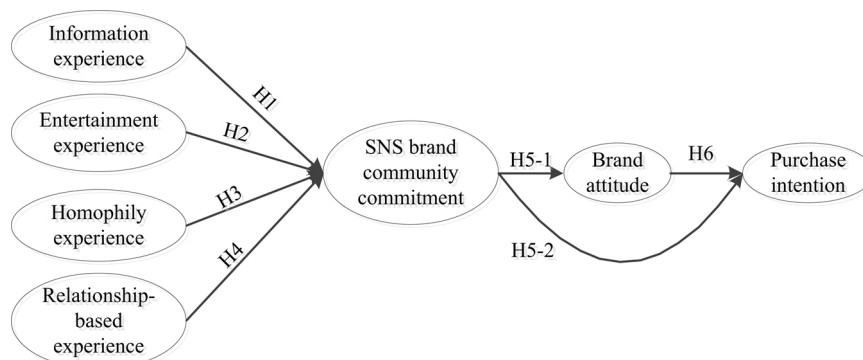
questionnaires were valid, we investigated only consumers who used Facebook fan pages (SNS brand communities). The first question on this questionnaire was whether the participant had used Facebook fan pages in the past three months. If the participant answered “No,” then he or she had to terminate the completion of the questionnaire. We obtained a total of 300 complete answers in Korea through a questionnaire company, 278 of which were valid. The sample consisted of 50% males and 50% females. The overall age of the participants ranged from early 20 s to over 40; the majority were in their 20 s and 30 s (89.6%). A  $\chi^2$  test was performed to confirm that there was no significant difference in sex or age (sex  $\chi^2 = 0.428$ ,  $p = 0.513$ ; age  $\chi^2 = 2.533$ ,  $p = 0.258$ ).

Among the participants, 51.4% checked their SNS at least once per day, and over 73% had used SNS fan pages for more than a year. Hence, the responses qualified for factor analysis of the variables and for the testing of the hypotheses (Table 1).

### 4.2. Scale development and measurement

#### 4.2.1. Scale development

In view of the fact that this study involves a new variable, few academic studies can be directly cited. After consulting the literature that closely addresses relationship-based experience variables, we conducted focus group interviews with SNS brand community users.



**Fig. 1.** Research model.

**Table 2**  
Summary of the recent literature that has investigated similar variables of relationship-based experience.

The study	The study's objectives	Variables related to current study	Content of the scale
Nambisan and Watt (2011)	Using theories and concepts from different fields, including computer mediated communication, consumer psychology and online community, this paper proposes a four-dimensional experience of constructing online community to capture customer experience and other online product communities, and examines its impact on customer attitudes and products.	Sociability dimension	The sociability dimension of online community experience is defined as the social experience customers derive from the interactions in the online product community This dimension captures customers' perceptions regarding the overall openness, friendliness and politeness of the community members
Simon et al. (2013)	This article illustrates the dimensions of the online brand experience on Facebook and highlights the role and importance of consumer engagement.	Relational dimension	Offer opportunities for building social relationships Facilitate joint consumption activities Create smaller subgroups to facilitate personal exchange
Kang et al. (2014)	The purpose of this study was to determine the correlation between four benefit components (functional benefits, social-psychological benefits, hedonic benefits, and monetary benefits) obtained by fan page members and members' community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment.	Social-psychological benefits	Seeking self-identity Getting involved with other members Seeking a sense of belonging Establishing and maintaining relationships with other members of Facebook
Kamboj et al. (2018)	This paper examines the antecedents of branding cocreation that include social networking sites (SNSs) participation motivations, customer participation, brand trust and brand loyalty in social media brand communities by applying the Stimulus-Organism-Response paradigm.	Building interpersonal relationships	To communicate with others To get in touch with friends I have not contacted for a while To talk to friends in private settings
Shao and Pan (2019)	In this study, a research model was established to study the influence of the richness and interactivity of platform media on users' social capital and WeChat moment participation behavior.	Social interaction	I keep close interactions with friends in WeChat Moments I have frequent communications with friends in WeChat Moments
		Two-way communication	I spend a lot of time interacting with friends in WeChat Moments WeChat Moments enables me to conveniently communicate with friends WeChat Moments facilitates communication among friends
		RenQing	WeChat Moments provides me the opportunity to convey information and share knowledge with friends Friends in WeChat Moments are trustworthy Friends in WeChat Moments behave in a consistent manner Friends in WeChat Moments will always keep my interests in mind

Semi-structured interviews can generate rich and meaningful data and provide meaningful insights for the subjects (Fawcett et al., 2014). Focus group discussions encourage interaction among participants, allowing them to share ideas in a natural way and revealing attitudes and behaviors. This exploratory approach is consistent with that of Baldus et al. (2015).

We required focus group participants to use the brand community on Facebook for at least six months to ensure they had a real community experience. The participants were 10 graduate students, 5 males and 5 females, aged between 24 and 30, majoring in digital marketing at Korea University. During the discussion, we provided drinks and fruit for the participants free of charge. We used the conclusions from the existing relevant academic literature as a focus group discussion guide (e.g., Kamboj et al., 2018; Kang et al., 2014; Nambisan & Watt, 2011; Shao & Pan, 2019; Simon et al., 2013) (see Table 2). Since our interview target was relatively specific, there was only one question: "What type of social experience do you have participating in the SNS brand community?" Therefore, only one interview was conducted, which took approximately 30 min. One of the authors of this paper was in charge, and one observer was responsible for recording the discussion. After the focus group discussion, one of the authors and two research assistants converted the text of the recorded content and determined the reliability of the text content through correction and comparison.

In the data analysis process of this study, the ideas and concepts that were expressed in the participants' reactions were identified using an inductive perspective; the participants' responses were classified according to the literature based on the deduction perspective (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Analysis was based on verbatim transcripts of the group discussions (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

The process consisted of two steps: first, the three analysts identified the units in the text that can represent or serve as examples of the

concepts studied (Davis & McGinnis, 2016). Then, through an open coding process, they worked together to agree on the identification and tagging of the categories (Davis & McGinnis, 2016). All the generated categories were compared, and some categories were merged (Davis & McGinnis, 2016). The second step was to compare the results with those of the published literature. Through the process of deductive content analysis, the emerging data categories were classified according to the concepts in the literature (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). This was an iterative process of identifying concepts, classifying similar concepts, comparing them to the concepts stated in the literature, and then re-assessing the data to validate the information (Fawcett et al., 2014).

After the data analysis was complete, 6 related concepts were extracted, specifically, recommendation, be recommended, activities together, feeds, homophily, and brushing the presence (see Table 3). As a homophily variable already exists in this study, it was not used again. Hence, only the five concepts of recommendation, be recommended, activities together, feeds and brushing the presence were used for scale development. The brushing presence did not pass the exploratory factor analysis test of the preliminary survey; therefore, in the formal survey stage, this measurement index was deleted. The indicators used in the formal survey are shown in Table 4.

#### 4.2.2. Measurement

The questionnaires were mainly adapted from relevant studies and were carefully modified to reflect the characteristics of Facebook fan pages. All items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Information experience was measured by three items, information accuracy, usefulness, and source, following Nambisan and Watt (2011) and Elliot, Li, and Choi (2013). Entertainment experience was measured by three items, level of interest, fun in everyday life, and happiness generated by the experience, following Moon and Kim (2001) and Nambisan and

**Table 3**  
Social experiences after participating in an SNS brand community.

Question 1	From social relationship and social interaction perspectives, what experiences have you gained after participating in the SNS brand community
Concepts identified (number of participants)	Participants' quotes
• Recommendation (10)	Sometimes I receive an account recommended by my friends. If I'm interested in the recommendation, I'll click it. ( <i>Social interaction and recommending</i> )
• Be recommended (10)	I follow the Starbucks fan page, and if I find out they have a special event, I forward it to my friends. ( <i>Event and recommending</i> )
• Activities together (9)	There are two friends sitting with me who are friends of < Blade & Soul > . We all follow their fans' home page...if I make any comments...they will tease me in my reply. ( <i>Active together</i> )
• Feeds (8)	I think it's fun to be with friends...because they can see my feed, and I can see theirs too. ( <i>Feeds</i> )
• Homophily (7)	Fan pages about businesses...I think sometimes I retweet a link, but I mainly want to listen to the opinions of friends... ( <i>Brushing the presence</i> )
• Brushing presence (5)	When I share links...I will predict whether someone will like the same content as I do. If not, I will not retweet, or that person will block me... ( <i>Sharing and Homophily</i> )

Watt (2011). Homophily experience was measured by three items, relevant content, similar mindset, and sharing the same purpose, following Brown, Broderick, and Lee (2007) and Park (2009). Relationship-based experience was measured by five items gleaned from the previous research (e.g., Kang et al., 2014; Shao & Pan, 2019) and the interviews with SNS brand community users: “those who know me participate on the fan page,” “someone’s recommendation”; “my recommendation”; “using the fan page together”; and “people who have a relationship with me joined the fan page and are active on the fan page”. SNS brand community commitment was measured by four items, having a sense of belonging, continuing to visit, exchanging information and opinions, and collecting information, adapted from Garbarino and Johnson (1999) and Hur et al. (2011). Brand attitude was measured using three items, namely, favorable, good feeling, and desirable, following Holbrook and Batra (1987) and Homer (1990). Purchase intention was measured by three items, recommending, buying, or the

probability of buying, following Grewal, Krishnan, Baker, and Borin (1998) and Papagiannidis, See-To, and Bourlakis (2014).

AMOS 21.0 was used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and to test the internal fitness of the model (see Table 3). CFA was performed on the sample for SNS brand community experience, SNS brand community commitment, brand attitude and purchase intention. The measurement model fit the data:  $\chi^2 = 262.606$ ,  $df = 218$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.205$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , GFI = 0.929, AGFI = 0.903, NFI = 0.927, CFI = 0.987, and RMSEA = 0.027. Therefore, the CFA results indicated a satisfactory model fit.

Table 4 shows the measurement items with the factor loading, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct. All of the factor loadings were higher than 0.60, and all CR values were greater than 0.80, indicating a satisfactory level of internal consistency (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 5 shows the correlation coefficients and the AVE values. The AVE values exceeded the

**Table 4**  
Confirmatory factor analysis of the variables.

Construct and measurement items	Loading	CR	AVE
Information experience			
The Facebook brand community is a good information source	0.734	0.825	0.612
The information in the Facebook brand community is accurate	0.817		
The information in the Facebook brand community is useful	0.793		
Entertainment experience			
The Facebook brand community gives me an interesting experience	0.848	0.847	0.651
The Facebook brand community adds happiness to my everyday life	0.855		
The content of the Facebook brand community make me happy	0.709		
Homophily experience			
There is a lot of content that relates to me in the Facebook brand community	0.750	0.850	0.655
The users in the Facebook brand community have a mind that is similar to mine	0.839		
The users in the Facebook brand community share the same purpose as me	0.836		
Relationship-based experience			
People I know are involved in the Facebook brand community	0.707	0.860	0.552
I participate in the Facebook brand community because of a recommendation from a friend	0.753		
I have recommended participating in the Facebook brand community to friends	0.660		
People I know are active in the Facebook brand community together	0.812		
People I am in a relationship with participate in the Facebook brand community	0.774		
SNS brand community commitment			
I feel a sense of belonging from this Facebook brand community	0.782	0.837	0.564
I will continue to visit the Facebook brand community	0.757		
I will exchange information and opinions with the members of the Facebook brand community	0.814		
I will collect information through this Facebook brand community	0.640		
Brand attitude			
The brand is favorable	0.850	0.909	0.770
The brand gives me a good feeling	0.897		
The brand is desirable	0.885		
Purchase intention			
I would recommend this brand to my friend	0.791	0.881	0.711
I would buy the product or service of the brand	0.882		
There is a probability that I would consider buying the product or service of the brand	0.854		



**Table 5**  
Discriminant validity analysis of the variables.

	IE	EE	HE	RE	SC	BA	PI	square root of AVE
IE	1							0.782
EE	0.340	1						0.807
HE	0.300	0.493	1					0.810
RE	0.245	0.416	0.386	1				0.743
SC	0.320	0.425	0.345	0.410	1			0.751
BA	0.322	0.209	0.390	0.185	0.439	1		0.878
PI	0.341	0.191	0.323	0.259	0.387	0.576	1	0.843

Note:  $p < .05$ ; IE: information experience, EE: entertainment experience, HE: homophily experience, RE: relationship-based experience, SC: SNS brand community commitment, BA: brand attitude, PI: purchase intention.

0.50 threshold for all constructs, which indicated that a large portion of the variance was explained by the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing the AVE values and the squared correlations between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All of the squared correlations ( $R^2$ ) between pairs of constructs were less than the AVE for each construct, which indicated acceptable discriminant validity.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Proposed structural model results

To test the research hypotheses, we used AMOS 21.0 software with maximum likelihood estimation to investigate the causal relationships among the variables. According to the threshold criteria, there is a good fit between the model and the data (see Fig. 2).

The determinants of SNS brand community commitment were examined in the structural model. The path estimates showed that, except for the effect of information experience (H1) on commitment, entertainment experience (H2), homophily experience (H3), and relationship-based experience (H4) played a meaningful role in the formation of SNS brand community commitment. Information experience ( $\beta = 0.042$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), entertainment experience ( $\beta = 0.303$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), homophily experience ( $\beta = 0.234$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and relationship-based experience ( $\beta = 0.419$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were found to exert a significant positive impact on SNS brand community commitment. The model predicted the path from SNS brand community commitment to brand outcomes (H5), which included two second-order paths—brand attitude (H5-1) and purchase intention (H5-2). Unexpectedly, the effect of SNS brand community commitment on brand attitude was 0.515 ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the effect of purchase intention on brand loyalty was 0.074, ( $p > 0.05$ ). Thus, H5-1 was supported; however, H5-2 was not supported. We also analyzed the impact

of brand attitude on purchase intention (H6) regarding which we propose a hypothesis in this study. The impact of brand attitude on purchase intention was 0.688 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

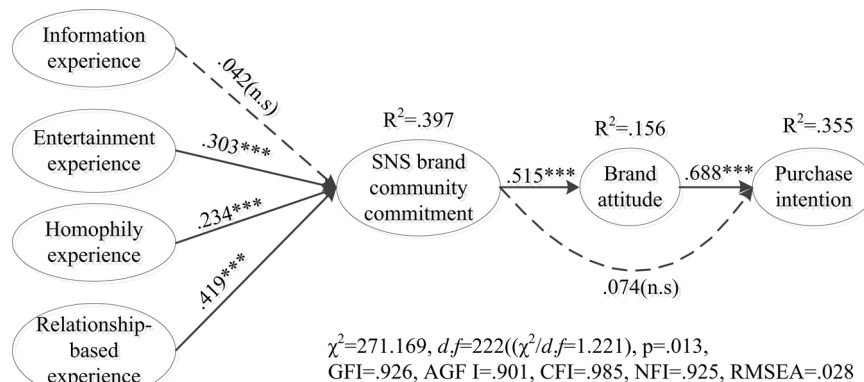
### 5.2. Rival model

Researchers are typically expected to compare rival models rather than merely test the performance of a hypothesized model (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, we compared the proposed model with its rival model in terms of various dimensions: (1) the overall fit of the model implied a covariance matrix with regard to the sample covariance matrix, which is measured by the CFI; (2) the percentage of significant parameters; (3) the variance explained by the model; and (4) the issue of model parsimony. Table 5 presents the comparisons between the proposed model and the rival model. The model fit indices, i.e., GFI, AGFI, CFI, NFI, and RMSEA, were lower than those of the proposed model. Additionally, only 31.9% of the paths in the rival model were significant, as opposed to 39.7% in the hypothesized model, suggesting that the additional paths were meaningful both theoretically and empirically. Hence, the proposed model was better than the rival model based on overall model evaluations including  $\chi^2$  and other model fit indices (Table 6).

### 5.3. The mediation effect of SNS brand community commitment

This study employed the approach of Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010) to examine the mediating effect of SNS brand community commitment on the relationships among SNS brand community experience, brand attitude, and purchase intention. The hypothesized model was re-estimated by bootstrapping. That is, full mediation or indirect-only mediation is present when the inclusion of a mediating variable renders the relationship between the exogenous and dependent variable non-significant. However, when both the direct and indirect effects are significant, this situation results in a partial or complementary mediation (Zhao et al., 2010).

To that end, this study examined the direct effect of SNS brand community experience on brand attitude and purchase intention using the AMOS 21.0 bootstrapping function. Information experience was found to have a direct effect on brand attitude ( $\beta = 0.238$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ) but not on brand purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.067$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Other SNS brand community experiences were found to have no significant direct impact on brand attitude. Therefore, SNS brand community commitment had a partial mediation effect on the relationship between SNS brand community experience and brand attitude.



**Fig. 2.** Testing results.

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 6**  
Rival model testing.

Model	$\chi^2$	d.f	$\chi^2/d.f$	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Hypothesized model	271.264	223	1.216	0.926	0.901	0.985	0.925	0.028
Rival model	236.809	143	1.656	0.917	0.890	0.966	0.918	0.049

## 6. Discussion and implications

### 6.1. Discussion

As noted by [Shiau, Dwivedi, and Lai \(2018\)](#), SNS can provide huge competitive advantages to enterprises. Indeed, as social media becomes more popular in business, advertisers and marketers are using this latest form of communication to connect with audiences and customers ([Shareef et al., 2017](#)). However, recent studies have examined core concepts such as community benefits and community commitment ([Kang et al., 2014](#); [Simon et al., 2013](#)) and have established a large number of reference theories. To the best of our knowledge, no research has been conducted to propose the mechanism of community commitment formation driven by SNS brand community experience. In view of the insufficiency of research on the relationship between SNS brand community experience and commitment, this paper integrated a variety of theories to build a research model.

This study aimed to explore the relationships among the experience, commitment, brand attitude and purchase intention of brand communities based on SNS brand communities, to build a ‘perception-attitude-behavior model’ of SNS brand communities. We studied the influence of SNS brand community experience on commitment and then tested whether relationships in an SNS brand community can be transformed into brand relationships. The results of this study are consistent with the recent research calling for attention to the SNS brand community experience ([Huang & Chen, 2018](#); [Simon et al., 2013](#)) while complementing the current research on social media marketing ([Alalwan, 2018](#); [Alalwan et al., 2017](#); [Dwivedi et al., 2015](#)). This model is more extensive than those previously developed ([Kuo & Feng, 2013](#); [Tseng et al., 2017](#); [Wei, Torres, & Hua, 2016](#)).

This study identified four factors (information experience, entertainment experience, homophily experience and relationship-based experience) as key predictors of community commitment through a review of the major literature in the field of experience research and interviews. The relationship-based experience is a variable that we found based on social media features. As shown in [Fig. 2](#), according to the main statistical results, excluding the information experience factor, these factors successfully predicted SNS brand community commitment (0.397), brand attitude (0.156), and purchase intention (0.355), which supports the predictive validity of the research model.

The data analysis based on a Korean sample regarding the influence of SNS brand community experience on commitment also verified that our ideas are essentially correct. The results indicated that entertainment experience (H2), homophily experience (H3), and relationship-based experience (H4) have significant impacts on SNS brand community commitment. Relationship-based experience ( $\beta = 0.419$ ) has the greatest impact on commitment, followed by entertainment experience ( $\beta = 0.303$ ) and finally homophily experience ( $\beta = 0.234$ ). These results are consistent with most of the research on commitment ([Akrout & Nagy, 2018](#); [Das et al., 2019](#); [Kuo & Feng, 2013](#)). However, the results showed no significant effect of information experience on SNS brand community commitment. A plausible explanation is due to business-related items, which are typically more formal and serious; lack lively, interesting features; and do not easily evoke emotional resonance in the user to stimulate forwarding behavior, interest, and other-related humor ([Berger, 2009](#)). As [Shareef, Mukerji, Alryalat, Wright, and Dwivedi \(2018\)](#) argue, in social networks, consumers will

notice if AD messages are embedded in entertainment. Without enough hedonistic factors, consumers may not be exposed, pay attention, or have a positive impression of advertising. Second, an SNS brand community is not a dominant source for consumers seeking brand information ([Kang et al., 2014](#)). A recent study on continuous Facebook use also showed that information-seeking did not guarantee users’ willingness to continue using the platform ([Basak & Calisir, 2015](#)) as Facebook users like to share activities, hobbies, interests and social contact ([Shiau, Dwivedi, & Yang, 2017](#)).

The mechanism of transforming brand community relationship into a brand relationship is the focus of brand community research. Based on this perspective, in stage two of the model, we tried to construct the mediating variable of brand attitude between SNS brand community commitment and purchase intention, making the whole model more systematic. The results indicate that users’ SNS brand community commitment does not directly lead to purchase intention (H5-2) but requires the mediating effect of brand attitude to generate purchase intention (H5-1). This result is consistent with the academic papers in the field of SNS advertising ([Bruhn et al., 2012](#); [Yang, 2012](#)). In addition, we verified that brand attitude that is formed based on brand community commitment has a significant impact on purchase intention (H6), which is consistent with the attitude theory research. In the literature on the transformation of brand community relationship into brand relationship, some scholars have noted that community commitment can be transformed into brand commitment (e.g., [Zhou et al., 2012](#)). The current model broke out of this thinking pattern and tried to analyze whether community commitment can be transformed into brand attitude. The use of the second mediating variable (attitude) increases the path from a brand community relationship to a brand relationship.

This study not only confirmed the results of previous studies results but also expanded the previous research content in several ways. First, the research verified the first and the second research topics presented in the introduction section of this study. By analyzing the previous literature and data analysis, we found that there was a causal relationship between consumer experience and commitment in SNS brand communities. The results indicate that entertainment experience, homophily experience and relationship-based experience can create user commitment. Of all the independent variables, relationship-based experience is obtained based on the characteristics of an SNS brand community. The data analysis results revealed that this variable has the greatest impact on commitment. Moreover, the degree of model fit proposed by the paper is significantly higher than that of the model with deletion of the variable, which proves the rationality of using the variable of relationship-based experience in this study. Entertainment is another feature of SNS ([Habibi et al., 2014](#)), and we found that entertainment experience is also an important driver of commitment. The results show that the information experience does not drive user commitment. Second, the results also indicate that SNS brand community commitment has a complementary mediation effect on the relationships among SNS brand community experience, brand attitude and purchase intention. This finding is also very interesting because when we removed the commitment variable and directly analyzed the relationships between SNS brand community experiences and brand attitude, the result was the opposite of the analysis result containing the commitment variable. That is, when the mediating variable of commitment is removed, the results show that only information experience has a positive effect on brand attitude; although the mediating effect of brand attitude on the relationship between information experience and purchase intention is nonsignificant under these conditions, other variables cannot generate brand attitude. Finally, brand attitude based on SNS brand community can cause users to form purchase intention (H6). The research results prove that relationship marketing on social media can be successful and suggests a core path of social media relationship marketing success ([Dwivedi et al., 2015](#); [Shareef et al., 2018](#)).

## 6.2. Theoretical implications

This study provides a rich theoretical basis for the study of social media marketing and relationship marketing.

First, a large number of studies have investigated the importance of consumers' participation in the virtual brand community in the context of social media (e.g., Hajli et al., 2017; Kamboj et al., 2018). Previous studies have directly or indirectly recognized the importance of value provided by SNS brand community-to-brand relationship (e.g., Laroche et al., 2013; Tseng et al., 2017), which provides a solid foundation for the concept development of this study; such studies focus on the intrinsic motivation that drives consumers to participate in an SNS brand community. However, the experience reflected in consumers' interaction with an SNS brand community should be given priority (Sha, Jiang, & Wen, 2010). Based on the logic of experiential marketing, this study focused on the actual experience of consumers in an SNS brand community rather than the perceived value or perceived benefits. Through the measurement of SNS brand community experience, this study proposed a way to consider SNS brand community experience to understand the influence of the actual experience of SNS brand community on commitment. Hence, the current research adds to the theoretical body of knowledge on customer experience in an SNS brand community (Simon et al., 2013). Specifically, this study addressed the intrinsic relationship among SNS brand community experiences, SNS brand community commitment, brand attitude and brand purchase intention, emphasizing the importance of evaluating members' experience in an SNS brand community. The results of this study indicate that a member's perception of the SNS brand community experience in an enterprise is very important for SNS brand community commitment and even for brand attitude.

In addition, the internal relationship model between 'experience-commitment' constructed in this study provides empirical support for the future relationship marketing research. For instance, Zhou et al. (2012) regarded commitment as an important variable to measure how brand communities create brand relationships. Following this logic, this study calls for future research to improve the existing commitment theory model, including the components related to consumer experience.

Second, this work extended the online brand community research to SNS brand community contexts and revealed a new SNS brand community variable: customer experience. SNS brand communities, which are formed through the intersection of SNSs and brand communities, differ from the traditional brand communities introduced by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) and other online brand communities; they develop within SNS pages and are based on Web 2.0 technologies (Habibi et al., 2014). Therefore, the elements of an SNS brand community experience are different and unique (Gambao & Gonçalves, 2014). The previous studies have noted the superiority and particularity of the social attribute of SNSs in the construction of SNS brand communities (e.g., Kang et al., 2014; Shao & Pan, 2019). Therefore, such variables are generally used in research models to obtain new discoveries. However, to the best of our knowledge, few studies have involved the characteristics of SNSs in extending (expanding) existing relationships. Therefore, through a literature review and interviews, we found the variable of relationship-based experience, which is a new concept of consumer experience. The factor analysis results confirmed the variable's existence in SNS brand communities. That is, after consumers participate in the SNS brand community of a certain enterprise, they will interact with their friends and recommend the account to their friends or follow accounts recommended by their friends. Moreover, the results of structural equation model analysis also show that the existence of the relationship-based variable improve the degree of fit of the whole model and have the greatest influence on commitment. Therefore, this study at least expanded the dimensions and research content of current consumer experience. From the perspective that inducing the consumer to like a brand may enhance his or her friend's willingness to try the brand (John

et al., 2017), this variable has great significance for the construction of brand relationships. Therefore, we call for further in-depth and systematic research on the variables underlying the relationship in future research on SNS brand community experience.

This study added new content to the research on the transformation of a brand community relationship into a brand relationship by advancing the connections among SNS brand community commitment, brand attitude and brand purchase intention. A large number of studies on the brand relationship created by SNS brand community use brand attachment or brand loyalty as dependent variables or as mediating variables to predict brand relationship (Laroche et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2012). This study is one of the first to go beyond this research paradigm and focus on exploring the influence of SNS brand community commitment on consumers' brand attitudes and purchase intention. With the popularity of SNSs, the vast majority of enterprises aim to create their own SNS brand communities and gradually increase investment in them and their brand (Alalwan, 2018). This study expounded upon the consequences of the strategic management of SNS brand community commitment from an academic perspective; that is, SNS brand community commitment can promote consumers' positive attitudes toward brands, thus influencing their purchase intention. This perspective has had a significant impact on the research on the transformation of SNS brand community relationships into brand relationships. The results of this study show that, in SNS brand communities, commitment has no direct influence on purchase intention. This finding is different from that of Gambao and Gonçalves (2014), who assert that online brand community commitment is a motivational factor for emotion and behavior with regard to a brand. The findings of the present study can explain why members of a community may not be brand followers but are still community followers due to their excellent community interaction and experience. They engage in the SNS brand community only because a friend introduced them to it or because they are attracted by some activities organized by the community. Notably, the members of an SNS brand community have a positive attitude toward the brand.

## 6.3. Practical implications

The findings of this study have various implications for marketing, brand community management, social media practice and managers.

First, SNS brand community experience has a significant impact on brand community commitment, brand attitude and purchase intention. From the perspective of this study, SNS brand community experience is the decisive factor in forming brand attitude and purchase intention. Therefore, managers should actively manage consumers' experience in SNS brand communities and include the following four aspects: *Relationship-based experience is the most important factor driving consumer commitment.* Therefore, managers can encourage members to interact with their friends and provide a space/opportunity for members to communicate with one another to strengthen existing relationships. This strategy can also be achieved by encouraging consumers to make recommendations to their friends (for example, by sending links or pictures pushed by the enterprise to their friends) and enabling consumers to engage in activities with friends (for example, by accumulating "likes" to gain certain rights or rewards). *SNS brand communities should provide members with entertainment experiences.* Hedonic factors are a necessary prerequisite for users to obtain and receive promotional information of any product through SNSs (Shareef et al., 2018). Consumers are likely to spend more time on an SNS brand community, particularly when the community incorporates unique features that are geared toward the interests of consumers, and consumers will visit such sites for relaxation and entertainment (Dholakia et al., 2004). Therefore, SNS brand community managers should design their posts in a more creative and innovative way so that consumers can experience more entertainment. Specific strategies can include leading consumers to find the content in an SNS brand community interesting, adding a sense of happiness to their daily life and providing entertaining content.



Such strategies can improve consumers' overall entertainment experience to achieve community commitment for the purpose of causing them to form a good attitude toward the brand and ultimately lead to brand purchase. *Homophily experience significantly influences SNS brand community commitment.* When SNS brand community members are homogeneous, the reference group influence becomes strong, as similar users tend to interact frequently and develop strong ties (Brown & Reingen, 1987). The homophily experience within the SNS brand community can prompt users to exchange brand-related information that supports their sense of identity (Phua et al., 2017). The empirical analysis results in this study indicate that enterprises should provide users with rich homophily experiences. In this study, measurements of the homophily experience variable include "content", "thinking" and "purpose". With the popularity of big data, enterprises can mine "similar" content, thinking and purpose by analyzing users' usage behaviors to improve their homophily experience and enhance their commitment. *However, the results of the rival model analysis show that only information experience directly drives brand attitude.* Thus, providing brand information to users in an SNS brand community does not lead to negative results. Instead of disallowing brand or promotion information from appearing in an SNS brand community, we suggest strategically pushing information into entertainment and social psychological experiences so that members can receive such information and enjoy the experience.

Second, SNS brand community commitment is a new mode of relationship and social media marketing. The previous research has found that consumers' continual participation in online brand communities affected their purchase/repurchase intention, which was primarily affected by the mediation effect of brand community commitment (Hur et al., 2011; Raies et al., 2015; Tseng et al., 2017). Certainly, commitment is not only an important goal of traditional brand community management but also an indispensable goal of SNS brand community management. While maintaining consumer experience, managers should also pay attention to the cultivation of consumers' commitment to the SNS brand community. The research results show that SNS brand community commitment is conducive to the formation of brand attitude, and brand attitude can indirectly improve purchase intention. Therefore, it is very important for enterprises to transform consumers' relationships in SNS brand communities into brand relationships by operating SNS brand communities. This aspect is also the criterion by which an enterprise can evaluate whether its SNS brand community is a success or failure. That is, enterprises must cultivate consumers' good brand attitudes by managing their SNS brand communities. The results of this study show that commitment has no positive impact on purchase intention, which also proves the importance of brand attitude.

#### 6.4. Limitations and future research

Finally, we acknowledge the main limitations of this study and propose future research to address these limitations and extend the current study. First, this study adopted four variables as SNS brand community experience to explain the formation mechanism of SNS brand community commitment. Because SNS brand community experience is a multidimensional concept, other dimensions should be examined (Nambisan & Watt, 2011) such as emotional experience and symbolic experience. In addition, the data analysis of this study shows that information experience has no significant impact on commitment, which is contrary to the results of some other, similar studies (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996; Chen et al., 2013). We objectively interpreted this finding according to comparable findings in the literature. However, the question of whether the results of this study can be extended to specific industries or products remains to be further studied.

Second, it should be noted that this was an exploratory study to determine the relationship structure between SNS brand community experience and brand community commitment. The study used the overall concept of commitment (Zhou et al., 2012), which of course

does not reduce the study's contributions. However, considering that commitment is a multidimensional concept, future research should explore the dimensionality of SNS brand community commitment and analyze its formation mechanism (e.g., Chen et al., 2013). In addition, the concepts of trust (Kamboj et al., 2018) and satisfaction (Tseng et al., 2017) are also essential in social media-based relationship marketing, and future studies should analyze the impacts of SNS brand community experiences on the variables, which will be of great benefit to digital marketers.

## 7. Conclusion

This research is the first to address the relationship between SNS brand community experience and SNS brand community commitment. The current study defined the main concepts and structures of the model and demonstrated and discussed the relationship among them. The results indicate that entertainment experience, homophily experience and relationship-based experience have a significant impact on consumer commitment. Thus, this work expands the research perspective and the content of the experience-commitment relationship. In addition, this study found that relationship-based experience has the greatest impact on commitment, followed by entertainment experience and homophily experience. The results of this paper also confirmed that the process of transforming the SNS brand community relationship is based on the transformation of consumer experience into a brand relationship, which improves the value the SNS brand community research. The inspiration of SNS brand community management was also systematically emphasized. This study contributes to the research on social media marketing and brand management, and it enriches the existing relevant theories.

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